



A Cotswold nativity trail

In the rush to buy gifts, prepare our houses for guests, stock up on drink and get ready to feast, it's all too easy to lose sight of the tale of the first Christmas. Sandra Kessell visited Burford and found many reminders of the Nativity story, and not just around the church of St John the Baptist



Star Cottage

THE STAR

Not from around these parts? Then here's the perfect place to start – or end – your journey to Burford. Star Cottage bed and breakfast, just outside the town in the neighbouring village of Fulbrook, was set up by Peter and Sally Wyatt around 10 years ago after their children had gone to university. Feeling like empty-nesters, they considered their next stage of life.

“We decided to turn the cottage into a B&B rather than downsize,” explains Sally, who was able to put her skills in interior decoration to good use at the same time.

Around two years later the couple created a self-contained apartment in their barn – it's rather more luxurious than the stable traditionally associated with the nativity story, and the welcome includes beautiful linens and a bathroom.

Peter attends to guests' culinary and travel needs – he'll organise a tour of the Cotswolds for guests if booked in advance.

When Sally isn't hosting guests, she works as a fine artist. Inspired by the Cotswold countryside and Cornish coast, she exhibits and sells at galleries and shows regularly, and is the artist in residence at Cogges Manor Farm in Witney. *Star Cottage Bed and Breakfast, Meadow Lane, Fulbrook, Burford, OX18 4BW. Tel: 01993 822032. burfordbedandbreakfast.co.uk*

THE CARPENTER

Furniture maker Robert Lewin and his wife Jane are the partners behind Burford Woodcraft. Robert is also one of the craftsmen whose furniture is sold in the shop. His love of wood was encouraged by an inspirational woodwork teacher at Burford School.

“I took A levels in engineering drawing, woodwork and geography,” he explains. “After school I went to work for my woodwork teacher, then I trained at Rycothe College near Thame.”

Robert's first piece of furniture was bought by Burford Woodcraft's previous proprietor and when he announced he would be retiring, Robert and Jane, a cartographer, decided to buy the business.

“We didn't want the shop to disappear,” explains Jane, adding that she knows of



Robert Lewin



Peter and Sally Wyatt at Star Cottage

only one other like it in the country.

Around 100 craftsmen and women sell their work through the shop, and the range of wooden items on sale includes turned plates and bowls, carved birds and animals and characters (including a shepherd), village scenes and nativity sets. Furniture includes mirror and picture frames, chests of drawers and side tables. Besides selling through the shop in Burford, there's an online shop.

“The oddest thing we've ever had to source was a new baby Jesus for a nativity set,” she says. “A dog had chewed the original.” *Burford Woodcraft, 144 High Street, Burford. OX18 4QU. Tel: 01993 823479. burford-woodcraft.co.uk*

THE ANGEL

Where would the Christmas message be without an angel or two to play the role of herald?

You can celebrate the festive season at The Angel with a meal or a get-together around the table, and even stay overnight if one of the three luxurious bedrooms is vacant. Once a coaching inn, it has a history of hospitality dating back to the sixteenth century.

Innkeepers (there have to be a few in this story!), Terence King and Gemma Finch moved to Burford five years ago to take the pub on and now have a three-year-old son.

“The town is very popular with tourists,” says Gemma, who worked in marketing before becoming the landlady at The Angel.

“Not only are the independent shops very good, the architecture in Burford is an added attraction,” she says.

Terence, who left South Africa to travel in the UK, came to the Cotswolds around 20 years ago and settled in the area. He worked in a number of the area's finest restaurants before taking on The Angel, which has become a gastro-pub of some renown.

The Angel, 14 Witney Street, Burford, OX18 4SN. Tel: 01993 822714 theangelatburford.co.uk



The Angel inn

THE ANIMALS

As you might expect of a town at the crossroads of coaching routes, Burford has more than its fair share of inns and pubs, which, down the ages, have put many a weary traveller up for the night.

The Lamb Inn, tucked down the appropriately-named Sheep Street, has all that a traditional country hostelry should offer in the winter – cosy fires, good food and a warm welcome for the family dog at the bar. Outside, there's an old well and secret garden, with mounting steps by the gate.

In contrast to the sleepiness of Sheep Street, the Bull Hotel is in the heart, hustle and bustle of the high street. Though it was once a private home, the stables, coach house and pretty courtyard show it has long been used as a coaching inn.

The Lamb Inn, Sheep Street, Burford.

OX18 4LR. Tel: 01993 823155.

cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk

The Bull, 105 High Street, Burford.

OX18 4RG. Tel: 01993 822220.

Bullatburford.co.uk

THE SCHOOL

Burford School isn't the most likely place to find farmyard animals, but since 2014 it has been offering pupils a hands-on science qualification thanks to an outdoor learning area, known as The Acre. Traditional sciences are taught in the classroom, but the school also offers Environmental Land Based Studies – a new GCSE course introduced in 2014.

Clare Brown, head of the science department, explains that the children turned the land into workable, fertile ground in which to grow vegetables and flowers. In addition to hens, pigs, rabbits, and a Shetland pony, the area is home to two miniature donkeys, (*equus asinus*) named Pedro and Matilda. They're much loved by pupils, staff and visitors. Though the original purpose of The Acre was to give pupils a chance to get in touch with their rural heritage, the environment is also used by art and photography students and those who want to apply to veterinary college.

"We find students like to go down there at lunchtime and some use it as a quiet start to their school day," says Clare. "It's a massive draw."

"We had lambs down there a few months ago, and in the spring it's likely we will have ewes and lambs there again," says Clare.

Unusually for a state school, Burford School, which was established in 1571, has boarding as well as day pupils. Students who board are housed in the heart of the town and walk through the streets to the school daily.

Burford School, Cheltenham Road,

Burford OX18 4PL. Tel 01993 823303.

burford.oxon.sch.uk



Mrs Brown's donkey, by George Pitt

"The oddest thing we've had to source was a new baby Jesus for a nativity set. A dog had chewed the original"



Cedric Reavley

THE CAMELS

Though it may surprise you to learn that Burford has camels in residence, Bactrian camels (*camelus bactrianus*) are perfectly at home at Cotswold Wildlife Park. They have two humps rather than the single hump of the Dromedary camels that were likely to have been ridden by the wise men in the bible story. Two camel calves, Frank and Pat, were born in 2016.

The wildlife park, just south of the town in Bradwell Grove, is set in 160 acres of land. It's part-zoo, part-safari and part conservation trust. The old zebra stables have been converted to house some unusual animals such as gundi and bush babies. There's a children's farmyard area with goat petting, pigs and miniature donkeys (two of which were donated to Burford School).

Set up in 1970 in what was then a family home, the park has established a reputation for its education and conservation projects and its endangered species breeding programmes. Now the park also raises funds for the conservation of animals and endangered habitats.

If you want to visit around the festive period, the gates are open every day of the year except Christmas Day. Winter hours are 10am-dusk with last admission at 3.30pm.

Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens, Bradwell Grove, Burford, OX18 4JP. Tel: 01993 823006.
cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk

THE WISE MEN

Pharmacist Cedric Reavley is the third generation of his family to run Robert Reavley's, the pharmacy on the High Street.

The shop is the oldest pharmacy in England, pre-dating the Reavleys' presence in the town. The premises, which used to be the Crown Inn, were leased by Nicholas Willet, an apothecary, in July 1734. The interior fittings, complete with an apothecary's cabinet with labelled drawers, have been retained by successive owners, adding to the charm of both the shop and the town.

The shop continued to be a pharmacy and was sold to Robert Reavley in 1918, who had been working in India but moved to the town to be closer to his wife Rachel's family. The next ▶

pharmacist, Sybil Miles, became an apprentice to Robert Reavley before going to college. She married Eric Reavley, Robert and Rachel's son, in 1935, the same year she qualified and they had three children, including Cedric.

"My parents said to me that if I wanted to get qualified I could take on the shop from them," says Cedric. "I love living in Burford, it's a lovely town."

Cedric's siblings Nigel and Alison decided to pursue other careers, but Cedric qualified in 1974 and joined his mother to run the business. He has seen many changes in the town over his lifetime and to his practice since qualifying.

"When I qualified we used to make a lot of medicines by hand," he explains. "That's almost completely died out now."

In addition to the remedies, traditional and modern, there's a selection of gifts sold in the shop.

New systems and the advent of computers have also changed the way information about medicines and research are imparted, and alongside keeping up with the times, Cedric has maintained the old traditions of offering personal service and good advice.

"It's a pleasure and a privilege," says Cedric, adding that the pharmacy has a good working relationship with local doctors.

Burford has become more prosperous over the 40 years since Cedric joined his mother in partnership at the pharmacy and though some families have lived in the town for a long time, some have moved to Burford because of its road connections and because it's an attractive place to live.

"We have visitors from all over the world coming to admire the town and buildings," says Cedric. The mixture of independent shops and businesses in Burford is part of the draw and a strong Chamber of Trade helps maintain the town's bustling streets.

Besides being a pharmacist Cedric is also an associate vicar at the parish church of St John the Baptist, where he takes services.
*Robert Reavley Pharmaceutical Chemist,
124 High Street, Burford, OX18 4QR.
Tel: 01993 823144. reavley.co.uk*

CHRIS WALKER ANTIQUES

Want to find something in Burford? Chris Walker, who runs an antiques shop tucked off the High Street, could be the man to direct you to it. Besides collectibles, antiques and books packing his shop, he is also a driving force behind the Burford Museum in the Tolsey, which houses artefacts and historical items associated with Burford.
Chris Walker Antiques, Taylor's Row, 134d High Street, Burford, OX18 4QU. Tel: 07973 550 753.

EARLY OAK FURNITURE AT WYSDOM HALL

If you need a third wise man, where better to look than Wysdom Hall, on the High Street? This shop, with its quiet air and comforting smell of polish, is home to fine oak antiques and is run by proprietor and dealer Tim Wilson.
Wysdom Hall, No. 115 High Street, Burford. OX18 4RG. Tel: 01993 822555. wysdomhall.co.uk.



Olives and oils at The Cotswold Cheese Company



The Cotswold Cheese Company

THE GIFTS

THE COTSWOLD CHEESE COMPANY

There's a vast array of cheeses and trucklements at the Cotswold Cheese Company. Beside the cheese, you'll find crackers, wines, smoked meats and small food-related gifts alongside an olive bar and a range of oils, including locally produced Cotswold Gold extra virgin cold pressed rapeseed oil.

The Cotswold Cheese Company, 113 High Street, Burford, OX18 4ZG. Tel: 01993 823882. cotswoldcheese.com.

THE BUTCHERS

Next door, W.J. Castle butchers' shop is housed in an ancient and beautiful building, with a traditional yard out at the back. This mainstay of the high street has helped the town keep its bustling centre, making it a pleasant place to live, as well as to visit.

W.J. Castle was taken on from William Castle by Jesse Smith – a family butchers' firm with origins going back to 1808.
*W.J. Castle, 111 High Street, Burford.
OX18 4RG. jesssmith.co.uk*

BURFORD GARDEN COMPANY

To enter Burford Garden Company is to open a box of delights. Not only are there rows and rows of plants, tools and gardening equipment – more than enough to satisfy the most eager horticultural fan, there are decorations, lights, furniture – decorative and practical – and gifts. If you fancy giving your true love a classic car for Christmas, you'll find a few of these for sale. A kelim or lantern? No problem, what size, which colour? But of all the wondrous things on offer, the most surprising (and even the managing director Paul Gingell was delighted to realise these were hidden in this amazing emporium) were three mangers. A fitting find to end a day to remember and reflect. ♦

THE CHOIR

Burford Singers perform three times a year in the Church of St John the Baptist in Church Green.

The singers, who rehearse on Thursday evenings in the Methodist Church, are largely amateurs, led by director of music Brian Kay and are joined by the Cotswold Chamber Orchestra for their performances. The choir is open to new members, who have to undergo a voice assessment prior to joining.

For details visit burfordsingers.org.uk.