

WHERE IN THE WORLD?
The Chilterns



Where in the world?



WHY TOUR HERE?

The chalk hills and grasslands of the Chilterns have been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – and they truly are. The views are gorgeous: at ground level you'll find wooded valleys peppered with picturesque villages, while activity in the sky reflects the successful reintroduction of red kites. The area is easily accessible from three major motorways; escape these highways to find fantastic walks, fascinating museums and welcoming pubs to while away an evening. Read more on p26.

WHAT MOTORHOME? Marquis Majestic 196

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Phil Russell





GRAND TOUR
The Chilterns



MARQUIS
Majestic 196



DURATION
5 days

The Lee village is one of the prettiest in the whole of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty





WHEN
Autumn 2017



Easily accessed villages and gloriously green, undulating hills offer tremendous views



On the trail of **FOLK TALES**

From a dandy politician to Roald Dahl, many fascinating characters have called the Chilterns home, as **Claudia Dowell** and **Bryony Symes** find out

**DID YOU
KNOW THAT...**

Animals from London Zoo were evacuated to Whipsnade Zoo, which opened in 1931, during World War II. In the event, Whipsnade was bombed 41 times but suffered no real structural damage

Around 75 years ago, when the world was at war for the second time in the 20th century, my mum was regularly trotting off across the Downs to her primary school in Dunstable.

Her tales of damming the stream at the bottom of their garden, to create her very own lake, told of a happy childhood, despite getting into trouble for that and despite the war.

I had her stories in mind as I stood on Dunstable Downs and imagined seeing her as a little girl, with her brown plaits swinging as she ran past the gliding club, which is still there.

It's a beautiful spot, with expansive views, and the thermals made use of by the London Gliding Club since the 1930s make it popular with paragliders and stunt kite flyers.

Sharing the sky above the chalk grasslands during my walk were two kinds of kites – red kites were reintroduced to the Chilterns during the early 1990s. This magnificent bird of prey is thriving, and it's not unusual to see them flying overhead as you cut through the Chilterns along the M40.

The second kind was the colourful kites of all shapes and sizes being flown by people of all ages. Along with dog walking, it's clearly a top leisure activity in these parts, and I wanted a kite to join in the fun.

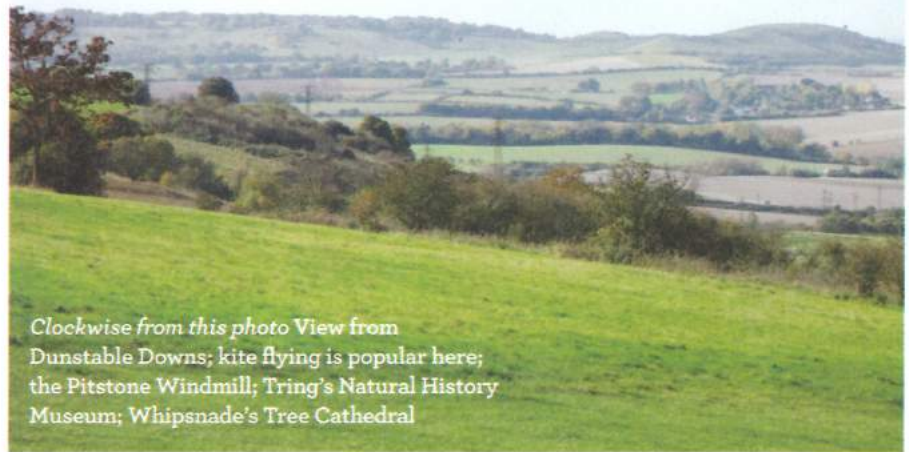
The visitor centre here, the Chilterns Gateway Centre, is managed by the National Trust. You'll find information about the Downs and its flora and fauna, the events held there, a café, and a shop selling kites. I bought an owl kite, but I was a novice when it came to flying them, so decided to remain a spectator to the sport and save it as a gift for Christmas.

Just three miles from the visitor centre and set high on the Downs is Whipsnade Zoo, an attraction that deserves a day of anyone's time; unfortunately, though, I couldn't spare it.

Close to the entrance is Whipsnade's tree cathedral, which also harks back to the 1930s, having been conceived by Edmund Kell Blyth as a living memorial to his World War I comrades.

It took two men nine years to plant, and comprises a porch of oaks, a nave of lime trees, cherry trees in the Easter Chapel, spruce in the Christmas Chapel, and beech and maple in the Autumn Circle, among other plantings.

More than 70 years on, the trees are fully grown and it's difficult to see the layout, but it is a very peaceful area to explore. You can take it all in while



Clockwise from this photo View from Dunstable Downs; kite flying is popular here; the Pitstone Windmill; Tring's Natural History Museum; Whipsnade's Tree Cathedral

resting on one of the charming wooden benches bearing carved animals.

Less than 15 minutes' drive from Dunstable Downs is another stunning viewpoint. Ivinghoe Beacon is an area of special scientific interest and has views over several counties; sadly for me, I chose a day when the car park was closed for filming – residents had been warned they might hear gunshots – and I was only able to grab a couple of quick photos.

I then went in search of the Pitstone Windmill, my sat-nav directing me into the village of Ivinghoe; it's gorgeous, with a beautiful church and an inviting pub. I found roads indicating the presence of a windmill, but not the windmill itself. I had given up and set course for Tring when I finally found it, in the middle of a field, with a handy layby to park in.

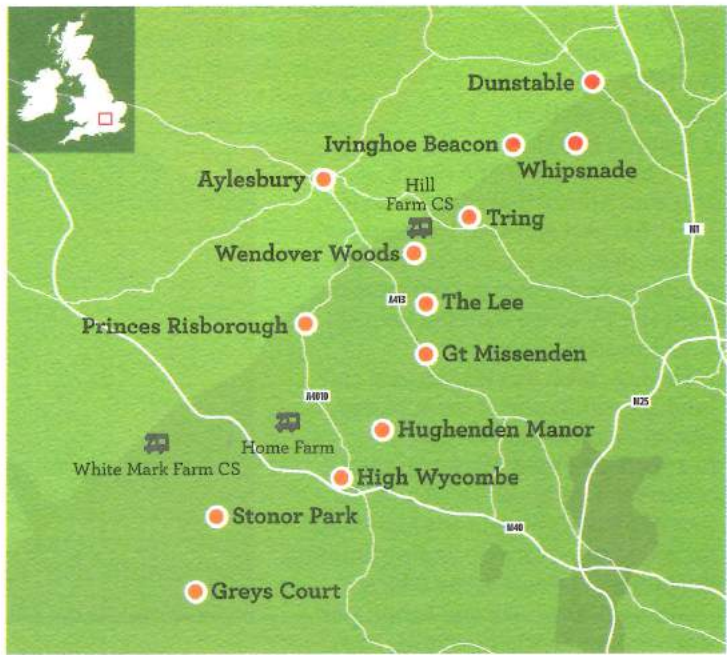
The windmill bears the date 1627 and is reputed to be the oldest in the British Isles. It was forced to retire at the age of 275 when it was damaged by the great storm of 1902, and the National Trust has been its carer since 1937. Check the website for opening times.

Home of the eccentric

Several interesting characters have made their home in the Chilterns, and my next stop would reveal the life's work of possibly the most eccentric of them all.

Tring was granted a market charter way back in 1315. Today, it's an attractive town with a magnificent church and the huge Tring Park – an area of chalk grassland and of special scientific interest – just off its high street. I was here to see the town's natural history





museum, the creation of Victorian naturalist Walter Rothschild, who from the age of seven wanted a museum.

When he was 21, his father gave him money and land to build it. The museum opened three years later, in 1892, and it's pretty much the same today.

It is astonishing. The first thing you see is a polar bear. Was it my glasses or the glass in the cabinets? All the mammals and reptiles looked huge – who knew that wolves were so big? The bird collection is vast – one of the largest ornithological collections in the world, apparently – and it is fascinating. I was completely absorbed and my passage past the many cases was slow.

Walter was known for driving his carriage pulled by four zebras, so seeing the different species of zebra was fascinating. He even bred a cross between a zebra and a horse. He also bred the cassowary, a strange creature from Australia and the world's third-largest bird. Although some of the exhibits look a bit fusty, the collection is remarkable in that it holds several exhibits of extinct animals, including the quagga, a sub-species of zebra.

After spending time in the museum, and with the Zebra Café closed, I wanted to end the day in the open. Nearby Wendover Woods is the highest point of the Chilterns; once you've taken the turning to the woods, it's only a few hundred yards to the car park.

Children will love it here – there's a Go Ape playground with zip wire and, if you walk past the café, you come across the Gruffalo's Child and a wonderful bench carved with a family of owls. I stopped at the café for a cup of tea, then took a look

at the view. Apart from the chalky grasslands around Dunstable, the Chiltern Hills, it seemed to me, were mainly covered in trees.

I was now tired, so pointed the Marquis Majestic towards the Home Farm campsite at Radnage. This site has wonderful views but, best of all for a weary motorcaravanner, there was a pub close to the farm entrance and the food here was good. Both the site and the Crown pub were a bit of a find.

A view to a hill

Coffee and poached egg on toast in the 'van set me up for the next day's adventure, which began with a walk on Whiteleaf Hill near Princes Risborough. The car park here has an unfriendly height barrier, so you will have to find a safe spot on the roadside.

I followed the path to the Neolithic barrow; at 5500 years old, it's one of Buckinghamshire's oldest monuments. This area is open, with a fence stopping you from toppling over the steep side. Below the fence is the Whiteleaf chalk cross, a landmark dating at least from the mid-18th century.

Here you can enjoy the stunning views over Monks Risborough, Princes Risborough and beyond. It's easily accessed with pushchairs and so on, and makes a great spot for a picnic. If you're a walker, it is part of the 87-mile Ridgeway National Trail.

Not far from Whiteleaf Hill is Lacey Green Windmill, England's oldest surviving smock mill – so named because they resemble the smocks once worn by farmers. Dating from 1650, it's 23 years younger than the ☺

**DID YOU
KNOW THAT...**

The Dunstable Met Office was responsible for delaying D-Day; it predicted a storm in the Channel that would wreck the invasion plans. General Eisenhower was persuaded to put off the operations for a day

post mill at Pitstone. It was derelict in the 1970s but, after careful restoration, it is now a fine sight.

My next stop was The Lee, a gorgeous village that has starred in TV's *Midsomer Murders*. You could, in fact, dedicate a whole tour of the Chilterns to discovering the locations from the TV series with the help of a downloadable map.

The Lee, with its village green and inviting pub, is one of those places you fantasise about living in. Its history is tied up with that of the owners of London store Liberty, its founder having bought the manor and extended the estate, including building the pub and houses in the village.

Although the Cock and Rabbit pub looks quintessentially English from the outside, the food it serves is Italian, as are some of the beers.

Celebrating the imagination

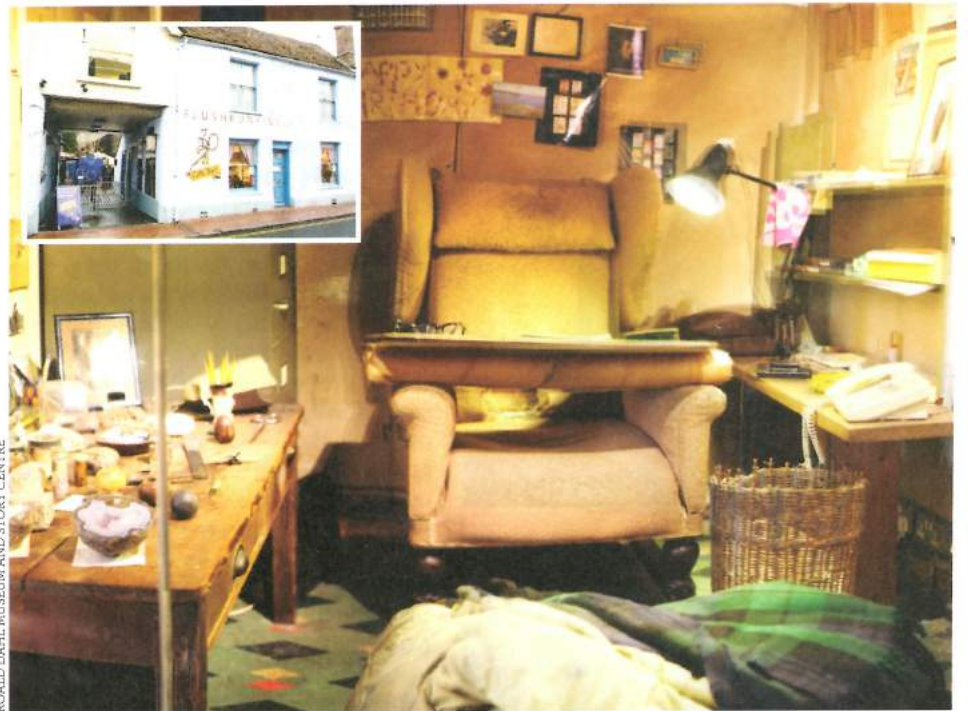
It was time to get to know my second great character from the Chilterns. In Great Missenden, I parked in the Link Road car park, then walked along the High Street to an imposing pale blue building bearing the legend: 'It is truly swizzffgglingly flushbunkingly gloriumptious.'

Roald Dahl's museum is a delight, telling the life story of this treasured children's author from boyhood, through his RAF career, to his fantastic literary creations.

The author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* at one point crashed his plane in the Libyan desert, then went on to become a fighter pilot in Greece, Palestine and Syria, and eventually a spy. He also had a brief role as Ernest Hemingway's minder.



Main A tour of the Chilterns will reward you with gorgeous countryside *Below* Roald Dahl's writing studio is recreated in his museum in Great Missenden



ROALD DAHL MUSEUM AND STORY CENTRE



Cromwell's wife lived here, no doubt while Ollie was busy rounding up the Cavaliers. I spent a happy half hour in an interiors shop whose higgledy-piggledy layout identified it as a pretty ancient place itself.

Back at Home Farm, I had a chat with owner Andy; he took on the farm and the campsite about 11 years ago, and is branching out with glamping tents. Keen to invest further, he is also planning a new washblock for the site.

Dizzy for fame

My final stop before handing the 'van keys to Bryony was the National Trust's Hughenden Manor, former home of one of the most famous Victorian prime ministers, Benjamin Disraeli – my third great character of the Chilterns.

You park in the woods and follow a path through the trees to the house, a huge Victorian Gothic affair. It's beautifully sited, with fantastic views across the countryside.

In a fenced-off part of the garden are several beehives, with an information board explaining that many large houses kept bees to increase fruit and vegetable production and provide honey for the kitchen.

The walled garden was a treat, too. I particularly loved the insect hotel built from airbricks, bits of wood and old pots, and called Buckingham Palace.

Victoria's favourite prime minister was a bit of a dandy, apparently very image-conscious, and fond of his own literary attributes (he wrote 12 novels) and moving in royal circles; I didn't find this reflected in his home, though.

The guide in the library explained that only three books in the vast collection were fiction, and all of the furnishings were a bit dowdy. What was interesting was the information



Hughenden Manor, home of Victorian PM Disraeli, was requisitioned in WW2

about his querulous relationship with his great rival William Gladstone. Lewis Carroll depicted them as the Lion and the Unicorn in his *Alice* books.

The other area of interest was the basement. The house was requisitioned in World War II and used as a secret base for map making. Exhibits in the basement, including the living quarters of servicemen, tell the story of the house's role at the time.

I finished my visit at St Michael and All Angels church, where Disraeli – who was born a Jew but whose father had him baptised – and his wife are buried.

During my tour I had delved into the lives of some interesting characters, visited several gorgeous villages and breathed in fresh air high up in the hills. However, there was much more to see and I was rather envious as I handed over to Bryony, who was off to explore the Chiltern's southern reaches.

Bryony takes up the reins

As Claudia discovered, the Chilterns has been home to many characters through the centuries, and as a setting it is quite stunning.

I began my tour with one of the most iconic views – from the extraordinary heights of the Dashwood Mausoleum, atop West Wycombe Hill. This was the

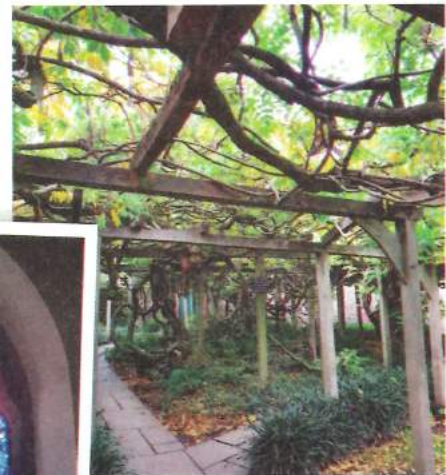
I stopped for soup and a sandwich at the museum's Café Twit, then headed back to the 'van. On the way I passed some red petrol pumps in front of a 'garage', whose door declared it was 'out of fuel ever since eight gallons cost over £1'. I reckon that was some time ago.

Little Missenden is picture-perfect. If you like musing over architectural salvage with your pint, you'll love the village's Red Lion pub. There's a wonderful wooden bridge with wire archway crossing a pond to the pub's garden, where you can feast on roast shoulder of lamb or crayfish salad; the menu looked very impressive.

Amersham's old town was my next stop, and I was able to park in a large car park just off the Broadway. This is another *Midsomer* favourite, with gorgeous timber-framed houses and an imposing Market Square building, which bears a plaque giving a brief history of the town. Apparently, Oliver



Cobstone Hill towers over the pretty village of Turville *Right, top and bottom* The gardens at Greys Court *Below* John Piper's stained-glass windows in Nettlebed church



It was a little early for me, though, so I browsed the shop before choosing some interesting-sounding wild peach liqueur to take home as a souvenir.

One of the most picturesque villages that I stumbled across while exploring the rather narrow lanes is Turville. This chocolate-box scene is overlooked by Cobstone Windmill, which is privately owned and not open to visitors. Climbing the steep hillside towards it, though, gives an incredible view across the valley; it is definitely worth the hard slog to get to the top!

After all that hard work I headed to Nettlebed, another attractive backdrop for *Midsomer Murders* filming, as I had heard good things about a café there.

The Field Kitchen's reputation precedes it, and the crowds lunching there when I arrived attest to that. I grabbed a seat at the communal table in the centre of the room, and tucked into great, fresh food, surrounded by the chatter and bustle of contented people.

As the car park had been jam-packed, I had left the van further out of the village; on my way back to it, I decided to pop into the local church,

as most have an interesting story to tell. A painter happened to be there, taking a break from redoing the whitewash on the stone walls. He was a superb guide, pointing out the vivid stained-glass windows by John Piper, who worked on a number of churches in the area and famously designed the windows for Coventry Cathedral.

Historical patchwork

The final stop on my Chilterns tour was perhaps the one I was most excited about: Greys Court. Once part of an enormous fortified mansion, with roots going all the way back to the year 1086, the manor house has been left as it was when the last family lived here, so you get to see it as an intimate family home.

As such, most of the information in the house is about the Brunner family and its showbusiness heritage (think Sir Henry Irving). However, the rather tumultuous history of Greys Court also

has connections to the Hellfire Club. In the 18th century, the court was owned by one Sir Thomas Stapleton, cousin of Sir Francis Dashwood and a member of the Hellfire Club.

It is thought that the elaborate gardens, which incorporate towering medieval ruins, were used for some of the club's reputedly riotous parties.

The gardens as we see them today, though, are down to Lady Brunner's labour of love. She wanted them to be explored through a series of rooms, because she loved the idea of secret places, so you'll find yourself in a labyrinth of courtyard gardens, with the magical 125-year-old wisteria walk at the centre.

Even in autumn, without spring's abundant blossom, the tangle of gnarled, twisting boughs above your head as you walk through creates a charming atmosphere.

This was a fitting place to end my tour of the Chilterns, where there are so many characters to be discovered among the scenery, including the hills and valleys themselves. ☺

TOUR ESSENTIALS

Way to go

The Chilterns cover Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire, running south-west from Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, to the north-east at Hitchin in Hertfordshire. The area can be reached via the M40, M1, M25, A404, A413 and A41.

Where to stay

Home Farm

Address City Road, Radnage, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

Tel 01494 484 136

Web www.homefarmradnage.co.uk

Open All year **Pitches** 12

Charges (pitch+2+hook-up) £25

Facilities include toilets, showers and a laundry; there are also great views, friendly owners and an excellent pub nearby.

Town Farm

Address Icknield Way, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 9EL **Tel** 01296 668 455

Web www.townfarmcamping.co.uk

Open 2 March-31 October **Pitches** 15

Charges (pitch+2+hook-up) £22.50

Two amenities buildings include toilets, showers, facilities for the disabled and a laundry area; there's also a tennis court.

Hill Farm CS

Address Chivery, near Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 6LD **Tel** 01296 630 819

Web www.hillfarmcampsite.co.uk

Open All year **Pitches** 5

Charges (pitch+2+hook-up) £22.50

This half-acre site is found up a steep, 1:13 hill close to Wendover Woods. Facilities are limited to a chemical waste-disposal point.

White Mark Farm CS

Address 82 Hill Road, Watlington, Oxfordshire **Tel** 01491 612 295

Web www.whitemarkfarm.co.uk

Open 2 March-19 November **Pitches** 5



Our Marquis Majestic 196 pitched at Home Farm in Radnage

Charges (pitch+2) £12-£14

This quiet Camping and Caravanning Club CS has been around for 32 years. There is no electric hook-up, but there is a toilet and shower block, and a chemical-disposal point.

Food & drink

The Crown

City Road, Radnage HP14 4DW

Tel 01494 482 301

Web www.crownradnage.co.uk

The Granary Delicatessen

18 High Street, Watlington OX49 5PY

Tel 01491 613 585

Web www.granarydeli.co.uk

The Field Kitchen

Church Hall, High St, Nettlebed RG9 5DA

Tel 01491 641 831

Web www.thefieldkitchen.co.uk

The motorhome

Marquis Majestic 196

This six-berth 'van has rear parallel sofas, a double dinette and drop-down double

bed, and a central kitchen opposite the washroom. There are four additional travel seats to those in the cab. Based on the Peugeot Boxer, the OTR price is £45,995.

■ Turn to p60 for our full Live-in test

Find out more

Visit the Chilterns

www.visitchilterns.co.uk

Dunstable Downs and Ivinghoe Beacon

www.chilternsaonb.org

Roald Dahl Museum

www.roalddahl.com/museum

Hellfire Caves

www.hellfirecaves.co.uk

Midsomer Murders locations

www.visitmidsomer.com

Costs

Site fees	£64
Fuel	£42
Food and drink.....	£66
Attractions.....	£44
TOTAL	£216

Vineyards and breweries

Scattered across the Chiltern hills are a number of breweries, distilleries and vineyards that take advantage of the shallow, chalky soil to create some delicious beverages. Here are just a few to check out on your travels:

Chiltern Valley Winery & Brewery

Old Luxters Vineyards, Hambleden, Henley-on-Thames RG9 6JW

Tel 01491 638 330

Web www.chilternvalley.co.uk

Brightwell Vineyard

Shillingford Road, Wallingford OX10 8LJ



Tel 01491 832 354

Web www.brightwellvineyard.co.uk

Malt the Brewery

Collings Hanger Farm, 100 Wycombe Rd, Prestwood, Great Missenden HP16 OHW

Tel 01494 865 063

Web maltthebrewery.co.uk

Puddingstone Distillery

Unit 1, Artisan Workshops, PE Mead & Sons Farm Shop, Lower Icknield Way, Wilstone, Tring HP23 4NT

Tel 01442 502 033

Web www.puddingstonedistillery.com

Tring Brewery

Dunsley Farm, London Road, Tring HP23 6HA

Tel 01442 890 721

Web www.tringbrewery.co.uk