

The golden Cotswolds

■ WORDS *Kate Taylor*

Cider with Rosie, William Morris and his world-famous chair, the Arts and Crafts Movement – you'll find it all in the glorious Cotswolds



Birdlip Viewpoint:
squint and you
can see Wales!

JOURNEY PLAN



MOTORHOME Auto-Sleepers Surrey

ROUTE Pittville (Cheltenham) to Snowhill

DISTANCE 102.5 miles

I HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO EXPLORE THE Cotswolds, taking afternoon tea in the elegant spa town of Cheltenham, hunting for Roman treasures in Cirencester and buying sweet confections to take home in pretty Stow-on-the-Wold. Most of all, though, I wanted to see the tiny, hidden hillside village of Slad, immortalised by Laurie Lee in his famous book *Cider with Rosie*, the most joyful book on the English Literature syllabus when I was at school.

Laurie Lee moved to Slad as a child at the end of the First World War and wrote, 'Most of the cottages were built of Cotswold stone and were roofed by split-stone tiles. The tiles grew a kind of golden moss which sparkled like crystallised honey. Behind the cottages were long, steep gardens full of cabbages, fruit bushes, roses, rabbit hutches, earth closets, bicycles and pigeon lofts. In the very sump of the valley wallowed the Squire's Big House ... a sixteenth-century manor.' Would there be anything left of Laurie Lee's Cotswolds now, I wondered?

Cheltenham Spa

My chance to find out came last September, when Marquis in Northampton offered their motorhome for this feature. My partner Malcolm and I picked it up and the wonderful John Foti talked us through inlets, outlets, awnings and controls. Off we went, in a brand spanking new £50,000 Auto-Sleepers Surrey, which is based on a Mercedes Sprinter.

The minute we got on the road the heavens opened, and we drove through a thunderstorm, buffeted by side winds, to the safe haven of Cheltenham Racecourse Caravan Club

PITTVILLE



Pump Room

Wealthy landowner, politician and entrepreneur Joseph Pitt built the Pump Room in the 1820s. You can still take the spa waters here from the original marble and scagliola pump.

☎ 08717 162350

🌐 information-britain.co.uk

PEOPLE & PLACES



'We're only here for a weekend and we'll be leaving our Bessacarr motorhome on site and going off in a car.'

We'll explore the tearooms in Cirencester and have a good pub lunch in Burford on Sunday with friends. In May we swapped our boat for a motorhome and we love it.'

Helen and Victor Salem, Southampton, Bessacarr 795 Elegance



'We're visiting the Cotswold Wildlife Park and will walk our dog at Birdlip. We love touring villages and

diving into tearooms for homemade cake.'

Tania and Summer Baker, Wootton, Northants, Swift Kon-Tiki



'Cirencester has a great market and it's a good place to stop on my way to see friends in the Midlands. This area reminds me what I miss about England, when I'm off in my motorhome, mostly in Spain.'

Dave Smith, UK & Spain, N+B Flair



'We love Cheltenham Racecourse as it's ideal for motorhomes and we just walk to the Park & Ride to

get into town. We've started using our new bus passes to explore and we're going on to Burford and Cirencester.'

Sue and Barry, Northampton, Bessacarr E765



Take time to explore the elegant Regency crescents, charming cafés and parks of Cheltenham

site. The racecourse was easy to find, but the Caravan Club sign was tiny and hard to spot in the dusk. If you go, once on the complex, take the second right turn, heading for the grandstand. The wardens had retreated to their own caravan for the night, but kindly gave us the code for the toilets and showers before battenning down the hatches again!

It was the perfect site for wet weather, and we parked on the expanse of concrete in the lee of the Desert Orchid stand, plugged into the hook-up and wound down the corner steadies in anticipation of a windy night.

We awoke the next morning to a glittering grandstand view of a rain-washed racecourse, with hills beyond lit by sunshine. Two jockeys were putting a

couple of thoroughbreds through their paces, just a hundred yards away – a stirring sight.

We headed into Cheltenham Spa, noting that the Park & Ride buses are right next to the racecourse. Several fellow motorhomers recommended the Park & Ride scheme to us, particularly as they had just reached 60 and were keen to try their new free bus passes.

Sheer elegance

On the way into town we stopped for a brief stroll through Pittville Park and Pump Room, posing for photos among the classical Greek Ionic columns by the ballroom. Everything about Cheltenham is beautiful, from the Regency crescents and Neptune Fountain of Montpellier to

PAINSWICK

1.5 MILES



CHELTHENHAM

10.5 MILES



19.5 MILES



Art Gallery & Museum

Renowned for its collection of Arts and Crafts Movement furniture, the museum celebrates Morris, Gimson and other makers from the Cotswolds area.

☎ 01242 237431
🌐 cheltenhamartgallery.org.uk



Painswick Rocco Garden

This 18th-century garden was created as a flamboyant pleasure garden and Pan, God of Love, guards the entrance. There are many beautiful buildings.

☎ 01452 813204
🌐 roccogarden.org.uk

TIP
If you have a large motorhome, leave it on site and take a special bus or coach tour to explore without getting stuck in narrow country lanes



This valley is near Painswick, the beautiful town famous for its 99 neatly clipped yew trees in the churchyard and its stunning Rococo Gardens

the elegant shops full of quality goods. There are pretty cafés, parks and floral displays. Ladies in pearls were meeting for lunch, dressed to impress, Cheltenham Ladies' College-style.

We visited the Art Gallery & Museum, with its exquisite collection of fine furniture, fabric and paintings from the Arts and Crafts Movement. There was a William Morris-designed rustic table from 1856, a dresser by Ambrose Heal, and a Pre-Raphaelite painting. All the treasures were fit for the Victoria and Albert Museum, and we had a good snack in the museum café. Outside, I loved the 'Minotaur and Hare' sculpture by Sophie Ryder in the tree-lined boulevard and, had the weather been better, it would have been fun to try the 1930s lido.

Wool mills of Stroud

Heading southwest took us to Stroud, a town surrounded by five sweeping valleys, whose wealth was built on woollen mills. It's a more down-to-earth place than neighbouring towns and here you'll find a large cinema, leisure facilities, a lakeside walk and the Museum in the Park. Road diggers were out in force in the middle of Stroud, which made things tricky with the motorhome, so we admired this fine town then went on our way to Painswick.

The Painswick legend

Called 'The Queen of the Cotswolds', Painswick is a small town famous for its 99 neatly clipped yew trees in the churchyard. Legend says that the devil prevents the 100th yew tree from growing

and the churchyard looks like a Surrealist painting. The steep, narrow, twisting streets are lined with tall, elegant stone houses. Painswick's other claim to fame is its beautiful Rococo Gardens tourist attraction. Buses run up and down the steep valleys to Painswick and on to Slad, so we decided it was possible to take a motorhome there. Cheltenham Visitors' Centre has 'Cotswold Day Tours' leaflets with circular bus trips for tourists, which means you can leave the van on site if you prefer.

Cider with Rosie

At last we came to Slad, the tiny hamlet on a steep hillside, where the brilliant author Laurie Lee grew up. It was on these very slopes that young Laurie

CHEDWORTH

10.5 MILES

CIRENCESTER

3 MILES



Chedworth Roman Villa

One of the largest Romano-British villas in Britain is at the National Trust's Chedworth Roman Villa. See gladiators fight to the death and picnic in the grounds.

☎ 01242 890256
🌐 nationaltrust.org.uk



Amphitheatre

Hidden away behind modern houses west of Cirencester, the grassed-over Roman amphitheatre once had room for 8000 spectators and now makes a lovely free picnic spot.

☎ 0870 3331181
🌐 english-heritage.org.uk

FOOD & DRINK



Jack's Café

Black Jack Street, Cirencester

We worked up an appetite admiring the Corinium Museum's treasures, so it was great to pop next door to Jack's café. I can highly recommend the pea and mint soup and homemade cakes.

☎ 01285 640888

🌐 coriniummuseum.co.uk

Rose & Crown

Shilton, Burford, Oxfordshire

Raspberry, mango and blackcurrant sorbet wowed us in this pub by a watersplash near Burford CC Site.

☎ 08721 077 077

The Woolpack Inn

Slad, near Shroud, Gloucestershire

Pop into Laurie Lee's atmospheric local village pub and enjoy a warm welcome, good food and local Uley beers. The brewery in Uley does tours, too, so you can see how they brew this amber nectar.

☎ 01285 640888

🌐 www.thewoolpackinn-slad.com



Visit Laurie Lee's Slad and have a delicious pint in the Woolpack

TIP
Cheltenham is perfect for fashion, jewellery shops and individual tearooms and restaurants. Use the Park & Ride at the racecourse to avoid stress

was 'taken in hand' by Rosie, under the haycart, in *Cider with Rosie*. He wrote: 'Never to be forgotten, that first long secret drink of golden fire, juice of those valleys and of that time, wine of wild orchards, of russet summer, of plump red apples, and Rosie's burning cheeks. Never to be forgotten, or ever tasted again...'

To our delight, the author's favourite pub, The Woolpack, was open in the afternoon. Not only that, but it looked as if it hadn't changed since the Second World War. There were plain cream walls, with simple shelves of books (by Laurie Lee), and a great fireplace. A portrait of the author hung above the bar, as if conspiring with the barmaids to persuade us to try the Uley beer. What a delicious hoppy ale it was, too. The Uley Brewery prides itself on its Cotswolds beer and the Woolpack kept it to perfection. Whether it was the ale or the lingering wit of the author in that pub, I don't know, but the locals were extremely friendly and chatty, asking about our trip and jumping in with jokes and

anecdotes. We went to the churchyard opposite and paid our respects at Laurie Lee's grave, before, in a flurry of waving and kind advice and directions, driving on to Birdlip Viewpoint for one of the best panoramic views in the Cotswolds. At last we could see this landscape in all its glory, with boards to reveal that the blue hills in the distance were in Wales.

Cirencester

The ancient capital of the Cotswolds was Cirencester, called Corinium Dobunorum by our Roman masters. So our next stop was Cirencester Caravan Club Site. The one-way system meant that to drive from our pitch to the MV water point we had to drive out of the site and then come back in again, via the security barriers. How we laughed! This has been improved for 2010. Our site tour created a lot of Mercedes badge envy among fellow motorhomers!

KEMBLE

1.5 MILES

CIRENCESTER

7 MILES



The Thames Head Inn

This pub is close to the spot where the River Thames begins its 154-mile journey to London Bridge. We enjoyed their award-winning, fresh, home cooked food sourced from local ingredients.

☎ 01285 770259

🌐 thamesheadinn.co.uk



Corinium Museum

Cirencester was the second biggest Roman town outside London, so it's full of Roman artefacts and mosaics, as well as finds from prehistory to the present day.

☎ 01285 655611

🌐 cirencester.co.uk/coriniummuseum



TIP
Shake down your Sunday lunch with a 1½ hour walk from Kilkenny viewpoint, where you can park easily

At Cirencester we 'discovered' an atmospheric Roman amphitheatre tucked away behind some houses just outside town, a relic from the days when this Roman fortress town was a regional capital. In the town centre I shopped for Mediterranean food, much as the Romans would have done, in the colourful street market. Overlooking the market is the impressive gothic Church of St John Baptist, with its porch dating back to 1490. Arts and crafts thrive in the arts centre and workshops, located in a converted brewery. We were drawn to the Corinium Museum, the best Roman Britain museum I've seen. There were huge mosaics and treasures that had been dug up locally, all clearly explained. In Jack's Café next door I sampled a local delicacy – pea and mint soup – which was sublime. Malcolm's eyes lit up at the sight of the delicious homemade cakes on offer here. Cirencester has many great places to eat and drink, and it's worth walking through the Abbey grounds and the

The Thames begins in the Cotswolds. It's a 154-mile journey to London Bridge from here

COTSWOLD CAMPSITES

Motor Caravan SITES FINDER
Visit caravanmagazine.co.uk/sitesfinder



Cheltenham Racecourse CC Site

Prestbury Park, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 4SH
☎ 01242 523102
🌐 caravanclub.co.uk

This site gives you great access to the north Cotswolds and many pitches have commanding views of the racetrack. There is plenty of room for even the biggest of motorhomes.



Cirencester Park Caravan Club Site

Stroud Road, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1UT
☎ 01285 651546
🌐 caravanclub.co.uk

Just off the main road on the way into Cirencester, this site is easily accessible for large motorhomes. Facilities are great, and there's a security barrier at the entrance.



Burford Caravan Club Site

Bradwell Grove, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4JJ
☎ 01993 823080
🌐 caravanclub.co.uk

This was my favourite of the three club sites as it was smaller and more rural than the others. There's a security barrier leading to a friendly warden in a reception hut filled with flowers.



Tudor Caravan Park

Shepherds Patch, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire GL2 7BP
☎ 01453 890483
🌐 tudorcaravanpark.com

Just off the M5 is this charming rural caravan site, which is next to the Gloucester-Sharpness Canal, with its tall ships. It is only a five-minute walk from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Centre at Slimbridge.

BIBURY



12 MILES

LECHLADE

10 MILES



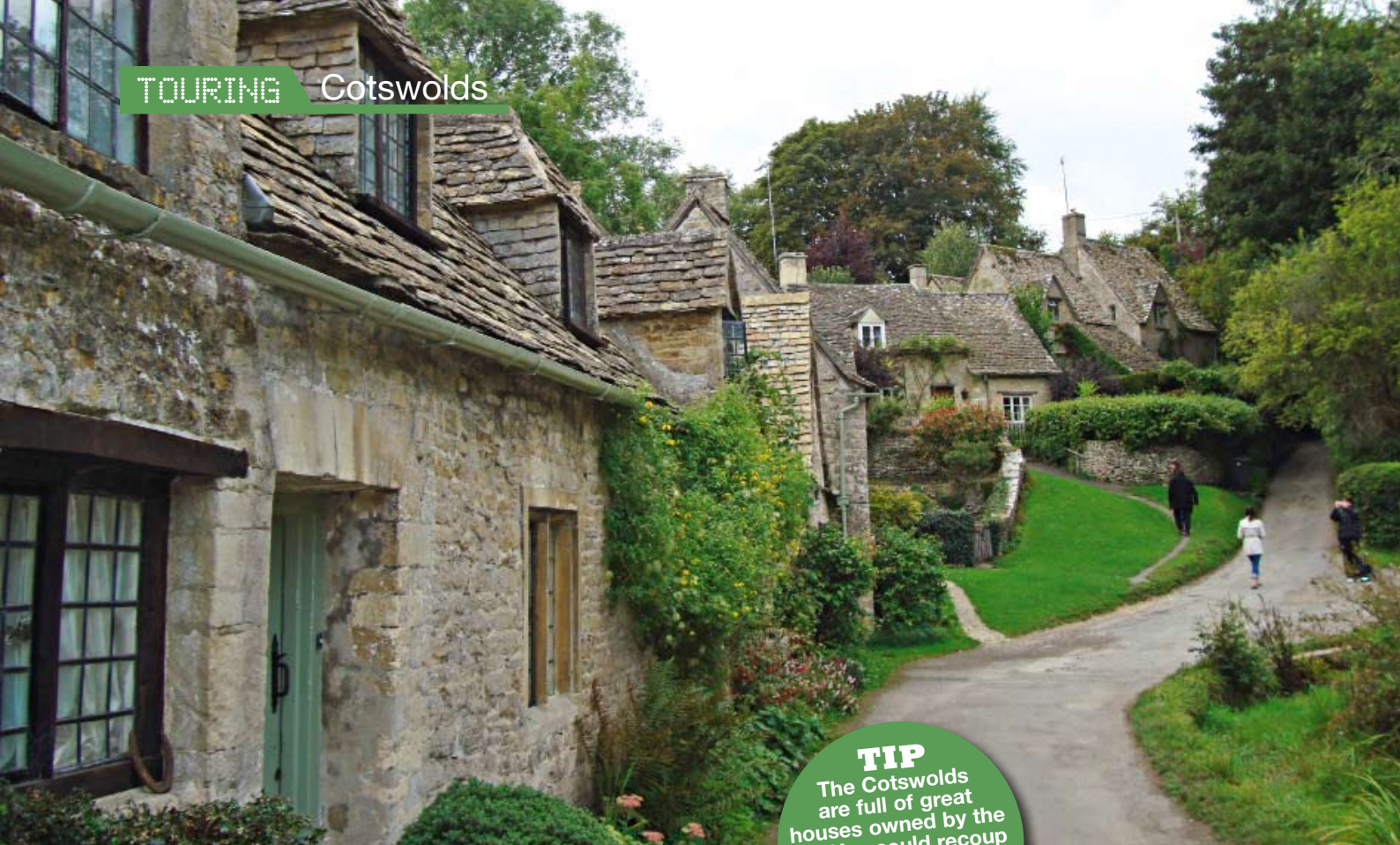
Bibury Trout Farm

This working trout farm is in Bibury, a quintessentially Cotswold village. Visitors can feed and catch their own fish, take tea and ice-creams in the café or simply enjoy the beautiful surroundings
☎ 01285 740215
🌐 biburytroutfarm.co.uk



Kelmscott Manor

Don't miss visiting this peaceful Cotswold manor house, the glorious country home and gardens of the late William Morris, founder of the Arts & Crafts Movement.
☎ 01367 252486
🌐 kelmscottmanor.org.uk



Arlington Row, Bibury epitomises rural English charm, a magnet for tourists

grounds of 18th-century Cirencester Park, which was owned by the Bathurst family for 300 years.

Beautiful Burford

Opposite the Burford Caravan Club campsite is the Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens, with its exotic animals, Victorian manor house and narrow-gauge railway. The nearest village to the site is Shilton, where there is a picturesque and quite unexpected ford and an excellent pub, the Rose & Crown. We had a wonderful meal there, the highlight being a set of three homemade fruit sorbets.

Burford itself is a couple of miles away and is often called the 'Gateway to the Cotswolds'. You can park on the wide, steep High Street beside golden 17th and 18th-century Cotswold stone buildings. There are tearooms, pubs, boutiques and antique shops full of quirky treasures.

What looked like a deluxe delicatessen, with a wicker basket display outside, turned out to be a very useful Budgens! There's an original Tudor house, Tolsey Hall, on the corner of Sheep Street, a legacy of the all-important wool trade here. Everyone seemed to be queuing up for Huffkins tearoom, so we joined in. The room was divided by open shelving displaying jams, pickles, mustards, biscuits, all with the pretty Huffkins label, making good souvenirs. As you leave Burford you cross a medieval bridge over the River Windrush.

Bibury's cottages

William Morris called Bibury 'the most beautiful village in England' and it really is the calendar pin-up honeypot of the Cotswolds. Bibury has Arlington Row, 14th-century weavers' thatched cottages,

TIP
The Cotswolds are full of great houses owned by the NT. You could recoup your membership fee in one go if you visited them all

and the shallow River Coln runs alongside the road, spanned by wobbly stone bridges. Swans glide on the waters, watched by envious ducks and tourists. Ah yes, did I mention that you might encounter a few other tourists here? There's room for motorhomes to park here, but the whole place does seem to get very full. The old stone bridge can get jammed up with coaches.

The Arts and Crafts manor

As our motorhome tour wound towards its end, we decided we had to go to Kelmscott Manor in Lechlade, the country home of William Morris. The poet, craftsman, designer and socialist became world famous when his company exported the 'Morris Chair' around the world, especially to America. Walking through the lovely manor garden at

BURFORD

9 MILES

NORTHLEACH

9 MILES



Cotswold Wildlife Park

Opposite Burford Caravan Club Site, the wildlife park has a Victorian manor house, plus the animals, including meerkats, big cats, coatis and reptiles.
☎ 01993 823006
🌐 cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk



Wool Church

Northleach is a market town with one of the finest three 15th-century wool churches in the Cotswolds. Keith Harding's World of Mechanical Music can be found in the Oak House here.
🌐 visitcotswolds.co.uk

HIT & MISS



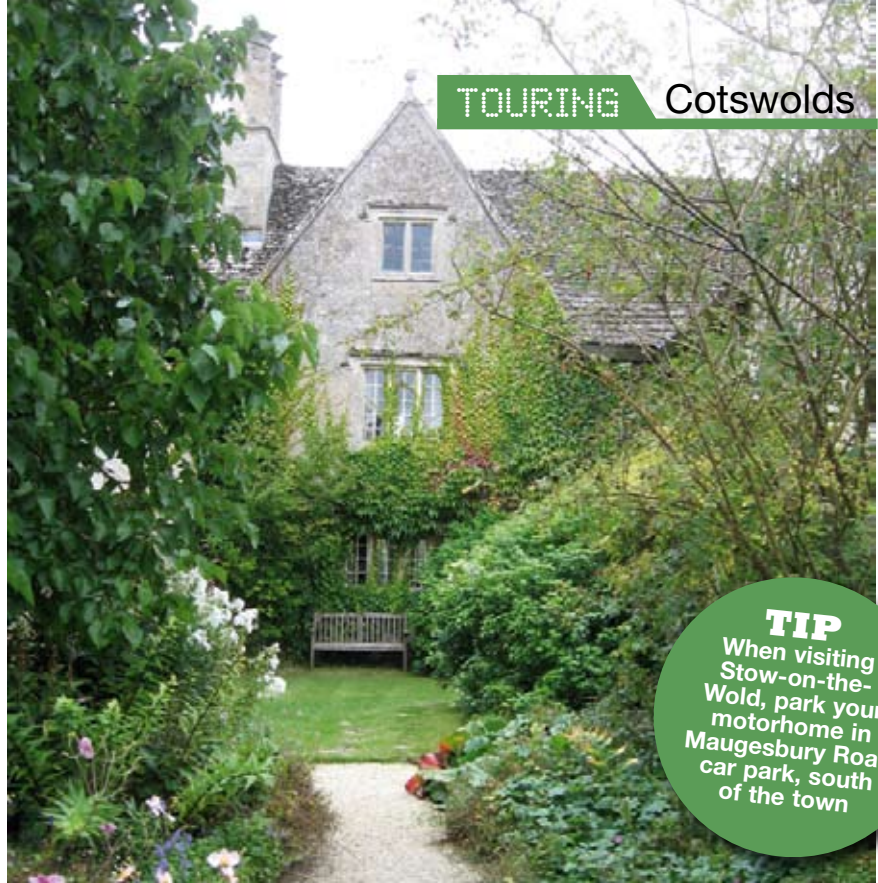
HIT

On Sunday we treated ourselves to a filling carvery at the Sherborne Arms in Lechlade then walked on the Gloucestershire Way from Kilkenny Viewpoint. We followed dry stone walls along a ridge, dropped down into an idyllic valley, then came back up through a forest. It was just the thing to work off those big portions!



MISS

The Gustav Holst Birthplace Museum was a long weary walk from Cheltenham's Montpellier area, but we hoped to be inspired by the great composer of *The Planets*. Sadly, when we got there it was shut. It closes at 4pm and is shut on Sundays, Mondays and from mid-December to early February. We were a bit underwhelmed, since it turned out to be just a terraced house. Adult entry is £4.50, pre-booked tours £5.50 a head.



Kelmscott Manor, former home of William Morris, world-famous for his Morris Chair and fabrics

Kelmscott was a peaceful experience. The garden has avenues of shrubs, flowers and specimen trees, the inspiration for many of those wonderful Morris fabric prints, perhaps. Timed tours inside the house keep it special, and I loved seeing artwork, furniture and family possessions placed as if their owners had just gone to London for a while. William Morris started the Arts and Crafts Movement and his handiwork is all over the house. We ended the tour like proper tourists, buying William Morris-designed tea towels and mugs, and lingering over tea and cake in an airy barn café.

Stow-on-the-Wold

Our week's tour was finally over, but we cheekily decided to fit in one more town. All roads seem to lead to the hilltop town of Stow, and it turns out that they always have. This picturesque spot is on the site of an Iron Age fort and the Roman Fosse Way passes through here. The large town square was built to hold sheep markets

and now has room for cars to park near the tearooms and souvenir shops. The Scots of Stow label is familiar, thanks to advertisements in Sunday supplements. Yet it hadn't occurred to me that Stow-on-the-Wold would be dominated by this company, with its kitchenware and William Morris tea towels. Stow was an excellent place to buy last-minute boxes of biscuits to take back home and just down the road was quirky Snowhill Manor. Then we were back on the road to Northampton once again. □

Thank you to John Foti and Emma Franklyn at Marquis Motorhomes, Great Billing, Northampton for the loan of their beautiful Auto-Sleeper Surrey.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Cirencester tourist information centre

☎ 01285 654180

🌐 visitcotswolds.co.uk

STOW-ON-THE-WOLD

9 MILES

SNOWSHILL



Stow-on-the-Wold

The highest town in the Cotswolds, Stow-on-the-Wold has a lovely market square and cross. It is a hot spot for tourists because it is full of antique shops, tearooms and pretty little gift shops.

☎ 01451 831082

🌐 visitcotswolds.co.uk



Snowhill Manor

Visit the manor and see the organic gardens and 22,000 objects of 'colour, craftsmanship and design' collected by the eccentric Charles Paget Wade. There are great cream teas and lunches, too.

☎ 01386 852410

🌐 nationaltrust.org.uk