

The Romantic Road

**Tours to discover the romance of
the Cotswolds**

Internet edition



CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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VisitCheltenham
77 Promenade, Cheltenham,
Gloucestershire, England, GL50 1PJ
Tel: 01242 522878
Fax: 01242 255848
email info@cheltenham.gov.uk
www.VisitCheltenham.info

Contributors include

Christopher Knowles, Peter Rollins, Aylwin Sampson
Ken Jennings, Pam Clarke

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The Romantic Road

A Road for Today

The Romantic Road takes you north over Cleeve Hill and down into historic Winchcombe. From here we visit Stanway and Stanton before calling at picturesque Broadway. Chipping Campden, Moreton-in-Marsh, Stow-on-the-Wold and the Slaughters all feature in this tour of Cotswolds highlights, before returning to Cheltenham. A tour of some 70 miles.

A Road for Tomorrow

From the edge of Cheltenham, a country road takes you to Northleach and onwards to Burford following the Windrush Valley. Lechlade and Fairford feature on this journey, en route for Cirencester via the pretty village of Bibury on the River Coln. We follow the winding road back to Cheltenham, calling into Painswick, the Queen of the Cotswolds. A tour of some 90 miles.

We hope you enjoy this special Internet Edition of The Romantic Road, which is yours free of charge from VisitCheltenham. The full colour version including a detailed map is available from:

**VisitCheltenham
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Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL50 1PJ
England**

**Tel: +44 (0) 1242 522878
Fax: +44 (0) 1242 255848
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www.VisitCheltenham.info**

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Welcome

Gloucestershire is in my bones. I was born here (in Minchinhampton), spent the most memorable times of my childhood and adolescence here and, fourteen years ago, returned to live here. For good.

I've never set a novel in Gloucestershire, for the very good reason that I wish to continue to live here with a clear conscience! – but I am in no doubt that any writing confidence I have comes from living in a place in which I feel I truly belong.

Of course it's beautiful – nobody who uses this beguiling booklet will be left in any doubt about that. But it's more than just beautiful – it is ancient and interesting and varied and uncompromising. I like that last quality - the fact that the high limestone hills will sustain little but sheep; that winters can isolate the steep valleys; that the winding and often vertical lanes deter all but those who really want to discover and appreciate this remarkable landscape, these memorable towns and villages.

So – off you go, and, as they say on some footpath signs round here, kill nothing but time, take away nothing but memories. And I can promise you that you'll treasure those.

Joanna Trollope

Introduction

In an area as rich in history and natural beauty as the Cotswolds, it is sometimes difficult for visitors – even those who have been before – to get to know all the country roads and traditional villages. The Romantic Road provides the visitor with touring routes that are easy to follow by car but which also connect with footpaths and cycle routes. They show off the loveliest villages and landscapes, reflecting the romance of their history and literary heritage.

To complete the circular routes at a leisurely pace you would need a full day for each, although you are never far from your starting and finishing point in Cheltenham. Choose from the many places of interest which are described along the way and, for visitors with time, they will offer additional highlights to the scenic journey.

The Cotswolds are a delight all the year round but do remember these charming landscapes can be less hospitable in bad weather. While driving The Romantic Road, be mindful of road and weather conditions on lanes that are sometimes narrow and steep. When cycling or walking, please keep to designated routes and follow the Countryside Code. And finally, please respect the fact that these beautiful towns and villages are people's homes and places of work; indeed, you may well find the true romance of the Cotswolds away from the crowded tourist spots during the busy summer months.

*The little roads are warm roads
And fine to house within;
They grow great trees, escape the breeze
And nurse the homely inn;
The high roads are dry roads
For many a thirsty mile;
But their wind and rain I will face again
As I have done many a while.*

*The little roads are quaint roads
That wander where they will,
They wind their arms round all the farms
And flirt with every hill.
But the high road is my road
And goes where I would go,
Its way it wends as man intends
For it was fashioned so.*

Jack Haines

(1875-1960; Haines enjoyed a reputation as a poet and botanist and frequently took long walks in the Cotswolds with his good friend the celebrated poet and composer Ivor Gurney.)

The Cotswolds are unarguably romantic. The countryside, from the high, windswept wold down to the tranquil vale that conceals a peaceful village with single pub and ancient church tower, speaks for itself. A country's history is fashioned by great events and its traditions built upon the way people have led their daily lives. Cotswold towns and villages are testament enough to English history. The harmony of the honey-coloured stone and traditional architecture complemented by the natural beauty of the surrounding countryside, is the sweeter side – the romantic side perhaps, of civilisation.

The love of one's homeland is a powerful emotion that may find its expression in words, pictures and music. Cotswold life has engendered an abundance of artistic, literary and musical endeavour and The Romantic Road combines the area's natural beauty with a rich cultural heritage. Here are scenes worthy of Constable, saturated in light worthy of Turner, which have been celebrated in words in every age from Alfred Tennyson and C. Day-Lewis (both residents of Cheltenham) to the eulogising of Shelley, the childhoods of the Mitfords and Laurie Lee and the longings of Ivor Gurney. And around you plays the music of Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst.

The celebrated English composer, Gustav Holst, was born in 1874 here in Cheltenham, at 4, Clarence Road. He is best remembered for "The Planets". The planet Venus will be your mentor throughout your journey along The Romantic Road.

A Road for Today

Your first romantic journey begins at Pittville Pump Room, the epitome of Cheltenham's Regency splendour. Standing under the colonnades, you can readily imagine those visitors some 150 years ago who came to take the waters which were prescribed for a myriad of maladies – from constipation and gout to “scrofulous afflictions, exudation and worms”.

Built in the late 1830s by the politician and entrepreneur Joseph Pitt, Pittville Pump Room has since been the venue for recitals and talks, dances and banquets. Today it remains as popular as ever, especially during Cheltenham's International Festival of Music in July.

You can still sample the alkaline spa waters, but perhaps you may prefer an invigorating promenade around Pittville Park before embarking upon The Romantic Road.

Leave Pittville Pump Room and head north on the A435 to the roundabout at Cheltenham Racecourse.

Take the right hand exit signposted to Prestbury, keeping Cheltenham Racecourse to your left.

Cheltenham Racecourse needs no introduction except to state that there has been racing here since 1831. It is the home of the National Hunt Festival in March, featuring the famous Cheltenham Gold Cup.

As you approach Prestbury, follow the signs to Broadway and Winchcombe along the B4632.

Prestbury is reputed to be one of the most haunted villages in Britain. The most famous of its ghostly residents is the Black Abbott, who roams around the village where he has been known to cause traffic to swerve!

Also well known for its horseracing connections, the village has been home to many famous jockeys, including Black Tom Oliver and Fred Archer. Fred, who rode a remarkable total of 2,748 winners in his short life, grew up at the Kings Arms in the High Street. There is a plaque which commemorates him. It reads:

*At this Prestbury inn lived,
FRED ARCHER the jockey,
who trained upon toast,
Cheltenham water and coffee.
The shoe of this pony
hangs in the bar,
where they drink to his prowess
from near and from far.*

*But the man in the street
passes by without knowledge
that t'was here Archer
swallowed his earliest porridge.*

As we begin to climb up Cleeve Hill out of Prestbury, just beyond the entrance to the Hotel De La Bere, a short detour from the main road to your left brings you to the village of Southam. Take the first turning on the left into Southam Lane. In the village, a signpost to your right directs you to the 12th century church and opposite, the impressive tithe barn.

Tithe barns are a common feature of the Cotswolds, linking directly to our medieval past. They were described by William Morris, the great English designer, poet and craftsman, as “the finest piece of architecture in England, as beautiful as a cathedral”. The tithe payment was the tenth share of the parish’s annual produce, which was taken by the Church to pay the clergy and for poor relief.

Rejoin the B4632 signposted Winchcombe.

As you continue the steep climb up Cleeve Hill, it is hard to believe that this road led to a predecessor of the present Cheltenham racecourse, marked now by the three radio masts. Immediately after Stockwell Lane is a viewing point where you can stop and enjoy a wonderful view across the Severn Vale. The panorama continues from the Severn Bridge to your left, sweeping across the Black Mountains, to the splendour of Tewkesbury Abbey and the Malvern Hills to your right.

Continue over Cleeve Hill and down into Winchcombe.

The ancient Saxon borough of Winchcombe today offers the passing visitor little clue to its former importance. It is worthwhile travellers on The Romantic Road stopping here and exploring on foot.

In the 17th century, the area around the town was famous for its tobacco crop. All that remains today to remind us of this period is the street name “Tobacco Close”.

Winchcombe’s Benedictine Abbey, with its shrine to the boy Saint Kenelm, was built by King Kenelf of Mercia in 811 and was a major site of pilgrimage in Medieval England.

“There is scarcely a place in England held in greater respect, or where more pilgrims attend” said the 12th century chronicler William of Malmesbury.

Today, the little town is dominated by the majestic wool church of St Peter’s. Look out for the grotesque carvings on the parapets. Some are demons and some are caricatures of local dignitaries. Look out for the mad hatter and the helmeted knight with stomach ache!

Whilst exploring, look out for the seven-holed stocks outside the town hall and the tiny house, reputed to be the smallest in Gloucestershire, tucked away on the right hand side of the main street.

On the outskirts of Winchcombe is Sudeley Castle – once the home of Katherine Parr, the last wife of King Henry VIII and the only one to survive him. She is buried at Sudeley, thus betraying the King's dying wish that they should lie together for eternity in the Royal Vault at Windsor. Within one year of Henry's death, Katherine had married Sir Thomas Seymour and they had made the Castle their home.

Sudeley Castle is also immortalised as Blandings Castle in the novels of P G Wodehouse, who when visiting Cheltenham, liked to walk across Cleeve Common and look down at the Castle in the vale beneath:

“The morning sunshine descended like an amber shower-bath on Blandings Castle, lighting up with a heartening glow its ivied walls, its rolling parks, its gardens, outhouses...green lawns and wide terraces, noble trees and bright flowerbeds.”

Sudeley Castle welcomes visitors travelling The Romantic Road. The splendid gardens feature among its many attractions.

Leave Winchcombe continuing along the B4632 following signs to Stratford and Broadway.

Just outside Winchcombe is Hailes Abbey, once famed for housing a Relic of Holy Blood, rashly certified as genuine by Pope Urban IV. The Abbey was founded in 1246 by the brother of Henry III who had vowed this deed after surviving a shipwreck on his return from crusading in the Holy Land. It was destroyed by Henry VIII during the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century.

The abbey is open to visitors. Trees have been planted to show the plan of the abbey where walls no longer remain.

Continue along the B4632 for another mile until you reach a roundabout. Take the right turn signposted Stow along the B4077.

Immediately on your right is the entrance to the GWR - not the Great Western Railway, or even God's Wonderful Railway, but the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway! Here the traveller can step back in time to experience the romance of the steam age. The preserved railway line offers a twenty-mile round trip on trains hauled by historic steam locomotives, all the way back to Cheltenham racecourse!

As you travel along this section of road, look forward and to your left to see a splendid eye-catching pyramid on the hillside. This dates from 1750 and is located in the grounds of Stanway House which we will pass a little further on.

After approximately three quarters of a mile take the left turn signposted to Stanway and Stanton.

At the junction notice the beautiful George and Dragon memorial to the men of Stanway lost in the Great War.

As you descend the hill, the magnificent Jacobean Gate House to Stanway House comes into view, and as you turn the bend in the road you are greeted with the sight of the neighbouring church.

Romantic and beautiful Stanway House dates from the 16th century when the Tracy family acquired the manor on the dissolution of Tewkesbury Abbey. So, there has been a change of ownership only once in the last 1270 years. There is a 14th century tithe barn, now used as a meeting hall, ...and a dog cemetery for the much loved family pets of successive generations.

Stanway House is a famous film location. It was used for the filming of Edith Wharton's 'The Buccaneers', 'The Clandestine Marriage', with Joan Collins, Sir Nigel Hawthorn and Paul Nicholls, 'Vanity Fair', starring Reece Witherspoon in the role of Becky Sharp, and most recently 'The Libertine', starring Johnny Depp.

The house and its spectacular gardens can sometimes be visited on summer afternoons. The gardens feature the impressive Stanway Fountain. This is the highest in Britain at 300 ft and the highest gravity fed fountain in the world. Check with VisitCheltenham for garden opening details and fountain viewing times, or visit our web site www.VisitCheltenham.info.

The village of Stanway was once the home of Thomas Dover. Dover made his fortune as a privateer but in the best traditions of a romantic adventurer, he is remembered for rescuing the real-life Robinson Crusoe – Alexander Selkirk – from his unscheduled and extended stay on a desert island.

As we follow the road around the church, look out on the left for the village cricket field. The thatched roofed pavilion is known locally as Pan's Pavilion, the gift of J M Barrie, creator of Peter Pan, a frequent visitor to Stanway and a keen cricketer.

Continue along the road out of Stanway for approximately one mile. At the next road junction, take the right fork signposted to Stanton.

Picturesque Stanton is best explored on foot. Many of the buildings date from the 16th and 17th centuries, being lovingly restored in the 20th by the architect, Sir Philip Stott, who bought the estate in 1906. The village church of St

Michael and All Angels contains 15th century stained glass from Hailes Abbey and fine woodwork of the 20th century. The traveller can take refreshment at the appropriately named “Mount” inn.

Leaving Stanton, take the road signposted Broadway and rejoin the B4632, turning right signposted to Stratford.

At the next T junction, turn right into Broadway, one of the most famous of all Cotswold villages.

Then take the first turning on the right, signposted to Snowhill.

If you wish to explore Broadway, park your car in the public car park on your left, in Church Close.

One of the best loved of all Cotswold villages, Broadway’s popularity is long-lived. It developed as a staging post on the route between Oxford and Worcester, where coaches and horses could rest at the Lygon Arms before the long pull up Fish Hill. Both King Charles I and Oliver Cromwell are reputed to have patronised the Lygon Arms.

It was William Morris, in the 19th century, who set the romantic tone to the town, imploring other writers and artists like Henry James and Rosetti to visit with him. John Singer Sargent painted his famous work “Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose” in the garden of Farnham House.

Gordon Russell, the fine furniture maker, established his workshops in Broadway. His father owned the Lygon Arms.

Continue out of Broadway up the hill towards Snowhill. At the top of the hill, after 2 ½ miles, the entrance to Snowhill Manor is on your right.

A Tudor house now in the care of the National Trust, it is Snowhill Manor’s more recent history that holds its romance.

Charles Paget Wade, as a soldier in First World War France, saw a picture of Snowhill Manor in a copy of “Country Life” magazine. Struck by its beauty and tranquillity, he determined to one day live there and survived the war to return and buy the property in 1919. A wealthy eccentric who inherited a fortune from the family sugar plantation in St Kitts, in the West Indies, Wade began to fill the house with a plethora of antiques, artefacts and memorabilia. His collection became so vast that he moved out and lived in the adjacent and very spartan Priest’s House!

Bearing right at the fork in the road, carry straight on into Snowhill Village and take the left turn immediately past the church.

Climbing out of Snowhill, go straight ahead at the crossroads signposted to Broadway Tower and Chipping Campden. Take the first left turn and then follow the brown tourist signs for Snowhill Lavender. Passing through the lavender fields, turn left at the next T junction for Broadway Tower. You will pass the Tower and Country Park on your left.

Built on an ancient beacon site, The Tower is a fine example of a folly, built in 1797 by the Earl of Coventry as a gift to his wife – from it, she could see her family's home at Croome Court in Worcestershire. Needless to say, on a clear day, it commands magnificent views over the surrounding countryside.

The Tower was constructed with 74 steps and a room on each floor. Towards the end of the last century, William Morris spent a memorable summer holiday at the Tower with a group of Pre-Raphaelite artist friends. This visit is commemorated by an exhibition of Morris's works.

Broadway Tower and Country Park are open to visitors.

Cross the A44 signposted to Saintbury and follow signs for the village. After approximately half a mile, take the first left turn. The road then bends immediately to the right passing the Dormy House Hotel and Broadway Golf Club.

Passing down the hill through Saintbury, rejoin the B4632 turning right signposted to Stratford.

Follow the road into Weston Subedge.

Sheltering beneath the limestone "edge" or escarpment of the Cotswolds, Weston straddles Ryknield Street, the ancient Roman road which runs between Stow-on-the-Wold and Alcester in Warwickshire.

Signposted in the centre of the village, a small detour brings you to Dover's Hill. This was the panoramic venue for the Cotswold Olympicks initiated by Robert Dover in 1612. Dover used his connections at Court to win permission from King James I to hold the Games which included such events as shin kicking and jumping in bags! Banned by the local vicar in 1851 because of hooliganism, the games were revived one hundred years later but "progress" had changed them into a shadow of their former incarnation when up to 30,000 people would throng the hillside.

Continuing through Weston and out of the village, at the next road junction turn right onto the B4035 signposted to Chipping Campden.

Passing through Aston Subedge, continue on towards Chipping Campden. There is a sign to Hidcote on the left.

For garden lovers our romantic journey offers the opportunity to visit two of the most beautiful gardens of the Cotswolds.

Hidcote Manor Garden, now in the care of the National Trust, is probably the most celebrated of all Cotswold gardens. They were created by Major Lawrence Johnston, a disciple of Vita Sackville-West. After returning from The Boer War, he undertook the restoration of the Hidcote estate, which his mother had bought for him as a project. The result is a wondrous series of outdoor “rooms” each with collections from Johnston’s travels in Mexico, South Africa and China.

Close by is Kiftsgate, famous for the 50ft climbing Kiftsgate Rose. Begun after the First World War, the gardens offer dramatic views over the Cotswold escarpment. Kiftsgate shared in the bounty of Lawrence Johnston’s travels, witnessed by the collection of tree peonies brought back from China and Japan.

We now enter the historic Cotswold town of Chipping Campden, best explored on foot.

The first notable Lord of the Manor of Chipping Campden was Earl Harold, whose fate at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 is announced in every English history book.

It was probably Sir Baptist Hicks, Lord of the Manor during the reign of Charles I, who put Chipping Campden on the map. Making a fortune as a silk and cloth merchant, Hicks was so wealthy that he lent money to the King, as well as building the market hall and almshouses and his own lavish home next to the church. Unfortunately, only the gatehouse and banqueting houses remain after the main house was burnt to the ground during the ensuing Civil War. Hicks and his family now rest in splendid tombs within the church.

It was the steward to Hicks’ daughter who was the central figure in a bizarre incident: seventy year old William Harrison inexplicably disappeared in 1660, three people being accused of his murder and hanged on Broadway Hill. Two years later he returned safe and well! Nobody has found out the truth behind “The Campden Wonder.”

Inspired by William Morris’s Arts and Crafts Movement, CR Ashbee formed an artists’ community in Chipping Campden after Morris’s death, moving the

influential Guild of Handicrafts out from London's Whitechapel. From 1902 to 1911, Ashbee made his home in the Woolstaplers Hall. The Old Silk Mill in Sheep Street still houses craft workshops.

In the town centre, turn left into Sheep Street signposted to Bourton-on-the-Hill. Take the next left turn signposted to Broad Campden and Blockley.

In the garden of the Quaker Meeting House in Broad Campden is the unmarked resting place of Jonathan Hulls, an 18th century clock repairer. One of history's tragic failures, who was later proved to have been a genius, Hulls came up with the radical idea of powering boats by steam power. His trials on the River Avon at Evesham ended in abject failure, however, and public ridicule led him to abandon his idea. His portrait later hung in the state room of the Queen Mary! Hulls' genius subsequently showed itself in other ways, and his legacy to mankind was the invention of the slide-rule, the precursor of the calculator.

Leaving Broad Campden, turn right signposted to Blockley and Moreton-in-Marsh. Heading up the hill, you can rest a moment on the roadside and look back into the valley.

Blockley was once a thriving "industrial" village supplying silk thread to the Coventry ribbon-making trade. By 1850, there were 6 mills employing some 600 people. In 1887, the same water power was used to light up the village – with Blockley becoming the first village in Britain to have electricity.

The village was famed as the refuge of the 19th century prophetess Joanna Southcott. She moved to Rock Cottage in 1804 and died in 1814, leaving behind a sealed box alleged to contain the secret of world peace and predictions for the future. Her instructions were that it was only to be opened in the presence of 24 Bishops of the Church of England. The box was X rayed and found to contain a cocked pistol! Another box, allegedly hers, was opened in 1927 and found to contain a lottery ticket and a night cap! Her followers in the English Panacea Society still maintain that the real box has yet to be opened and regularly advertise for the Bishops or their representatives to do so. Rock Cottage was tragically gutted by fire in 1971, destroying many of her "Communications". It has since been restored.

Blockley was more recently the home of Doris Lindner who created the bronze statue of champion hurdler Arkle, now displayed at Cheltenham Racecourse.

On summer days, Mill Dene Garden, a Cotswold water-mill garden set near the centre of the village, is open to visitors.

Arriving in Blockley, turn left following the sign to Bourton-on-the-Hill, then turn right at the next junction into Lower Street. This road will take you out of the village.

Now head south along the B4479 towards the A44, passing signs for Batsford on your left.

Turn left onto the A44, signposted Moreton-in-Marsh and Oxford, passing down through the village of Bourton-on-the-Hill.

Beyond the village, on your left, you will pass the entrance to Batsford Arboretum.

Batsford Arboretum was planted by the first Lord Redesdale, ambassador to Japan during the 1850s. Bucking the Victorian trend, he created a “wild” garden with over 1000 species of trees, noticeably magnolias and maples, as well as a Japanese garden and oriental sculptures. The gardens can be visited and provide a colourful diversion on The Romantic Road.

Lord Redesdale was also the grandfather of the “Mitford Girls” – Nancy, Pamela, Diana, Unity, Jessica and Deborah. From their childhood home at Batsford Park, the celebrated siblings defined the eccentricities of the 1930s upper classes, some achieving infamy for championing British Fascism.

Opposite, on your right, is the entrance to another celebrated Cotswold house and garden which welcomes visitors, Sezincote.

The famous Brighton Pavilion was created following a visit by the Prince Regent to Sezincote in 1807 where he was inspired by the Nabob’s house, a moghul-style house which was set amongst the oriental water gardens created by Sir Charles Cockerell at Sezincote.

John Betjeman’s “Summoned by Bells” tells how.....

*We’d drive to Sunday lunch at Sezincote
First steps in learning how to be a guest
First wood-smoke-scented luxury of life
In the large ambience of a country house...exotic Sezincote!
Stately and strange it stood, the Nabob’s house
Indian without and coolest Greek within..*

Head on into Moreton-in Marsh. At the junction with the A429 turn right, signposted to Cirencester.

To explore Moreton-in-Marsh, turn left at the junction with the A429, and park in the main street (except on Tuesdays when the town’s busy market is held

here).

The Curfew Bell on the tower at the corner of Oxford Street is a noted local landmark, and was rung daily from 1633 to 1860.

Continue along the A429 for 4 miles towards Stow-on-the-Wold. This road is also known as the Fosse Way, an ancient Roman Road which ran from Exeter, through Cirencester, across the Cotswolds and on to Leicester and Lincoln.

“All roads lead to Stow”. To visit, turn left at the second set of traffic lights and enter the town square.

*Stow-on-the-Wold
Where the wind blows cold
And the cooks can't roast their dinner!*

Both a major coaching stop and sheep town, this is the highest town in the North Cotswolds and is built around its enclosed market square to protect it from the elements. Daniel Defoe wrote that more than 20,000 sheep were sold in one day in Stow-on-the-Wold, a town more likely now to be thronged with visitors than with sheep, though there are still twice-yearly horse fairs.

The last great battle of the first English Civil War was fought here in 1646. The Royalists under Sir Jacob Astley were overwhelmed by the Cromwellian army, and many were imprisoned in Stow church. “The blood ran down Digbeth Street”. The Royalist Hotel is the oldest Inn in England, recorded in the Guinness Book of Records.

From Stow-on-the-Wold turn right off the A429 at the third set of traffic lights signposted along the B4068 to Lower Swell and Naunton.

The charming villages of Upper and Lower Swell may take their name from the nearby Lady's Well.

Passing the crossroads on the green in Lower Swell, take the left turn signposted to The Slaughters. Drive on into the village of Lower Slaughter.

Turn right over the bridge and follow the signs to Upper Slaughter, following the river on your right.

“The Slaughters” are very popular Cotswold beauty spots, typifying the rural idyll of Cotswold villages. During the quieter months of the year it is rewarding

to park in one and walk to the other. If you have time, stroll along the river bank in Lower Slaughter to the Old Mill Shop and Museum.

Upper Slaughter is the setting for the “Diary of a Cotswold Parson”. The parson in question was Francis Edward Witts who served the parish between 1820 and 1852. At some point during this time he assumed the title Lord of the Manor, and his former Rectory is now the celebrated “Lords of the Manor” Hotel and Restaurant. It was a previous Lord of the Manor in the 12th century who perhaps gave his name to the villages: de Soletres.

For the traveller with time to spare, it is easy to divert from The Romantic Road at this point to visit Bourton-on-the-Water, the ‘Venice of the Cotswolds’. The River Windrush flows through the village, crossed by many little bridges. It is famous the world over for beautiful setting and many attractions.

Climbing out of Upper Slaughter, follow signs to Cheltenham, eventually reaching the junction with the B4068.

Take the left turn signposted to Cheltenham. After approximately a mile, take the right turn into Naunton.

Naunton is the last of the Cotswold villages you will be visiting on your Romantic journey. A look round Naunton reveals a dovecote of typical Cotswold design, dating back to 1600. With its 1176 holes, it is reputed to be the largest in England. Naunton church still displays the Table of Kindred and Affinity which acts as a genealogical chart, expounding at great length the family members whom a man or a woman were forbidden to marry.

Continue through Naunton village and climb back up to the B4068, turning right to Cheltenham.

The countryside you are now crossing was once common land, as eloquently described in William Cobbett’s “Rural Rides” in the 1820s. When the Enclosures Act dictated the parcelling up of this open land, there was no ready supply of wood to fence in the fields, and the soil was too poor to cultivate hedgerows. It was these circumstances which gave birth to the drystone walls which today are such an integral part of the Cotswold landscape.

Reaching the A436, turn right signposted to Cheltenham.

Many villages throughout the Cotswolds did not survive the thin margin between life and death on the exposed uplands. Their populations dwindled and disappeared through a combination of poor harvests, increased taxation and finally, in 1348/9, the Black Death. The demise of Harford was more violent, however, destroyed by the Knights Templar to make way for their sheep runs which funded their Preceptory at Temple Guiting.

We are now at the end of our Romantic journey for today. To return to Cheltenham follow the A436 for approximately 3 ½ miles to the traffic lights at the junction with the A40. Turn right at the lights and follow the A40 through Charlton Kings back towards Cheltenham town centre.

A Road for Tomorrow

For your second Romantic journey, take the A40 eastbound from Cheltenham along London Road, in the direction of Oxford.

Less than two miles from the centre of Cheltenham, you will pass through the outskirts of Charlton Kings, an old farming community.

The village proper has many literary connections – the popular Victorian poet Sydney Dobell lived here. “Alice through the Looking Glass” possibly originated in a visit the real Alice paid to her grandfather, the Rev. George Liddell in Charlton Kings. Lewis Carroll came to see her there and the famous looking glass is still in the house. The real Tailor of Gloucester is buried in the Charlton Kings cemetery, but his true story is not as colourful as told by Beatrix Potter.

Beyond Charlton Kings, the A40 rises into the open countryside of the Cotswolds. Just after the inn on the right, you will see Dowdeswell Water on the left.

At appropriate times of the year, you may notice a curious road sign depicting a toad. The A40 bisects a regular migratory route from the reservoir and drivers are asked to pay special attention to avoid this endangered species.

After you pass Dowdeswell Water, take the first road on the right, signposted to Dowdeswell.

The road climbs steeply, passing a Tudor farmhouse and the parish church with its small stone spire.

Go straight across at three sets of crossroads and follow the signs for Withington.

The tower of Withington church will soon provide a good directional landmark. Withington has a wonderful backdrop of woods and is situated near the head of the picturesque Coln valley.

On entering the village, continue past the church and its belt of ancient yew trees and follow the sign for the Roman Villa and Compton Abdale.

Dipping down into the valley, you may be tempted by the Mill Inn, through the garden of which, runs the River Coln.

Shortly after the car park of the Mill Inn, you will be turning sharp right, signposted towards the Roman Villa and

Yanworth, passing the village's second public house, the King's Head.

Keep following the signs for the Roman Villa and Yanworth.

The Romantic Road now takes you through some of the most beautiful valleys, woodland and farmsteads in the Cotswolds. Eventually, the road to the Roman Villa will lead off to the right whilst you will continue towards Yanworth and Northleach.

The Roman Villa

"Scratch Gloucestershire and you will find Rome". The Romans certainly had good taste when they chose this site in the Coln Valley for their exquisite villa, which dates from AD 120. It was discovered by accident in 1864 when a gamekeeper, who was digging to retrieve a lost ferret, came across a mosaic pavement. Cared for by the National Trust, the remains are some of the best preserved in the country.

A visit here is an opportunity to ruminate on the passing of even the greatest of civilisations. The poet, Jim Turner wrote the following lines with regard to the Roman occupation of the Cotswolds:

*Did Tribune or Centurion
Find solace in a British home
Where colder Cotswold rivers run,
Far from the Tiber, far from Rome?*

As you pass through the delightful village of Yanworth, notice the beautiful village sign erected to commemorate the millennium.

At the end of the village, follow the road round to the right, then downhill, towards Northleach. Follow this road for approximately 1¾ miles.

At a minor crossroads, go straight ahead following signs to Northleach and Stow-on-the-Wold.

The road to Northleach quickly brings you to a junction with the A429. Here you should turn left and travel for a short distance towards Stow, before coming to a set of traffic lights, where you turn right for Northleach town centre.

At this crossing on the old Roman Fosse Way is the former House of Correction, built as a pioneering prison of 1789.

You enter Northleach along the West End and will come to the main square on the right, where there are parking spaces and public conveniences. In the Middle Ages, Northleach was one of the most important wool trading centres and the town is still dominated by the magnificent “wool church” of St Peter and St Paul. A unique attraction based at Oak House on the High Street is Keith Harding’s World of Mechanical Music.

The Romantic Road waltzes along the High Street Red Lion pub and takes the first left immediately after Keith Harding’s World of Mechanical Music towards Farmington. At the next T-junction, you turn right into Farmington and pass the little green en route for Sherborne and the Windrush valley.

As you pass through Farmington, look out for St Peter’s church on your right. The churchyard gate made of horseshoes and there is a one-handed clock on the church tower.

The next village, Sherborne, is best explored on foot. It is typical of many Cotswold villages that you will encounter. Each has its own characteristics, though all have features in common. All have their church; most have a pub; and many have a Manor, or a Hall or grand House.

You will pass on the right, Sherborne House, said to be haunted by a previous owner, the hunchback royalist, Crump Dutton. Next, the village church, St Mary Magdalene, is on a rise overlooking Sherborne Brook. Here, centuries ago, thousands of sheep would have been seen grazing on the water-meadow. The church contains many memorials to generations of the Dutton family.

Today, the estate and the village are in the care of the National Trust.

Sherborne was the birthplace of James Bradley, a 17th century Astronomer Royal who was the first to calculate the speed of light and also established the time line at Greenwich.

Continue through the village, noting the rows of Victorian cottages on the left. One is a Post Office and shop of some charm.

Follow the road as it bears round to the right towards Windrush and the Windrush Valley.

The last cottage, as you follow the road out of Sherbourne, boasts a Norman arch. This originally graced a 12th century chapel which, stood in the grounds of a nearby farm.

The Windrush is “a laughing little river where it runs between the hills”. Its romantic name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon “wen” (wind or meander) and “risc” (rush, or river grass), especially apt as you listen to the breeze rushing through the reeds.

The next village is Windrush itself – drive through keeping to the main road, with the village green on your right. On the churchyard wall is a poignant plaque to Sgt. Pilot Bruce Hancock, who died heroically in the last war.

Local stone and local craftsmen were employed by Sir Christopher Wren in the building of St. Paul's Cathedral.

At the next junction you will be turning right, signposted to Little Barrington.

You may care to call in at the Fox Inn opposite this junction. It is prettily situated by a river bridge, built with funds provided by Thomas Strong, one of the same local craftsmen who had a hand in the construction of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Little Barrington feels wonderfully remote. It is built around a hollow from which was excavated the stone used to build the surrounding houses. Watercress was once cultivated here. On the far side is the old village water pump.

Continue past the green, rising up from the valley to join the A40 where you will turn left towards Oxford and Burford.

After crossing the Gloucestershire / Oxfordshire border, you will soon come to the main Burford roundabout. You will be returning later to visit the lovely town centre of Burford, but for the time being,

Follow the A40 straight towards Oxford.

After a mile or so, take the first road on the left, signposted towards Widford (single track road). As you drive down the hill, towards the bottom, turn right to Widford and Swinbrook.

Look out for the solitary Widford Church, which you will see on your left amongst the meadows of the River Windrush.

Turn left at the crossroads into Swinbrook.

Here you can enjoy a scene that could not be anywhere else but rural England. The Swan Inn is delightfully situated by a stone bridge over the Windrush; next door is an old mill; and a lob away is a cricket pitch perfectly drawn for lazy summer afternoons and tankards of ale. In front, sheep graze on gentle slopes. The Romantic Road continues into the heart of the village, which, with its stream-cleft green is set in "the lyrical, soft beauty of the world".

This description is taken from a book called “Hons and Rebels”, the account of her early life by Jessica Mitford, one of the Mitford girls who were brought up here in the early part of the twentieth century. Raised in an aristocratic family of some eccentricity, Jessica herself became involved in radical left-wing politics, ran away to the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War and settled in the USA. Her sister Unity created something of a scandal by her involvement with Hitler and the Nazis. Deborah married the Duke of Devonshire, Diana married Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Fascist Party and Nancy became a noted novelist. Her version of a Cotswold childhood is recorded in “The Pursuit of Love” – romance of a unique variety.

Unity, Nancy and Diana are buried side-by-side just beyond the entrance to Swinbrook Church. Inside is the coat of arms of the Redesdale family (the Mitfords’ father was the second Lord Redesdale) and the pews were donated by him following a successful bet on the Grand National.

Swinbrook was the home of another eminent family, the Fettiplaces, whose local importance is clear from this couplet:

*“The Tracys, the Lacys and the Fettiplaces
Own all the woods, the parks and places.”*

In the church six members of the family are unusually commemorated in two tiers, reclining on their sides and elbows in the costumes of their time, gazing longingly outside rather than up to heaven. Nearby is a romantic dedication to one of the clan – Edmund Fettiplace:

*“WHOSE NATIVE MYLDNES TOWARDS GREAT AND SMALL
WHOSE FAITH & LOVE TO FRIENDS, WIFE, CHILDREN, ALL
IN LIFE AND DEATH MADE HIM BELOVED AND DEER
TO GOD AND MEEN AND EVEN FAMOUSE HEER.*

*BLESSED IN SOULE, IN BODIE, GOODS AND NAME
IN PLENTIEOUS PLANTS BY A MOST VERTUOUS DAME
WHO WITH HIS HEIRE AS TO HIS WORTH STILL DEBTER
BUILT HIM THIS TOOMB, BUT IN HER HEART A BETTER.”*

Some 300 yards past the church, take the first road on the left. It is unmarked and leads across undulating fields to the village of Fulbrook. Turn left, then travel the short distance into one of the most famous and romantic of Cotswold towns – Burford.

You enter at the bottom of the village by crossing a fine medieval bridge dating from 1322. It spans the Windrush next to the Weaver’s Cottages and a charming mill with sculptured hedges. If time allows you to explore Burford on foot, there is a well signposted car park to the left of the main street.

Here is a long sloping street of houses all in local stone and topped in local slate. There is a wonderful intermingling of buildings and dimensions, harking back to the days when Burford was an important stop on the London – Cheltenham coaching route, as well as the Midlands – South Coast run. As in times gone by, there is no shortage of hotels, inns and teahouses, as well as shops selling antiques and gifts.

On a more romantic note, Charles II stayed at the George Hotel with his colourful mistress, Nell Gwynn, during the races at nearby Burford Down. Indeed, their son was created Earl of Burford.

The Romantic Road passes between the lime trees at the top of the High Street and continues across the roundabout towards Lechlade and the Cotswold Wildlife Park.

Follow this road, the A361, for approximately 3½ miles ignoring all turnings until you see one on the left, marked Filkins, which you should take.

In the village you will see Filkins Hall on the left, opposite Cotswold Woollen Weavers. This is a working woollen mill, one of the few remaining, and uses only pure Cotswold wool. Here is what remains of the heart of the Cotswolds, for it was on the wool trade that Cotswold prosperity was built. In the Middle Ages local wool was the most sought after in Europe; and many villages owe their distinctive character to the bequest of merchants who made their fortunes from the wool trade. So this mill represents an entire epoch and continues to produce soft, romantic wools.

If romance has come to signify, in part, a love of a disappearing way of life, then the life of George Swinford, a former centenarian resident of Filkins who recorded the events of his life in “Jubilee Boy” was truly romantic. Here is an unadorned account of the hard life of a stonemason, born in Filkins in 1887 and who spent the whole of his life here. Joys were few; and he does not regret the passing of the hard life. He regrets only that people have lost the facility of deriving enjoyment from small, innocent pleasures. He recalls playing marbles in front of the Bull and Lamb Inns; the excitement of visiting Lechlade Fair; his part in helping to build Filkins Hall. He worked for William Morris’s pupil Gimson; and indeed he remembers seeing William Morris himself “driving along the road from Kencot across the fields in his high carriage with his wife and two daughters. When we heard his horse clip-clopping, we boys ran to close the gate and stood waiting nearby. When he got there he would raise his whip and shout “You young rascals again!” but he always threw us a penny for opening the gate.”

From the Cotswold Woollen Weavers, continue through the village. Pass the village church and then turn left on to the A361 for the two miles into Lechlade. Here the rivers Leach

and Coln meet the Thames, and the Thames and Severn Canal begins.

William Morris and Kelmscott – The Romance of Revival

Not far from Filkins, in the direction of Lechlade, is the village of Kelmscott. William Morris, craftsman, poet and visionary, lived here in Kelmscott Manor for the last twenty years of his life and is buried in the local churchyard. He described Kelmscott as “heaven on earth”. In the middle of the village is a memorial cottage with a fine stone carving of Morris reclining philosophically under a tree. The Morris Memorial Hall, designed by his pupil, Gimson, was opened by George Bernard Shaw. Morris’s name is well known for his contributions to English culture and to the movements in which he was involved. He was associated with the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who were fired with enthusiasm for the ideals of the Middle Ages. Morris was also a force in the revival of traditional handicrafts manifested in the Arts and Crafts Movement – indeed his recognisable style and influence in fabric and wallpaper is still felt.

The following extract, taken from Morris’s “Inscription for an Old Bed”, seems to sum up his love for his Cotswold home.

*“THE WIND’S ON THE WOLD
AND THE NIGHT IS A-COLD
AND THE THAMES RUNS CHILL
TWIXT MEAD AND HILL
BUT KIND AND DEAR
IS THE OLD HOUSE HERE.”*

Explore Lechlade on foot. The Market Square is attractive and so are the streets that run off it – Burford Street, High Street and St. John’s Street. There are two fine bridges here too – the 18th century Ha’Penny Bridge and St. John’s Bridge that dates back to 1228. The romance of the town is in the vicinity of the church, one of the finest wool churches in the Cotswolds. In 1815 the poet Shelley made the journey from Windsor by boat in the company of the writer Thomas Love Peacock. He spent the night in the neighbouring New Inn; but as the sun went down he was inspired to write “Stanzas in a Summer Evening Churchyard”, from which the following extract is taken:

*“Thou too, Aerial pile! Whose pinnacles
Point from one shrine like pyramids of fire,
Obeyest in silence their sweet solemn spells
Clothing in hues of heaven thy dim and distant spire
Around whose lessening and invisible height
Gather among the stars the clouds of night”.*

A plaque by the church, along “Shelley’s Walk”, marks the spot where inspiration struck.

From Lechlade you initially travel along the A417 in the direction of Cirencester, passing the town’s celebrated Christmas Shop, where it is Christmas every day of the year.

On reaching Fairford, turn right into the town square and High Street.

Take time to visit St Mary’s, in whose church some of the most beautiful stained glass in England transmutes sunlight into a temple of colour. The church itself is almost entirely 15th century and was built by a prosperous Cirencester wool merchant. The glass, is attributed to the Flanders craftsman Barnard Flower. The windows, the most complete examples of medieval glass in England, illustrate biblical scenes, starting with the temptation of Eve, continuing with the story of Christ, and ending with eternal damnation.

The Lady Chapel, in the north east corner of the church, is particularly worthy of your attention – here are portrayed the marriage of Joseph and Mary and the birth of Jesus Christ. Beneath these scenes are the tombs of the Thame family. John, the principal benefactor of the church, lies in effigy next to his wife, whom he loved dearly and who died bearing their fourth child.

A less romantic aspect of marital bliss is to be found among the carved benches beneath the choir stalls in the sanctuary – the last is of a wife “batting” (without much restraint) her errant husband! The Englishman’s legendary love for animals finds expression here too – as you leave the church you will see the last resting place of a much beloved church cat, Tiddles, buried outside the church door.

Opposite the church gates, note the former Old Police Station in Cotswold stone, built in the days when the police shared premises with the magistrates’ and petty sessions’ court.

John Keble, leader of the Oxford Movement, was born here in 1792.

The Birthplace of a Great Composer

Down Ampney, near Fairford, was the birthplace of Vaughan Williams, the great English composer. His father, the local vicar, is commemorated with the resurrection scene in the church and the village itself is remembered in the tune “Down Ampney” that Vaughan Williams wrote for the hymn “Come down O love divine”. You traverse a pretty graveyard to reach the church, which stands next to a handsome 15th century manor house.

From St Mary's, continue the few yards to the end of the High Street opposite the entrance to Fairford Park and turn left into Mill Lane. After crossing the River Coln, you will arrive at a junction. Turn right and follow the signs for Coln St Aldwyns.

Coln St Aldwyns is a delightful village and is made up of sturdy Cotswold stone cottages. A particular welcome can be found in the charming New Inn. From the Inn with its fine coaching yard, The Romantic Road rises to the top of the main street by the wonderfully old-fashioned Coln Stores and sets off in the direction of Bibury.

Half a mile beyond Coln St Aldwyns, take the first road on the left to Bibury (straight on points to Aldsworth and Burford).

As we approach Bibury, turn left on to the B4425, which will take you through the village.

Bibury was described by William Morris as “the most beautiful village in England”. It certainly has a very particular charm, with the shallow, crystal Coln bubbling by the roadside; and many delightful cottages and houses, the most beloved of which make up Arlington Row, a line of exceptionally pretty 17th century cottages sitting between a bank and rushy meadows. Stand on the little footbridge nearby and drink in the beauty of them and of the whole place. At the other end of the village is Arlington Mill Museum and Gallery, where there are several displays pertaining to Cotswold life and culture.

This area has more than its fair share of literary connections and the writer J. Arthur Gibbs lived at the end of the 19th century in the nearby village of Ablington. In his book, “A Cotswold Village”, he attempted to record the simple annals of a quiet, old-fashioned Gloucestershire hamlet. The author does himself an injustice, for although he records much that is fascinating of the old ways, he does so with some passion and lyrical power.

“Darting straight up stream on the wings of the soft south wind comes a kingfisher clothed in priceless jewellery, sparkling in the sun: sapphire and amethyst on his bright blue back, rubies on his ruddy breast, and diamonds round his princely neck. Monarch he is of silvery stream and pretty tyrant of the silvery fish”.

From Bibury, your next stop along the Romantic Road is Cirencester, ancient Roman town and capital of the Cotswolds. Continue along the B4425.

En route you will pass Barnsley Park with its fine baroque house. Look out for the “pepperpot lodge”, on the right hand side before entering the village. Barnsley village is famous for its Barnsley House Gardens, the creation of the late Rosemary Verey. The gardens, now in the grounds of a hotel, are on your

left beyond the “Village Pub”. They are opened for charity on selected days of the year.

To visit Cirencester, go straight ahead at the roundabout on the outskirts of the town, following signs for the town centre. Go straight ahead again at the traffic lights and then turn right into South Way, still following signs for the town centre. The road winds round to join Dyer Street, where you will turn left into the market place.

Explore Cirencester on foot. In its heyday, it was known as Corinium Dobunorum and the second most important town of Roman Britain. It was the point of convergence of three major Roman roads – the Ermin Way, the Fosse Way and Akeman Street. There are many delightful sights to treasure in this bustling market town: the great parish church with its three-storey porch, once the town hall; Coxwell Street’s unspoiled charm; a Roman amphitheatre; Cecily Hill leading to the splendour of Earl Bathurst’s park. If you have time, visit the Corinium Museum.

To leave Cirencester from here, continue through the traffic lights by the church, along Castle Street and then follow the road round into Sheep Street. Keep right and follow signs for the ring road and pick up signs for Stroud along the A419.

From Cirencester, take the A419 signposted to Stroud. You will turn right at the roundabout at the top of the hill.

Approximately 3½ miles out of Cirencester, look out for the small signpost on the right for Sapperton.

Take this turn and you are once again in the heart of the Cotswold countryside. Continue on this road, missing out Sapperton village. The road skirts a pretty green before plunging downhill to the Daneway Inn.

Just by the pub, take the narrow road that climbs up to the left towards Bisley.

Through lonely wooded valleys, you will eventually come to a main road just outside the attractive village of Bisley, one of the few places in the area where the ancient tradition of well-dressing is maintained.

Cross this road carefully and go down a narrow street until you meet the main street where you should turn right. Follow this amongst the stone cottages until you see a small Post Office and grocery stores on the right. Take the left turn, directly opposite the store.

You will pass by the “lock-up” on the right and the splendid 17th century Bear Inn, supported by its fine Jacobean pillars.

This is a friendly hostelry and its open fireplace makes it as snug as any pub in the Cotswolds.

In the pub, you may even hear tell of the popular legend of the Bisley Boy who became Queen Elizabeth of England! Sources will relate how the young princess stayed the night at the old Butler’s Court beside the churchyard, where she inexplicably and suddenly died. Her guardians were fearful of the King’s wrath and searched the village for a red-headed girl, who could take her place. Alas, to no avail and they substituted a boy of the same age who consequently had to play the role of the princess and then later the Queen. This accounts for the reason why Queen Elizabeth never married and was such a powerful ruler – or so the story goes.....

Continuing past the Bear for approximately half a mile, you take the second turning on the right, signposted to Camp and Birdlip.

This is an old drover’s route called the Calf Way.

At the next T junction, turn left again, signposted to Camp and Birdlip.

Just after The Camp, you turn left at a somewhat unromantic electricity station, towards Sheepscombe. At the crossroads with the B4070, go straight across towards Sheepscombe, followed shortly by a right hand fork to Sheepscombe Village.

You now dive down into the “Peaceful Valley”, which rates as one of the most beautiful in the Cotswolds.

Sheepscombe has a further claim to fame as one of the villages associated with the late Laurie Lee. His book, “Cider with Rosie”, (published in North America as “Edge of Day”), about his childhood in the early years of the 20th century has already become a pastoral classic. Here is the romance of a way of life not long distant in time, but which was the continuation of hundreds of years of unchanging custom which has now all but disappeared. It is not merely a collection of observations, but also the story of the approach of manhood and the awareness of the possibilities of romance (“.....for me, the grass grew longer, and more sorrowful, and the trees were surfaced like flesh, and girls were no longer to be treated lightly but were creatures of commanding sadness, and all journeys through the valley were now made alone”). It is, too, the story of his mother (“I absorbed from birth, as now I know, the whole earth through her jaunty spirit”), of local characters (“Granny Trill and Granny Wallon were traditional ancients of a kind we won’t see

today, the last of that dignity of grandmothers to whom age was its own embellishment"). Perhaps more than any other, Laurie Lee succeeded in capturing the romance of the Cotswolds in all its beautiful complexity.

Bear right by the war memorial. Then, after passing the Village Hall, The Romantic Road rises up steeply from the valley to go by the local pub, the Butcher's Arms, following the winding road towards Painswick.

The soaring spire of Painswick church provides a distinctive landmark.

Following signs to Painswick, The Romantic Road will bring you to the junction with the A46 where you should turn left.

It is just a short distance into Painswick. To visit the town, pass down the narrow High Street, and park in the car park beyond the Church. The entrance is on the left in Stamages Lane.

Painswick is known as the "Queen of the Cotswolds". It is a little gem of a town of silver grey stone houses, worthy of exploration on foot.

The town is famed for its 99 Yew trees growing in St Mary's churchyard. Local legend has it that the devil prevents the 100th from growing. Note also the 17th and 18th century table tombs.

One of the attractions of Painswick is the famous Rococo Garden. A unique restoration of an 18th century garden from the brief Rococo period, it is set in a hidden valley affording magnificent views.

From Painswick retrace your steps through the town, travelling north along the A46 towards Cheltenham.

As you journey you will pass on the left a large pub called the Royal William. Continue straight on here and follow this road as it spirals in a long descent towards the vale below.

The escarpment rises steeply above you to the right, covered with a cool forest of ancient beech.

Before long, a signpost marked Prinknash Abbey will appear on the left.

England, and particularly Gloucestershire, was at one time quite overrun with monasteries, until their dissolution in the 16th century. This Benedictine monastery, however, was built in 1939 to house the monks who had formerly lived on Caldey Island. The site had for centuries been the property of the Abbots of Gloucester and the old house can still be seen on the hillside. The

writer, Horace Walpole, visited the old house in 1774: "It stands on a glorious but impracticable hill in the midst of a little forest of beech, and commanding Elysium". The new monastery boasts a pottery, bird park, chapel and café, all of which are open to the public throughout the year.

The road continues its descent past Cooper's Hill.

This is the scene of one of the more bizarre Cotswold traditions. Every spring Bank Holiday Monday in May, locals gather in a line at the top of the cliff-like hill, then at a given signal speed off in hot pursuit of the "cheese" that is despatched down the hill. The first to reach the bottom receives a genuine whole Double Gloucester. This is no mean achievement, but all the more so if accomplished without injury.

The origins of this curious ceremony are obscure but it is thought that there may be associations with fertility and Spring, with the cheese symbolic of the Sun. The cheese rolling is still an annual event of considerable popularity.

The road curls downwards and straightens up towards the roundabout at Brockworth. The road to Cheltenham carries straight across.

Beyond the roundabout, the road flattens out to take you through Shurdington and back towards Cheltenham.

On the right you will pass the entrance to an Elizabethan country house, now the Greenway Hotel, with its fine formal gardens. As you approach Cheltenham, the full length of Leckhampton Hill, its former quarries distinguishable by its exposed outcrops of golden limestone, can be seen above you to the right. Not easily visible at this distance is the intriguing Devil's Chimney, which is associated with the following legend:

Gloucestershire was noted, as we have seen, for its churches and abbeys, much to the displeasure of the Devil. In his anger and bitterness, he would hide on this ledge to extract boulders with his trident, which he would then lob onto the pilgrims passing below. All to no avail, however, for the boulders came piling down on the Devil himself, driving him underground. The stone chimney is a symbol of his simmering anger.

As you return to Cheltenham, at the end of your romantic journey through the Cotswolds, one more piece of verse from another of the area's great poets, Ivor Gurney, will serve to accompany you into our Regency spa town and leave you, it is hoped, in good heart.

***"The gardens grow as freshly
On Cotswold's green and white;
The grey-stoned cottage colours
Are lovely to the sight,
As we were glad for dreams there,***

Slept deep at home at night.”