

# Centre of Excellence

Steve Rowe explains why the Midlands should be high on your list of caravanning priorities

## THIS MONTH'S SITES



1. HARBURY FIELDS FARM AS  
See p128 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*



2. WARWICK RACECOURSE  
See p140 of the *Directory*



3. CHAPEL LANE  
See p125 of the *Directory*



4. BROMYARD DOWNS  
See p123 of the *Directory*



You can book your pitch online at [caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook](http://caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook) or by calling our Advance Booking Service on **01342 327490**. Please call Affiliated Sites directly.

Stratford-upon-Avon Canal is just over 25 miles long



## FOOD + DRINK



## Bar Angeli

This is a great bar and coffee shop in the modern Regent Court shopping centre of Leamington Spa. Enjoy soup and a baguette – sit outside if the weather is good.

**Contact:** 01926 887577, regent-court.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Harbury Fields Farm AS

## Becketts Farm Shop

This family-run business sells local produce and has its own on-site bakery, restaurant and coffee shop.

**Contact:** 01564 823402, beckettsfarm.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Chapel Lane

## Thomas Oken Tea Rooms

Close to Warwick Castle, this was once home to local philanthropist Thomas Oken. It's a great place to stop off for a cooked breakfast, cream tea, coffee or just a slice of cake.



**Contact:** 01926 499307, thomasokentearooms.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse



## The White Hart Inn

This country pub on the outskirts of the village of Ufton has a good selection of beers and great food. There's plenty of parking and tables outside if the weather is good.

**Contact:** 01926 612976, thewhitehartufton.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Harbury Fields Farm AS



Wonderful Warwick Castle

**H**aving worked on various caravan and motorhome magazines over the years, I have learned that the Midlands region has one of the largest concentrations of caravan and motorhome owners anywhere in the UK.

Perhaps this is due to its central location, good road and motorway connections, plus, of course, the fact that this part of the UK has a long history of motor manufacturing.

In fact, if such a thing exists, the 'average caravanner' probably lives in the Midlands and takes his/her caravan or motorhome down the M5 to the West Country for his/her main holiday.

Well, this month, my aim is to turn the tables and encourage people from the West Country and elsewhere to head for the central belt. I'm concentrating on the area to the south of Birmingham, taking in the ancient centres of Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick, travelling as far west as Bromyard in Herefordshire.

This area packs in a lot of history, from the castle in Warwick to Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford. It also boasts a proud industrial heritage taking in the canal network and Birmingham's gritty manufacturing background. And, let's

not forget the vast swathes of countryside and outdoor attractions in this fascinating part of the UK.

## ROYAL APPOINTMENT

I first visited Royal Leamington Spa in the early 1990s, when friends of mine sold their flat in Blackheath, South London, and bought a small period house in this charming town. I really loved the place, with its stylish Georgian buildings and leafy centre.

Since then, the town has developed to include a large indoor shopping mall, but this is tucked away and the white-painted facades of the shops and buildings in the centre have been preserved, with modern signage kept to a minimum.

Other attractions in town include the Royal Pump Rooms (which have been turned into a cultural centre containing a gallery), library, visitor information centre and café. Opposite, the pretty park known as Jephson Gardens boasts a lake, glasshouse with exotic plants, café and children's play area.

Club members looking to pitch near Leamington should head for Harbury Fields Farm Affiliated Site. Surrounded by lovely Warwickshire countryside, it is easily

"My next destination was the ancient town of Warwick, famous for its castle and the racecourse"

accessed by a single-track lane with flat grass borders, off a fairly wide country road. It's an intimate site, with just 35 pitches, mainly hardstanding and with hook-up points. It also boasts two washroom blocks, so you never have to walk very far from your outfit for a shower. I also found a very nice pub serving food in nearby Ufton village, in the shape of The White Hart Inn.

## RACE ACE

My next destination was the ancient town of Warwick, famous for its castle and the racecourse, which is home to The Club's Warwick Racecourse site.

This site is located right in the middle of the track, and you drive over a temporary road surface to reach it (solid panels are lifted out of the way when racing takes place). Of course, you cannot drive onto

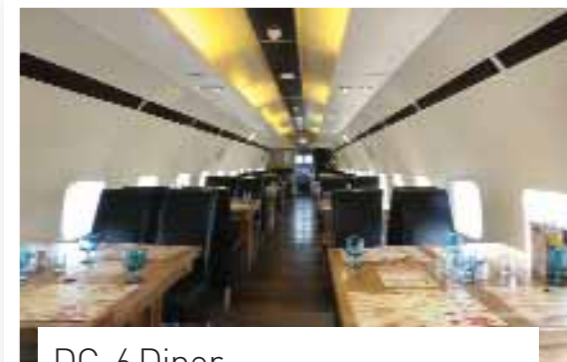
the site when a meeting is in full flow, but you can walk across the track between races if you fancy a stroll into the town centre.

The site has 55 pitches, of which 22 are hardstanding, plus the usual high-quality washroom block and laundry facilities. As well as the castle, attractions in town include the Collegiate Church of St Mary, which boasts some of the country's best Gothic architecture. I also enjoyed a great cream tea at Thomas Oken Tea Rooms, housed in a 500-year-old timber-framed building close to the castle entrance.

I'm a big fan of classic cars and motorbikes, so one of the main appeals of the Midlands for me is the large number of motoring museums. My favourite is the Heritage Motor Centre, at Gaydon, near Warwick. In my opinion, the most fascinating cars are the prototypes that never made it into production, including a couple of MG Midgets from the 1960s and '70s, plus a proposed boxy replacement for the Mini that pre-empted the Metro.

Another top attraction is Coventry Transport Museum, which contains a large collection of cars manufactured in the Midlands. While you're in town you might like to visit the shopping centre, look >>

## FOR THE FAMILY



## DC-6 Diner

On the edge of Coventry Airport, this 1950s aircraft has been converted into a restaurant offering American-style burgers, hot dogs and steaks. It should appeal to youngsters who can watch the aeroplanes taking off.

**Contact:** 024 7688 2604, dc6diner.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse

## Heritage Motor Centre

Home to the world's largest collection of British-built cars, this is a mecca for fans of classic motors. It even contains prototypes of cars which never made it into production, including a couple of MG Midget designs.

**Contact:** 01926 641188, heritage-motorcentre.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Harbury Fields Farm AS



## National Motorcycle Museum

More than 650 classic bikes are housed at this venue close to the NEC in Birmingham.

**Contact:** 01675 443311, nationalmotorcycle museum.co.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Chapel Lane



## The Time Machine Museum of Science Fiction

This fascinating little museum in the centre of Bromyard features props from famous films and television series.

**Contact:** 01885 488329, timemachineuk.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Bromyard Downs





## OUTDOOR FUN



### Jephson Gardens

In the centre of Leamington Spa, this charming Victorian park has a lake as well as several fountains and follies. It also contains a modern glass house, children's play area and café.

**Contact:** warwickdc.gov.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Harbury Fields Farm AS

### Cycling

For cycling in the Midlands, check out National Cycle Network Route 5, The West Midlands Cycle Route, which runs from Oxford to Derby via Birmingham. It follows quiet roads and canal towpaths.

**Contact:** sustrans.org.uk



### Hill Close Gardens

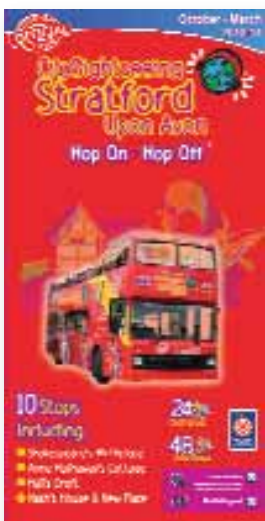
A short stroll from the Warwick Racecourse site, sections of these gardens were once rented by local families in the Victorian era.

**Contact:** 01926 493339, hillclosegardens.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse

### Stratford bus tour

Take in the Bard's town on a City Sightseeing 'hop-on hop-off' bus tour. Buses leave every 20 minutes in summer so you shouldn't ever have to wait for one for too long.

**Contact:** 01789 412680, city-sightseeing.com  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse



round the ruins of the old cathedral and marvel at its modernist replacement.

If you're near Coventry, one fascinating attraction that I would recommend is the DC-6 Diner. Located on the outskirts of Coventry Airport, this is a 1950s DC-6 airliner that has been converted into a bar and restaurant. Follow the directions on the website to gain access (also check here for opening times), since you have to drive past a barrier and then round the outskirts of the airport. Once there, you can enjoy a burger or hot dog while watching aeroplanes taking off. Take time to wonder at the multitude of dials and switches in the ancient-looking cockpit – kids of all ages will love dining here!

Another attraction on my must-see list is the National Motorcycle Museum, which is not far from Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre. It houses a collection of more than 650 British-made motorbikes, tracing the golden age of manufacture in the UK right up to modern-day Hinckley-built Triumphs.

Nearby Shirley, in the southern suburbs of Birmingham, has a large shopping centre and several great curry houses – I've been to many while attending NEC caravan shows over the years! This brings me to the third site on my trip, Chapel Lane Club site, which is not far from the M42 and is often used by people visiting the shows or looking to explore the many attractions of Birmingham.

Open all year, Chapel Lane is a large site offering 120 pitches (95 hardstanding). There's also Wi-Fi access and laundry facilities in the washroom blocks. A bonus is the bus stop for Birmingham, on a main road that's less than a mile from the site.

## MEMBERS' VIEWS

**Linda and Bryan Hale** from Somerset were staying with a group of family members including Pauline and Gerald White and Andrew and Alison Speed at the Warwick Racecourse site. They were all enjoying an end-of-season getaway and planning to take in a race

meeting while staying at the site. Linda enthused, "We often like to go away as a group, either before or after the main summer season, when sites are quieter. As well as watching the races while we are here, we also plan to explore the centre of Warwick, as well as the castle."



### DOWN TIME

The final stop on my tour was at Bromyard Downs Caravan Club Site, just a short drive from the historic Herefordshire town of Bromyard. This relatively small and very beautiful site is easily accessed off the A44 and is set in a forest clearing. There are 40 pitches (18 hardstanding) here with electric hook-ups, but there is no washroom block, so you'll need to use the facilities in your caravan or motorhome.

There are plenty of opportunities for walking nearby, across Bromyard Downs, Bringsty Common or around the National Trust estate at Brockhampton which boasts a moated manor house. I enjoyed strolling around the well-preserved town

### Alan and Marian Edwards

from Brighton were staying on the Chapel Lane site and were just off to catch a bus into Birmingham when we met them. "In the past, we have usually passed the Midlands on our way to other parts of the country," said Marian. "But this time we thought we would stop and check out this area. I love shopping, so we are now off to explore the Bullring shopping centre in Birmingham. The other day we visited Birmingham's rag market which is a great place where you can buy fabrics, clothes and much, much more – well worth a visit!"



Lower Brockhampton near Bromyard Club site

"Bromyard has an old-fashioned feel thanks to its collection of small local shops"

centre in Bromyard, which has an old-fashioned feel thanks to its collection of small local shops, including a bakery and a couple of greengrocers, as well as a selection of cafés and pubs.

If you're holidaying with children, a fascinating attraction in Bromyard is the

Time Machine Museum of Science Fiction. Exhibits here include props from TV series and films such as *Dr Who* and *Star Wars*. It's open during school holidays and weekends, as well as on certain weekdays between April and September, so it's best to check before visiting.

I really enjoyed my week in the Midlands. It's a part of Britain that's often overlooked, as people speed past Birmingham on their way to more traditional holiday destinations north and south. However, the area is absolutely packed with things to do and see for all the family, and, in the event of rain, a week spent here could be more fun than one at a windswept seaside resort!

## Club Together

The online community that just keeps growing

To read even more member views, see our fantastic online forum at [caravanclub.co.uk/together](http://caravanclub.co.uk/together)

## CULTURE



### Shakespeare's Birthplace

In the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of our most famous dramatist has been welcoming visitors for more than 250 years.

**Contact:** 01789 204016, shakespeare.org.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse

### Collegiate Church of St Mary

Open to the public all year round, this church in the centre of Warwick can trace its roots back over 1,000 years. Rebuilt in the 14th century, the chancel, vestry and chapter house represent the peak of English Gothic architecture



**Contact:** 01926 403940, stmaryswarwick.org.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse



### Royal Pump Rooms

Now a cultural venue, the Royal Pump Rooms in Leamington Spa house an art gallery, museum and library. The town's visitor information centre is also here.

**Contact:** 01926 742762, warwickdc.gov.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse

### The RSC

The Royal Shakespeare Company's building in Stratford-upon-Avon has a roof-top restaurant, café and bar. Tours are available, too.

**Contact:** 0844 800 1110, rsc.org.uk  
**Nearest featured site:** Warwick Racecourse

