



# LESLEY'S MOTORHOME TOURS



## Around the Cotswolds and the Caen Hill Locks



A trip with Mel Harvey in July 2015

We left Mel's house at 7.45am. - Yes I *can* get up at that hour! (I did have an early night though!). We were soon on our way to the M5. The traffic was surprisingly light, and we made Bristol in 3 hours, having stopped at Sedgemoor services for a strong coffee & homemade blueberry muffin. Exiting the M5 at junction 14 we made our way to Elm Farm, a Caravan and Camping Club CL (*certified location*). Mine was the only van there, and it was very clean and tidy.



There was a bus stop outside, and as it was only midday, we caught the bus into Gloucester, where we visited the Cathedral, which was smaller than I had imagined. It was clearly undergoing repairs and restoration. While we were there, there was a concert by the "Caring Choir", which was made up of NHS staff & Cathedral choir members. We sat and listened to some of it before going for





a coffee & cake in the Cathedral coffee shop.

The City itself has quite a few old and timbered properties, hemmed in by modern buildings. - shame!

We returned to the bus station as our bus pulled in, and half an hour later we spotted familiar landmarks, and got off the bus at the farm gate.



We sat outside the van with a coffee, by which time the air was cooling down. The farmer asked if we minded if he cut the grass before it rained. Sure enough it started raining within the hour. We spent a very peaceful night, and woke to cloudy grey skies. After a bacon sandwich we were on our way to Bladon Chains Caravan Club site. I had chosen a route avoiding major roads, and consequently we passed some beautiful villages; in particular Bibury. - It was only 9.30am, and already it was crowded with coaches, cars and motorhomes, and I was unable to get parked. Maybe we can go through it again on our sort of circular tour.



We arrived at the camp site at 11.00am and it was half an hour before we were allowed through to pitch up. (They were waiting for some campers to depart). We were soon plugged into the electric post and the kettle was on!





Churchill's resting place is only 1km away, - so I thought we could walk it, - except we headed the wrong way, and ended up in Woodstock instead. Woodstock is a beautiful village of Cotswold stone. Some of its quaint shops were open, including a deli, where Mel bought some "Stinking Bishop" cheese.

The church was pretty, and as the clock struck 1, the bells played hymns. It was a restful Church, and I could have sat there for ages.



We made our way back towards the campsite, and took a footpath along the back of the campsite, which said Bladon half a mile. From here, Churchill's' grave is signposted, so we decided to visit. For me, the church was a disappointment. It was lacking the peace of the Woodstock Church, and it was capitalising on selling CD's, DVD's, post cards and souvenir books of Churchill. - A shame really.





Crossing the road, we went into the White Horse PH. I needed to sit down, and it was starting to rain, - so we had a light lunch. Crostini with mushrooms and spinach cooked in garlic butter for me, & hot pork sausages on a ciabatta with caramelised onion chutney with chips for Mel. It was a nice rest before walking back to my van, where I sat reading, and Mel fell asleep.



We spent 2 days at Blenheim Palace, as there was so much to see. It is the principal residence of the Dukes of Marlborough and the only non-royal, non-episcopal country house in England to hold the title of palace. The palace, one of England's largest houses, was built between 1705 and circa 1722. It is completely symmetrical. We began with an organised tour of the State rooms, learning of its history.



The land on which the Palace stands was given as a reward to John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, from a grateful nation for the duke's military triumphs against King Louis 14th of France, culminating in the 1704 Battle of Blenheim. Public funds were also given that a small house may be built!

Following the palace's completion, it became the home of the Churchill, later Spencer-Churchill, family for the next 300 years, and various members of the family have in that period wrought changes, in the interiors, park and gardens. At the end of the 19th century, the palace was saved from ruin by funds gained from the 9th Duke of Marlborough's marriage to American railroad heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt.





Then we went on a guided tour of the Private apartments, which is still used by the family. We were not allowed to take photographs.

Everywhere we went was the heady scent of Asiatic Lilies, and displays of Orchids, which are a passion of the family and are everywhere.



We saw the bell corridor; his & hers sitting rooms; dining room, the servants circular staircase, with its little anti room where drinks are poured, & cocktails mixed. I did not know that Champagne should be decanted before being served, in order to warm it to the correct temperature, before being poured into chilled glasses. Seemingly, tumblers are not the done thing!

After a quick coffee in the very busy restaurant, we were off again on a guided tour of the gardens in the drizzle. I expected a gardener, but was surprised to see Anthea McDonald, our guide from the house. Anthea was very humorous & knowledgeable and told stories of the family and grounds as though they were hers, such was the depth of her knowledge.

One of the Duchesses was fond of beauty treatments in order to keep her youthful looks. She even had paraffin wax injected into her face; - an early form of Botox!? Only paraffin wax melts, and eventually she had to have her chin & jaw cut open to let the accumulation of liquid out! - Gruesome!



Blenheim sits in the centre of a large undulating park, a classic example of the English landscape garden movement and style. In 1704 the small River Glyme, trickled through the park and Vanbrugh (Its designer) envisaged this marshy brook traversed by the "finest bridge in Europe". Ignoring the second opinion offered by Sir Christopher Wren, the marsh was channelled into three small canal-like streams and across it rose a bridge of huge proportions, reported to contain some 30-odd rooms which were connected by a secret passage to the Palace. The parkland and streams were later modified and improved by Capability Brown. The feature with







which he is forever associated is the lake, a huge stretch of water created by damming the River Glyme and ornamented by a series of cascades where the river flows in and out. The lake was narrowed at the point of Vanbrugh's grand bridge, and the three small canal-like streams trickling underneath it were completely absorbed by one river-like stretch. He flooded and submerged the lower stories and rooms of the bridge itself, thereby reducing its height.

Also in the park, completed after the 1st Duke's death, is the 'Column of Victory'. It is 134 ft high and terminates a great avenue of elms leading to the palace, which were planted in the positions of Marlborough's troops at the Battle of Blenheim.

The ornamental gardens close to the palace, the Italian and water gardens, are the design of the 9th Duke.





The trees of the Arboretum framed views of the house. One of the Oak trees adjacent to the water terrace dates back to Queen Victoria. Lots of old & misshapen oaks are remnants of the ancient Wychwood, which once covered the area.



On our second day at Blenheim, which was also a bit damp; a parade of vintage classic cars on a 1 thousand mile trials arrived for a lunch stop. We had a brief and then headed to my van to get dry and have some lunch.







We then set off Gubbins Hole Farm, a Caravan Club CL. The traffic on the A41 was a bit heavy, & I nearly became a sandwich filling between a lorry and a car, both of whom cut me up on a roundabout. Once in Marsh Gibbon, I decided to ask for directions, because SatNav told me to 'Navigate off road' in 1 mile. I have been given stupid instructions in the past, but, as it happened, SatNav was correct. The camping area was up a concrete road which crossed a field! I parked adjacent to a field of heifers. I didn't realise how much noise they made ripping up the grass. It was continuous.

I then settled down to plan the next day. - Where to go, what to see, where to stay? It was only .3pm, and we could have fitted in a National Trust property, but would have had to rush it. Instead, as the sun came out, we dried off our clothing from our earlier trek in the morning. Being very mean, I did not put the water heater on, as it is powered by gas. I decided that if we wanted hot water we could put the electric kettle on, as electricity was in with our camping fee. Our overnight stop was very quiet with birdsong for company. The only drawback from the farm were the flies. - Loads of them!

Wednesday arrived, and with it the sun! It was a bit humid to start with, but we were able to have a lazy start because we were half an hour away from our first port of call, which did not open until 11.00am



We headed to Claydon House, owned by the Verney family. In the 1750s at his family seat in Buckinghamshire, Ralph Verney set out to create a country house of extraordinary grandeur that would dazzle his wealthy neighbours and outdo his political rivals. Thirty years on he was facing financial ruin.

The house as it stands today is a fraction of its original planned size. The original conception was of a mansion to rival the richer Earl Temple's huge mansion at Stowe, a few miles away near Buckingham. However, Lord Ralph Verney did not have the same funds, and used cheap labour, and an architect who saw him coming!

What remains today is the 'west wing'; this at one time had an identical twin, which contained the ballroom, and other state apartments. The twin wings were separated by a huge colonnaded rotunda surmounted by a cupola, which sank when the dome was put on. Lord Verney ran into financial problems before the latter two wings were entirely completed, and had to spend the final years of his life on the continent to escape his creditors. Following his death in 1792 his estate was inherited by his niece Mary, she had the house reduced to its present size. Mary sold the building materials to repay the debts, and with the monies left over, built some alms houses.



The interiors are 'over the top' in their decoration. Mainly of carved oak, painted to look like plaster, the lavish carvings adorned walls and ceilings. The doors had marquetry inlay with mother-of-pearl.



The treads and banister of the stairway were also of beautiful marquetry. During the war, the building became a school - How the inlay and carvings survived is a miracle!

This house was also where Florence Nightingale (Lady Verney's sister) spent her summers. There is consequently a lot of Scutari memorabilia.





The Chinese Room is impossible to describe. The National Trust calls it the marmite effect; - you either love or hate it! It is over the top with its carved doorways of waterfalls, pelicans & storks. The canopy to the bed is carved to represent bamboo and a tea party!



There is also a room featuring Thomas Hardy, and in particular, the new film "Far from the Madding Crowd", which was partly filmed at Claydon House.

Moving on, using B roads where possible, I zig zagged through some pretty villages en-route to Stowe Gardens

The gardens were a delight. Capability Brown was a young under-gardener when he was employed here. You can see where he got his inspiration from. The garden was created in the 18th C by Lord Cobham.



The National Trust now administer the garden, and their map has divided the garden into 3 circular routes. These aren't loops in the garden, they were intentionally created this way to illustrate Lord Cobham's political and social beliefs.



*Palladian Bridge*

On the advice of one of the NT volunteers we followed a route which encompassed a bit of all 3 walks, and enabled us to view nearly all the follies in the garden, the cascades, grotto's, monuments & the Temple to British Worthies. The Gothic Temple is let as a holiday home.



*The Temple to British Worthies.*



*Temple of Virtue*



*From inside the grotto*



*Gothic Temple*



Back at the van by 4pm, I decided to head for a 'Brit Stop' (a scheme where you can park up overnight free of charge. – motor homes only - some provide facilities, but not all. The rules of the group dictate that you don't give the address, just its listing number. So if you are a 'Brit Stop' member this is number 169!



We were made very welcome here. The location was perfect along the canal, and there was an adjacent pub. I thought the meals were a bit pricey but look at the location!

That evening I found I had a water leak somewhere as my carpets were wet along the front edge all across the van. Also, during the day, I had a warning light come on the dashboard to say the engine management system had failed again. This happened in April & was

supposedly fixed. ~ And to top it all ~ the fridge isn't working on gas! Never mind, I will spend alternate nights on electric & the freezer packs will keep everything cool. Thank goodness I have a warranty on the van.

After an undisturbed night, apart for a land rover that pulled in at 2.30am, and the hum of motorway traffic from the M40, I decided to head to Banbury. It was a pleasant old market town, with of course the Banbury Cross of nursery rhyme fame. I expected a stone cross, but instead it was a weensy iron one on top of a stone monument. It did stand at a 'cross' roads (which is now a roundabout!). The town is quite pretty with lots of old buildings and alleyways. There was a market taking place, mainly fruit and veg, which I thought quite cheap - and all sold in imperial weights!! I bought 1lb of root ginger for £1.00! (Its more than twice that at home). Mel bought a Banbury cake, which he said was like an Eccles cake, but oval and with more filling.



Wanting an easy day, I decided we would stay on a Caravan Club CL, & plug into electricity to ensure the freezer stayed frozen. As it happened my Kindle needed recharging too, - and of course the loo needed emptying. So I think it was worth the £10.00!

It was quite humid despite the breeze. The weather forecast promised rain for the midlands, and overcast for the South. - We will get what comes, as I think we are between the two! - It didn't look promising. As it happened, we had an overcast afternoon with sunny spells. We sat outside most of the afternoon; Mel reading; I did a bit of sewing, a bit of reading, and cleaned my pressed fly collection off of the bonnet and front lights. Then I completely re-jigged the itinerary to include un-planned stops and to eliminate some that weren't open when we were available.



Friday was quite a windy day, but at least it has blown away the heavy overnight rain. Today we were off to visit Coughton Court, which has been home to the Throckmorton family for over 600 years. This fine Tudor house stands testament to a family's courage in maintaining their beliefs. From a position of high favour to one of fear and oppression post-Reformation, the Throckmortons were leaders in a dangerous age, helping to bring about Catholic emancipation in the 19th century. I found the inside of the house to be a bit dark, and it was easy to lose your bearings as you walked from wing to wing. Being a Catholic family, they had a priest's hole, and the house was ransacked by the protestants



. Katherine, Sir Georges wife, was Aunt to Katherine Parr. Katherine & George had a large family of 8 sons, 11 daughters and 112 grandchildren! Inside on display is a Bishops Cope, said to have been made by Catherine of Aragon. This fascinating house also has links to the gunpowder plot!



The gardens were particularly beautiful. A virtual maze of flower borders with clematis archways, and around every corner was a new view; Statues, lakes; a hidden seat. It was a joy to explore.







Unusually the estate has 2 churches:

St Peters C of E, which was built in 1500 and is where the Throckmorton's are buried; and the Catholic Church a few yards further on.

We had a snack lunch in the van before heading to Hanbury Wharf, and the Eagle & Sun PH, where we had enjoyed a stay earlier in the year. Once again I parked up facing the marina, and after obtaining permission to park overnight, we booked a table for their amazing carvery (3 meats & 14 veg!). This pub is now stored as a favourite on SatNav!





Obtaining a table in their conservatory we whiled away some time watching the canal barges. One of them appeared to have a veggie garden of its own. After a short stroll around Hanbury Wharf village, (a couple of small industrial units, home to a stained glass craftsman; a chandlery & also a re-upholstery unit, - to name but a few), we walked a short way to the T junction of the canals before strolling back for dinner, which was just as good as the first time.



Once again we had a very quiet night, and did not wake until the sun was well up. Today we set off South again to find the Fleece Inn, which is owned by the National Trust. We arrived by 9.30, and after a quick look around the tiny hamlet of Bretforton, visited the community run shop for butter, coffee & a newspaper. It may have cost a few pennies more, but I like to support small businesses rather than the multiples.



We returned to the Inn just gone 10.00, and enjoyed a coffee while looking round. The Inn was originally a Long House in the days of Chaucer, owned by a farmer called Byrd, and remained in the ownership of the family for virtually the whole time. A pub steeped in history like the Fleece has many stories to tell.





The building was already 71 years old when the Lancastrians marched by on their way to final defeat at the Wars of the Roses at the Battle of Tewksbury; and it was 200 years old when the Gunpowder plotters rode past on their attempt to blow up Parliament. A curious mediaeval tradition also survives at the Fleece. This is the practice of chalking "witch circles" on the floor in front of each hearth to prevent witches from getting in through the chimneys. There are also "witch marks" on the inside of the door, to keep evil spirits out



After chatting to the bar maid, she offered the information that at the Landlords discretion, we would be able to camp in the large orchard, which also served as beer garden & playground. It was a little more pricey than I had planned, £15 per night, but that included water and electric. Not having had a call back from the CL I had phoned earlier, we said yes, and got talked into booking a table for dinner as well! We left the pub and headed to Hidcote to view a world famous Arts & Crafts garden, with its linked "rooms" of hedges, rare trees, shrubs and nestled in the North Cotswold hamlet of Hidcote Bartrimt.



Lawrence Johnston and his mother, settled in Britain about 1900, and Lawrence immediately became a British citizen and fought in the British army during the Boer war. In 1907 Johnston's mother, purchased the Hidcote Manor Estate for Lawrence. Major Johnston was a talented and wealthy horticulturist; and Hidcote's colourful and intricately designed garden 'rooms' are full of surprises.







Many of the unusual plants were collected on Johnstons' trips away. Wandering through the maze of narrow paved pathways, often so overgrown with lavish planting that you cannot see the path, you come across secret gardens, unexpected views, secluded benches and topiary.

We spent over 3 hours exploring this lovely garden. (The house is not open to the public). Johnston is reputed to have said "Plants grow in a jumble, flowering shrubs mingle with roses, climbers scramble over hedges and seedlings come up where ever they choose to sow themselves That's how I like to garden". - I can echo that - Why fight nature?



While there we attended a talk in a small screened garden about the life of Lawrence Johnston and his garden. The man who gave the talk was very articulate and humorous. It was worth going to listen to, in order to understand the history of the house and garden. I had taken a packed lunch, and we sat and ate it on the 'Long Lawn', later, on the way out we also had an ice cream before heading back to the Fleece Inn.



We had to rob my hair drier of its plug, as normal 3 pin sockets with waterproof covers were supplied, instead of the usual round pin outdoor sockets. Never mind, we can swap it back again tomorrow. - At least the freezer will stay cold!

It was a noisy night. - We had fireworks at 10.30, to celebrate the end of the Silver Band Competition. This was followed by a bit more 'popular music'. We were then woken at 2.00am by an alarm going off and some shouting, followed by the siren of a police car and more shouting. It seemed the party was ending! I finally surfaced at about 9.00am, and after breakfast we borrowed the screwdriver from behind the bar again, and swapped the plugs back. (My screwdriver wasn't long enough). We then set off for Cheltenham.



I followed the signs for the Gloucestershire & Warwickshire railway, and the steam train to Laverton, which is currently the end of the line. A further extension to Broadway is due to open in 2017. We boarded at Cheltenham racecourse and travelled through the Cotswolds, passing Cleeve Hill, and the village of Bishops Cleeve, with superb views of the Avon Valley plains and the Malvern Hills, to the pretty station of Gotherington.



Leaving Gotherington we were treated to the fabulous views of Bredon & Dumbleton Hills in one direction, and Prescott Hill in the other, - home of the Bugatti owners Club. After a while we passed through Greet tunnel, which at 693 yards is the 2nd longest tunnel on a British Heritage Railway. - It is also said to be haunted. Emerging from the tunnel we reached the Station of Winchcombe. Just past the station is the River Isbourne, said to be one of only two rivers in England which flow due North from its source.





Toddington was the final station, before we changed from the Steam Train to a Diesel Car, which was great, as I could see straight out the front as we passed over the Stanway Viaduct, which with 15 arches, 50 feet above the valley floor, sounds huge. - In comparison with the Ribblehead Viaduct it was just a babe!



Once we reached Laverton the driver got up and walked to the other end of this 2 carriage train to make the return journey to Toddington, where Damien Hurst resides in the Manor House.

Once again we had to change trains, and as we had a 30 minute wait, took the opportunity to look around before the return journey to Cheltenham Racecourse, where the Caravan Club have a site. - Right in the middle of the race course!





I had soon parked up & levelled the van. Once we had topped up the water & plugged into the electric, we sat outside, Mel with a glass of wine & me with coffee.

While I was in the shower, a German coach pulled in next to a large trailer. The men piled out, set up trestle tables & benches, opened up the side of the trailer & hung a tarpaulin from its overhang. The trailer is divided into 42 'pods' each with a window. Camping by coach!



We had a quiet night, but were woken early by the German campers, who had eaten breakfast, packed up their wagon, and were on the road by 8.00am! Once I had surfaced, we set off for Stowe on the Wold.

Stow-on-the-Wold is the highest of the Cotswold towns standing exposed on 800 feet high Stow Hill at a junction of seven major roads, including the Roman Fosse Way. At the height of the Cotswold wool industry the town was famous for its huge annual fairs where as many as 20,000 sheep were sold at one time. The vast Market Square testifies to the towns' former importance. At one end stands the ancient cross, and at the other the town stocks.

The square is faced with an elegant array of Cotswold town houses and shops where I bought an extremely comfortable pair of shoes (which I wore for the rest of the trip). Mel bought some Gloucester Old Spot sausages, & a local cheese. Later on he bought some Clotted Cream, scones and beer. You can see where his priorities lie! We moved on to nearby Chastleton House, which was closed. However, we sat out side the gate in the turning circle and ate lunch. I then retraced my route over the rutted lane leading to the A436, through Morton-in-the-Marsh, where I could not get parked, and onto Bourton-on-the-Water, where a very officious parking attendant followed me round, and grudgingly said "I suppose you'll do", when I parked neatly in a car space with all 4 wheels in the space - just! It wasn't until we went to pay, that we discovered that motorhomes (who have a reserved area with bigger spaces - which was full) pay more. I got off with the fee for a car!



Cheltenham has been a health and holiday spa town resort since the discovery of mineral springs there in 1716. The visit of George III with the queen and royal princesses in 1788 set a stamp of fashion on the spa.

Cheltenham has a very large shopping area, with some nice buildings. The Promenade is considered to be one of the most beautiful thoroughfares in the country, with its tree lined avenue flanked by smart shops and café's. The composer Gustav Holst was born at 4 Clarence Road in 1874 and his childhood home is now the Holst Birthplace Museum. (It was closed as are a lot of tourist attractions on a Monday). Mel thought it would be a large house, and I thought it would be a terrace. - It was both of those things! Back at the van the heavens opened. What good timing!

We had both been to Bourton-on-the-Water before, Mel with his late wife, and me with Mum. It hasn't changed much, and was very busy.

After wandering our fill, we made our way back to the car park with plenty of time to spare (in case the afore mentioned attendant had a stop watch) and I drove back to Cheltenham race course. Once parked up and plugged in, we made our way across the car park to the park & ride into town.





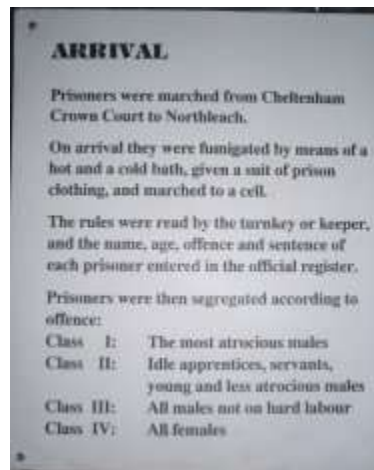
Tuesday dawned and I drove to the delightful Cotswold town of Northleach, which is tucked away from the busy A40, between gently rolling hills, at a crossroads of the Roman Fosse Way. When you walk through the Town, you can see reminders of the great days of the wool trade. Including the Church which was built on the proceeds of wool.



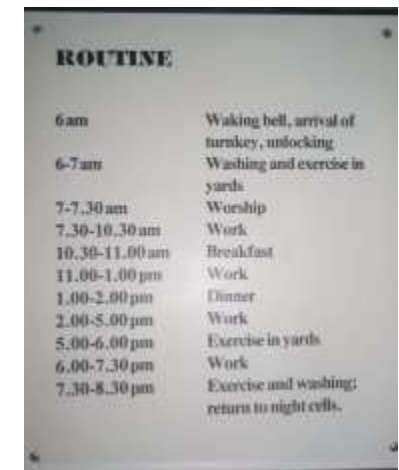
The streets in and around the ancient Market Place are rich in architectural interest ranging from half-timbered buildings and merchants' houses dating from the 15th and 16th Centuries, some of which lean at alarming angles; to the great House of Correction built at the crossroads in the 18th Century. The old Prison gives a glimpse into life in a 19th C house of correction. Once a fine example of a model prison, used to inspire better care and rehabilitation of prisoners throughout Britain. It even served as a blueprint for London's Pentonville Prison.







Today, the Prison is home to a Rural life collection; Cotswold Visitor Centre; home to the Dry Stone Walling Academy and a display of historic Agricultural and farming machinery.



While we were there a party of school children were learning the art of fence making, dry stone walling and watching a blacksmith at work, and learning how thatched roofs were made. We had coffee & cake in the visitor centre's 'Lion Cafe'. Apparently a Cotswold Lion is a shaggy sheep.



Leaving the Old Prison behind, I continued on the Fosse Way for a while, before turning off on to a rutted lane to Bibury, where I managed to park in a layby adjacent to the Trout farm. It was only a few yards from the centre of the village, and we were able to view this pretty place that we had passed through at the beginning of the tour. Bibury was once described by William Morris as "the most beautiful village in England".

The place where wool was hung to dry after being washed in Arlington Row, was known as "Rack Isle". Today, this water meadow and marshy area, which is seasonally flooded and surrounded by water from three sides, is an important habitat for water-loving plants and birds.



Returning along the lane, I drove down a single track lane that led to Chedworth Roman Villa. We were lucky enough to be just in time to join a guided talk by an enthusiastic National Trust volunteer, who was obviously interested in history.



The Villa was discovered in 1864 when a gamekeeper discovered small fragments of mosaic. The site was dug to reveal extensive walls, bath houses and mosaics. The 19th C landowner, Lord Eldon, built timber shelters over the most delicate ruins and built a small museum for the artefacts. The museum is now a grade 2 listed building, built on top of a grade 1 listed site!



Chedworth was at its greatest in the 4thC, as a large and luxurious country house with many domestic comforts, such as under floor heating & 2 bath houses.

It is a site of some significance as it has a spring. The spring-fed octagonal pool in the northwest corner of the villa complex was the location of a shrine to the water-nymphs. This spring also provides all the water on site (no mains water here).



The remains of the mosaics are still being carefully renovated. Large black patches on some of the floors are said to be the sites of fires from when the village fell into disuse and poorer people moved in and lit fires in the middle of the rooms instead of the furnaces, which fed the under floor heating.





Leaving the villa, I retraced the route, phoning a CL on the way to book a site closer to our next stop. We stayed at Friars Court, a farm on the banks of the River Thames at Radcot; under the flight path into RAF Brize Norton. Our host told us the bridge over the Thames dates from 1211; The oldest Thames crossing. There is also another dating from 1750-1800. The river appears to split into 2 here, with the Swan Hotel in between.



Our host did not have a lot to say about the pub, so we decided to find out ourselves. Mel was tempted by Lamb Shank, while I fancied their 'Whale of a fish'. We had a lovely meal, except there was a mix up on ordering. Mel's arrived, smelling lovely with minted gravy, thick crispy chips and peas. Mine had been missed off the order! It arrived as Mel was finishing his. Meanwhile I had eaten some of his chips dunked in the delicious gravy! My fish was very good. Not huge, but very thick and meaty. Because I had to wait, my meal came at half price, and worked out at about the same price as a take away with the benefit of peas, tartare sauce & lemon wedges! The poor lad behind the bar was so busy serving food and clearing tables, that the locals started serving beer! To top it all, they had just had a new card machine installed, and it wasn't working. If you wanted to pay by card, you had to leave your name & phone number at the bar, and they would take payment the following day. - A strange way to do business. We managed to scrape together the cash.



After an exceedingly quiet night, we set off South crossing the M4, and heading to Wiltshire and Great Chalfield Manor.

The house is a moated manor house built around 1465–1480 for Thomas Tropenell, a modest member of the landed gentry who made a fortune as a clothier.



A monkey, soldiers and griffins adorn the roof of this medieval Manor. The house is occupied by tenants who manage it for the National Trust. Therefore entry is by guided tour only, which I don't mind, as you can learn more that way. The manor has an impressive history, & was at one time occupied by Cromwell's army. The property was of importance, not only for its well in the courtyard, but also for its springs which provide a plentiful supply of water. The army could raid farms for food.



The servants had a tough life, they lived in the attics, accessed by ladders from the outside! The servants also had reversible uniforms, as the owner of the Manor played his cards close to his chest, and supported the policies of whom ever came to call! Hence "Turncoat". There was even a spy hole by the front door, so that they may change the flags in the great hall at a moments notice. There were also many spy holes in the house.



Externally there is a garden with four "tree houses", groups of four clipped yews that have grown together and been hollowed out inside to allow one to walk through.

The intimately connected parish church, largely rebuilt by Tropnell, which also faces into the front court was incredibly tiny. Its carved screen depicted flowers, birds & lizards. The ancient organ was hand painted with pictures of saints and angels.



After wandering the stables, and saying hello to the only horse remaining in his stable, I drove South West to Westwood Manor. Like the previous property, there was no car park to speak of, & I managed to squeeze behind a motor home similar to mine.



Westwood Manor was even smaller than the previous property. It is a small Jacobean manor house with 16th-century additions and 17th-century plaster-work in the village of Westwood near Bradford on Avon. It is the former home of Edgar Lister, a diplomat.

The house contains fine furniture, musical instruments and tapestries collected by Lister between 1911 and 1956, when he died in a car crash. The decorative plaster work is superb. He restored the house throughout and adorned the garden with topiary; he was also an expert in needlepoint and upholstered much of its furniture.



On entering, to the left is the dining hall, & the Kings Room is to the right; So called, because in each panel is a portrait of a King or Queen. Beyond the dining hall is a small sitting room. Upstairs, is a reception room which boasts a harp & 2 rare keyboard instruments, a virginal and a spinet.



Outside the small gardens consist of topiary and two lily ponds.





Next door is a Parish Church. Both house & Church appear in the Domesday books.

We decided to drive to a farm shop for the night, but on arrival I decided against staying. - Why? - I don't know!

Instead I headed to a Caravan & Camping Club site I have stayed at many times before at Sells Green. The site is very clean, and right on the banks of the Kennet & Avon Canal. Just right for tomorrow. By the time we arrived I was tired, and Mel was what he described as fractious.



We went to the neighbouring pub, The Three Magpies, for dinner. Mel had Burger and chips, while I decided to be adventurous and enjoyed sliced Faggots with Bacon, Black Pudding & Lambs Liver, served with creamy mashed potatoes, carrots and savoy cabbage. It was gorgeous. Very filling but I managed it all!

Back at the van it was time to sit with our feet up in the evening sun.





Our last day, and it was overcast but dry. Today was a day off from driving. We were going on foot to view Caen Hill Locks. After a half hours walk in the wrong direction, but with plenty of locks to view, we stopped so Mel could see one in use. - he hadn't seen this before. Turning round we headed back up the tow path, past Caen Hill Marina to Lock gate 22 where we sat and ate our packed lunch. By gate 26 we were able to view the flight of locks which magically appeared once we had passed under a bridge. The 29 locks have a rise of 237 feet in 2 miles. This flight of locks was engineer John Rennie's solution to climbing the very steep hill, and was the last part of the 87 mile route of the canal to be completed.



We made use of the few seats along the canal bank on the way back, as by then I really had over done it, and had enough. Passing the site shop I bought ice creams, then it was boots off back at the van - Bliss! I had managed to acquire a blister. Before I got settled, I went and had a shower, then fell asleep, woke up and made a cup of tea, then we went back to the Three Magpies, for a fish and chip dinner, before nodding off again.

I drove home on the Friday, hoping to avoid the holiday jams, which I largely did. The weather was appalling, with heavy rain and spray. A good time to come home.