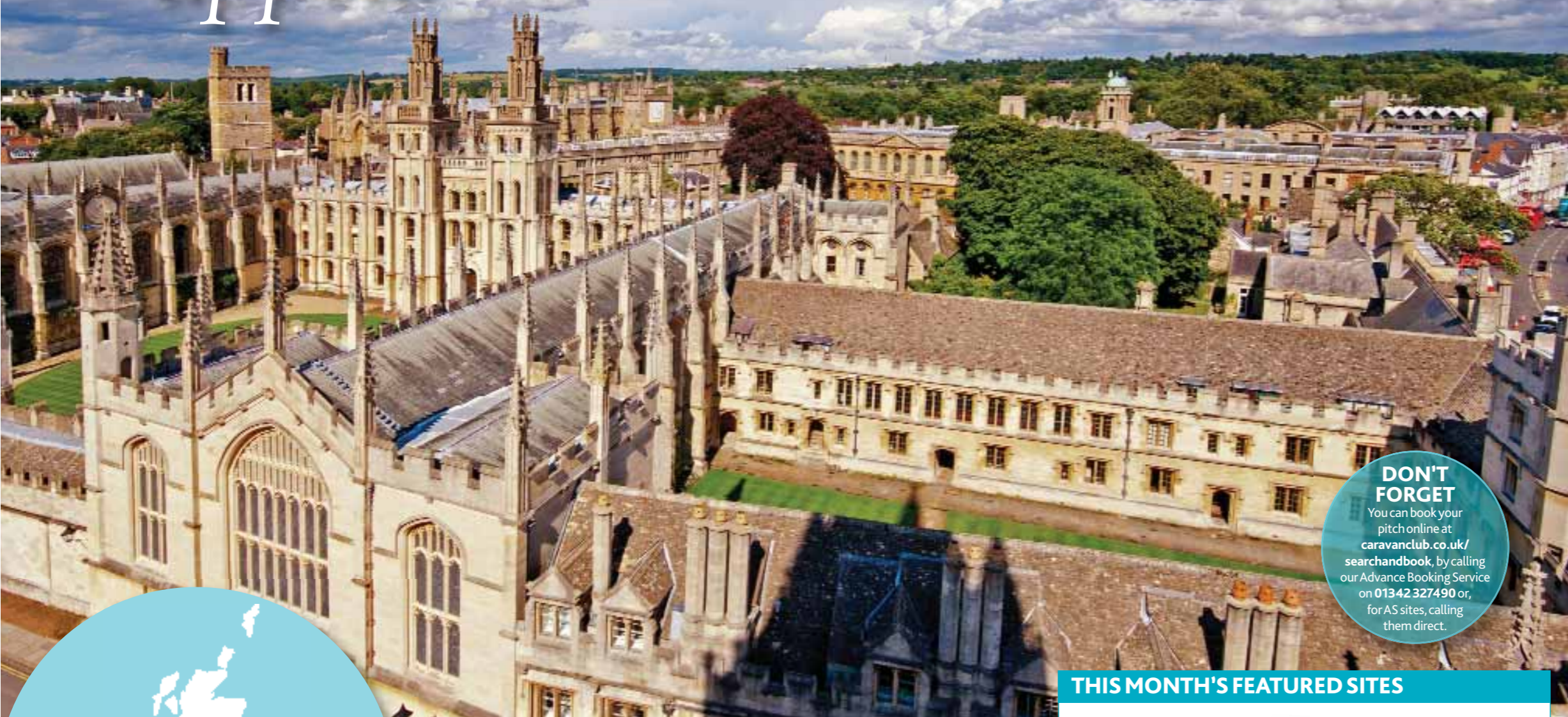


Universal appeal

Steve Rowe stays on a quartet of Club sites during a mission to explore Oxford and its rural surroundings



Oxford, arguably Britain's most famous seat of learning and the home of Inspector Morse, is a fascinating place to visit at any time of year. It's the perfect destination for a mini break (the BMW Mini is built on the site of the old Morris factory at Cowley in Oxford!), or as a day-trip during a longer holiday.

But more on the city of dreaming spires later. I started my sojourn quite a distance to the south of Oxford, at the Club's Henley Four Oaks site, which, as its name suggests, is close to the town famous for its Royal Regatta. Surrounded by mature trees, this members-only site offers both hardstandings and grass pitches as well as hook-ups and the usual heated toilet block. Henley town centre is a short drive or a relatively easy >>

DON'T FORGET
You can book your pitch online at caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook, by calling our Advance Booking Service on 01342 327490 or, for AS sites, calling them direct.

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SITES

HENLEY FOUR OAKS
See p129 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*

CIRENCESTER PARK
See p127 of the *Directory*

BURFORD
See p124 of the *Directory*

BLADON CHAINS
See p120 of the *Directory*



FOR THE FAMILY



Go wild

A stone's throw from the Burford site, Cotswold Wildlife Park boasts a menagerie that includes penguins, giraffes, crocodiles and meercats.

T 01993 823006
W cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk
Nearest featured site Burford

Float your boat

Established in 1870, Hobbs of Henley offers sightseeing trips on the Thames, as well as the opportunity to charter a boat for private parties. You can even hire a motor launch for your own self-drive adventure!

T 01491 572035
W hobbsofhenley.com
Nearest featured site Henley Four Oaks

Miniature marvel

Pendon Museum is a fascinating place for model railway enthusiasts. There are several large layouts designed to represent British rural settings from the 1920s and '30s.

T 01865 407365
W pendonmuseum.com
Nearest featured sites Burford/Henley Four Oaks



RIGHT ON TRACK



Fun on the farm

Offering something for everyone, Millets Farm Centre has amusements for children, a well-stocked shop, a garden centre and restaurant. You can even join its Fly Fishing Club.

T 01865 392200
W milletsfarmcentre.com
Nearest featured sites Burford/Henley Four Oaks



FOOD + DRINK



Calling chocoholics

The Chocolate Theatre Café in Henley not only serves 25 different types of hot chocolate, tea, coffee and freshly-cooked food, it also offers delightful views of the Thames.

T 01491 411412
W chocolatetheatrecafe-henley.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Henley Four Oaks

Brewery tour

One for beer fans! The Hook Norton Brewery offers two tours per day, including a half-hour beer tasting. There's also a visitors' centre and gift shop to stagger round afterwards.

T 01608 737210
W hooky.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Bladon Chains

Pub grub

With friendly staff and a good selection of food and drink, including real ales, The Mermaid Inn on Burford's High Street also has a 'posh' candle-lit restaurant upstairs.

T 01993 822193
W themermaidburford.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Burford



FFEL GRAND

Tea and cocktails!

A good place to stop for a cream tea or light meal during the day, The Grand Café in the centre of Oxford becomes more of a cocktail bar at night, when it attracts many of the city's students.

T 01865 204463
Nearest featured sites: Bladon Chains/Burford

Enjoy a waterside pint at Henley



“Cirencester Park site is set within Grade I listed parkland”

walk away. If you're driving, use the large pay-and-display car park next to the river. From here, you can walk back into town along the banks of the Thames, admiring the boats moored up on the river. For an even closer look at these vessels, why not take a relaxing sightseeing boat trip or even book your own motor launch?

My walk into town was delayed by a cuppa and a bite to eat at the fabulous Chocolate Theatre Café which offers good Thames views. Those of you who enjoy dining out are spoilt for choice in Henley.

Art lovers are well catered for too, thanks to a number of commercial galleries. You might even like to take a work home, although judging by some of the price tags you'd need fairly deep pockets.

Once you've taken in all the town's numerous attractions, there are plenty more on offer a half-hour or so drive from Henley Four Oaks. If you like trains, there's the Didcot Railway Centre, which houses several Great Western Railway steam engines and has 'running days' when you can ride in period carriages. On a smaller scale, the fascinating Pendon Museum near Abingdon boasts several model railway layouts representing scenes from the 1920s and '30s (the car park is also quite miniature, so motorhomes are best parked on the village streets).

If trains aren't your thing, then Millets Farm Centre, also near

Abingdon, is a great place to visit, with a farm shop, restaurant, garden centre and amusements for the kids, all occupying a large rural site with plenty of free parking.

GOWEST

From Henley, I headed west to the Club's Cirencester Park site. Set within Grade I listed parkland which forms part of the Bathurst Estate, this is another members-only site with both grass and hardstanding pitches, hook-ups and heated toilet blocks.

It is well placed for easy access to the centre of Cirencester and a number of pretty Cotswold villages are also within range. Cirencester boasts many historic buildings and a variety of shops and eateries. And don't miss the fascinating Corinium Museum with its large collection of Roman artefacts – Corinium was the Roman name for the town.



Burford Club site

www.caravanclub.co.uk

Driving eastwards from Cirencester towards Oxford, you'll come across several charming Cotswold stone villages, including Bibury. Slightly off the main tourist trail, this village was described by textile designer, artist and writer William Morris as "The most beautiful village in England." I agree with him. It's a sublime spot, with the River Coln flowing under ancient stone bridges that are overlooked by picture-postcard cottages. Another attraction here is Bibury Trout Farm, which offers fly fishing and has a café and a shop, where you can buy fresh fish.

My next destination was Burford Club site. Enjoying a rural setting, it has well-spaced pitches, including some hardstandings, plus mains hook-ups and washroom blocks. This is an ideal base for families, the entrance to the Cotswold Wildlife Park being just across the road.

The village of Burford is a short drive from the site – a car park is clearly signposted from the High Street, but it is too small and difficult to access for large motorhomes, which may be better off finding a roadside parking spot instead. The tree-lined High Street is set on a fairly steep slope which leads down to a bridge over the River Windrush. The ancient buildings that line the street are now home to shops, pubs and cafés, as well as the fascinating Tolsey Museum, which houses a collection of artefacts depicting the social and industrial heritage of the area. I enjoyed a bite to eat at the dog-friendly Mermaid Inn.



DID YOU KNOW?
The University of Oxford is the oldest English-speaking world

Cirencester Park Club site

CHURCHILL COUNTRY

My final site, and the one from which I planned to visit the city of Oxford itself, was Bladon Chains, set within the lovely grounds of the Blenheim Palace Estate at Woodstock. It's a members-only site with grass pitches and hardstandings, plus hook-up points and toilet block. It's very quiet and surrounded by woodland, with plenty of walking opportunities.

Here's a quick quiz question for you – which famous Prime Minister was born at Blenheim Palace? It was, of course, Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. Club members can use their site receipts from Bladon Chains to get a third off the admission price to the palace.

On a more sombre note, Churchill is also buried nearby, with his wife Clementine, in the graveyard of St Martin's Church in Bladon. I visited the graveside and it's quite humbling to see that such a great man chose to have a fairly simple grave. Standing graveside, in the empty cemetery, was an unusually touching moment. >>



Beautiful Bibury

OUTDOOR FUN

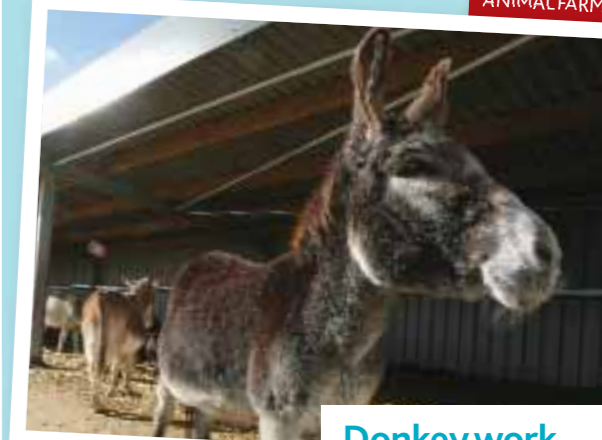
Gone fishing

Situated in the charming stone village that shares its name, Bibury Trout Farm has a catch-your-own fishery, as well as a café and children's play area. There's also a shop where you can buy fresh fish.

T 01285 740215
W biburytroutfarm.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Cirencester Park



ANIMAL FARM



Donkey work

Be prepared for a collective 'aaahhh' if you visit the Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary near Didcot, a charity which cares for ill-treated animals. Admission is free but your heart will tell you to leave a donation.

T 01491 833938
W donkeyrescue.co.uk
Nearest featured sites: Burford/Henley Four Oaks

Cycling

Highlights for cycling in and around Oxfordshire include National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 5 which runs from Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon. The Bladon Chains site is close to a traffic-free section to Oxford. If you're staying at Henley Four Oaks, it's worth checking out The Thames Valley route (NCN 4) which, if you are feeling adventurous, is mostly traffic-free all the way to London.

W sustrans.org.uk

Green fingers

With eight acres of grounds to explore, Waterperry Gardens also boasts a large garden centre, gift shop, tea room and country life museum, so you can easily spend a whole day here. It's situated close to the M40, just east of Oxford.

T 01844 339254
W waterperrygardens.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Bladon Chains



CULTURE



Pay your respects

Winston Churchill's relatively humble gravestone at **St Martin's Church** in Bladon says a lot about the great wartime leader. Park near the White House pub, cross the road and walk up the path between houses to the church.

Wchurchill-society-london.org.uk
Nearest featured site Bladon Chains



Back in time

Once the medieval meeting point for wealthy wool merchants in Burford, **Tolsey Museum** now houses a collection of artefacts depicting the social and industrial heritage of the area.

T 01993 823196
Wtolseymuseumburford.org
Nearest featured site Burford



Art warming

Located behind the town hall in the centre of Henley, the **Old Fire Station Gallery** is home to various art exhibitions throughout the year, so is well worth a look to see what's being featured if you're exploring the town.

T 01865 263990 Woldfirestation.info
Nearest featured site Henley Four Oaks



Feeling sheepish

In the village of Filkins, not far from Burford, **Cotswold Woollen Weavers** is home to a museum, café and fascinating shop which sells a variety of woollen products.

T 01367 860660
Wnaturalbest.co.uk
Nearest featured site Burford

OFF TO OXFORD

From Bladon Chains, I headed off to Oxford in my car, taking advantage of one of the many park-and-rides to take a bus into the historic centre. I hadn't visited this university city since the mid-1990s, when I was selling French-designed computer hardware to Apple Macintosh dealers. My rather large sales area included both Oxford and

Cambridge so, after visiting my contacts at the Apple Centre shops in both, I used to find time to have a look round two of Britain's finest centres of education.

After so many years, I actually lost my bearings a little. I think that's because a lot of Oxford has been pedestrianised since the mid '90s, giving a totally different feel to the place. It now seems much more focussed towards tourism and shopping, not so much the 'working city' buzz I seem to recall.

From a tourist point of view that's a good thing, of course, and it's much easier to explore the city centre now. As well as plenty of shopping and eating opportunities, you can hire a punt on the river or pay to have a look round some of the ancient colleges. You can



Bladon Chains Club site

even visit locations used in the filming of the *Inspector Morse* TV series starring the great John Thaw, such as the Macdonald Randolph Hotel, which is opposite the Ashmolean Museum, and where you can now have a drink in The Morse Bar!

I spent my time in Oxford admiring the architecture, as well as enjoying a spot of shopping – there's a good mix of major chain stores and smaller gift shops – plus grabbing some food.

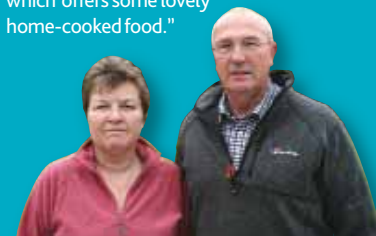
This signalled the end of my trip, and I had really enjoyed my time in this wonderful part of the world. Any of the four sites featured would make a good base from which to explore the whole area, so you don't have to follow my itinerary. If I have inspired you to pay a visit, I guarantee you'll have a great time. ■

MEMBERS' VIEW



Tony and Dorothy Smith from Lyneham in Wiltshire were staying at Henley Four Oaks, partly so they could see their daughter who lives in Reading. Speaking about the local attractions, Tony enthused, "This is a great part of the country and there's plenty to see and do. We've been to Blenheim Palace on several occasions, plus Buscot Park, an 18th-century property now run by the National Trust, is also nearby and we've taken our grandchildren there in the past. We'd also recommend the Rainbow Inn in the village of Middle Assendon, which offers some lovely home-cooked food."

John and Susan Steele from Cardiff were relaxing in their Hobby caravan when we spoke to them on the Cirencester Park Club site. "This our first time on the site but it's very well located just a short walk from the centre of Cirencester, which has some lovely old buildings," said Susan. "Our son lives fairly close by, in Swindon, so we can also see him while we are staying here." John added, "We like exploring towns and villages with ancient and interesting buildings and one of our favourites in this area is Bourton-on-the-Water. We are also planning a trip to Oxford, where we will use the park-and-ride scheme to access the city centre."



To read even more member views, see our fantastic online forum at caravanclub.co.uk/together

