

ON THE TRAIL OF MIDSOMER MURDERS

Those Midsomer murderers are at it again! Series 12 of ITV's tongue-in-cheek country classic catches yet more victims napping in sleepy villages where Old English beauty looks too good to be true.

Plots may be truly fantastic, but the idyllic settings of Midsomer Mallow or Magna, Wellow or Worthy are delightfully real.

The key locations that enthral viewers around the world are hidden away in Buckinghamshire's rural vale of Aylesbury and Chiltern Hills, within easy reach of Pinewood Studios where the production team makes its base.

In true Midsomer Murders tradition, these seemingly peaceful villages with their hallmark village greens, old-world cottages, cosy pubs and jolly summer fetes conceal more than meets the eye. Our trail visits a selection of them, unmasking such quirky characters as a hedgehog hospital and a duck decoy, England's oldest free house, the model for Enid Blyton's Toy Town or the secret resting place of a notorious spy.

Keep an eye on those Midsomer Murders to spot further episodes in which these and other Buckinghamshire locations appear!

Aylesbury

Put a pin in the map at the County Town of Aylesbury, where markets are still held three times a week. Just behind the cobbled market square is the National Trust's much-haunted King's Head pub, now also housing the Tourist Information Centre (**HP20 2RW**) with a second-hand bookshop-cum-coffee shop in the Great Hall. Walk round the corner to the Roald Dahl Gallery, where the giant peach and glass elevator bring out the children in us all.

A date for your diary: Aylesbury's Roald Dahl Festival takes place every year in July.

[Aylesbury to Waddesdon via A41: 5 miles]

Waddesdon Manor

Seen in *Death of a Stranger*.

Prepare to be seriously impressed. Banker Ferdinand de Rothschild built Waddesdon Manor (**HP18 0JH**) in exuberant French-chateau style as the supreme

showcase for his awesome collections of paintings, porcelain and other priceless treasures. Its rolling acres include a gilded aviary, rose gardens and spectacular seasonal bedding displays. The famous Rothschild wine cellars, restaurants, shop, talks, tours and a calendar of special events make it easy to while away a whole day here.

Spot Ferdinand's elegant additions to Waddesdon village, such as the Five Arrows Hotel. Built to accommodate visitors' coachmen, it's now open to guests and non-residents throughout the day.

[Waddesdon to Buckinghamshire Railway Centre via A41: 3 miles]

The Buckinghamshire Railway Centre at Quainton

Seen in *'Things that Go Bump in the Night'* and *'Down Among the Dead Men'*.

(HP22 4BY) Steam days, engine-driving sessions, rides with Thomas the Tank Engine and other family happenings leave little time to dwell on murder victims left on the line. This nostalgic centre presents one of Britain's largest private railway collections on a 25-acre site, complete with original station platform, buildings and working track. Historic locomotives and coaches are housed in the listed terminus building, moved here from Rewley Road, Oxford. Vast sheds house future exhibits under restoration by willing volunteers.

Detour to Quainton village, where highlights include Quainton Windmill and the award-winning George and Dragon pub.

[Bucks Railway Centre to Brill via country lanes: 9 miles]

Brill

Seen in *'Four Funerals & A Wedding'*.

This panoramic hill-top village is literally a high spot of the county. Turn off the pretty High Street, featured in several episodes, to 17th century Brill Windmill **(HP18 9TG)** - a superb example of its kind. Set amongst the spectacular, grassy lumps and bumps of former clay diggings it provides superb views over the Vale of Oxford and the Cotswolds.

In Brill: pick up signs for the Bernwood Jubilee Trail, which runs past the windmill. Detour to the National Trust's medieval Boarstall Tower and 17th-century Boarstall Duck Decoy, where "Dan" is in training to become the decoy dog.

[Brill to Long Crendon via country lanes: 5 miles]

Long Crendon

Seen in *'Garden of Death'*, *'Tainted Fruit'*, *'Death & Dreams'*, *'Things that go bump...'*, *'Dead Letters'*, *'A Tale of Two Hamlets'* and *'Second Sight'*.

Location scouts just love Long Crendon's hidden High Street, a haven of picturesque cottages, pubs and church concealed from casual passers-by. To find it, take the turning off the B4011, almost opposite the parade of shops. 15th century Long Crendon Courthouse (*HP18 9AN*), seen in *Dead Letters*, is at the far end of the High Street next to the parish church.

Time a visit to take in the award-winning Churchill Arms pub in the High Street - a hotspot for blues, jazz and other live music.

[Long Crendon to Chearsley via country lanes: 2 miles]

Chearsley

Stop off at Chearsley, where pub, post office and stores all made star appearances in *Country Matters*. You may recognise The Bell (*HP18 0DJ*) as The Woodman and the shop as Elverton Village Stores.

[Chearsley to Cuddington via country lanes: 1.5 miles]

Cuddington

The Crown in Cuddington has been seen in *'Death in Disguise'*, *'Death of a Stranger'*, *'Death & Dreams'* and *'Bad Tidings'*.

Dark deeds are unimaginable amongst these whitewashed cottages and thatched roofs, traditional store-cum-post office and picturesque village hall. Buildings of note include the 11th-century Church of St Nicholas (*HP18 0AP*) and numerous houses and boundary walls made of wychert - a mix of local clay, chopped straw and stones built on a foundation of rocks called a 'grumpling'. Thousands of visitors converge on Cuddington in July to catch its annual fete, packed with colour and entertainment.

More Diary Dates: periodic open days at nearby Nether Winchendon House, a unique Strawberry Hill Gothic medieval manor house familiar from scenes in *Bridget Jones' Diary II: On the Edge of Reason*.

[Cuddington to Dinton, via country lanes: 2.5 miles]

Dinton

Appearances include *'Who Killed Cock Robin'* and *'Dead Letters'*.

Here's another gem of village - with another gem of a church - just yards from the A418 Aylesbury to Thame road. The church of St Peter & St Paul (*HPI7 8UG*), scene of the wedding in *Who Killed Cock Robin*, dates from the time of William the Conqueror - beside that is 15th century Dinton Hall. Leaving the village, head for pretty Westlington Green, where a body was found in the well! The former pub, whose exterior featured in *Dead Letters*, is La Chouette (*HPI7 8UW*) restaurant run by Belgian chef/patron Frederic Desmette.

Famous local residents have included The Dinton Hermit, commemorated by a hotel / restaurant and the exiled French King Louis VIII, who held court in nearby Hartwell House - now a prestigious hotel, restaurant and spa.

[Westlington Green to Haddenham, via country lanes: 2.5 miles]

Haddenham

Appearances include *'Judgement Day'*, *'A Talent for Life'*, *'Birds of Prey'*, *'Orchid Fatalis'* and *'Vixen's Run'*.

The home of the Aylesbury Duck is a miracle of well-preserved village charm. Branch off the through-roads to find its clusters of old-world houses, linked by winding lanes and passages bounded by distinctive wychert walls topped off with tiles. The photogenic heart of the village is around St Mary's Church (*HPI7 8AH*). You'll still find Aylesbury ducks here, on the largest of Haddenham's four duck ponds - and there's a choice of good pubs nearby.

Visit the inmates at Haddenham's St Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital and Visitor Centre, which cares for an assortment of injured creatures rescued from the wild. Highlights include the hedgehog memorabilia museum and baby bird and mammal viewing area.

[Haddenham to Bledlow, via country lanes and the B4009: 8 miles]

Bledlow

Appearances include *'Dead Man's Eleven'*, *'Blue Herrings'*, *'Dark Autumn'* and *'The Maid in Splendour'*.

Murder has brought both Barnaby and Miss Marple to Bledlow, in the secluded Chilterns countryside. The much-filmed village church is unlocked for viewing in

the summer, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. The gate to the right of its spacious churchyard leads to Lyle Garden, a fascinating water garden laid out, with great ingenuity, in a steep ravine. Owned by former cabinet minister Lord Carrington, the garden is open daily free of charge. The familiar Lions at Bledlow (*HP27 9PE*) is perfectly placed for walking off a pub lunch: the path beside it leads up to a lovely stretch of Britain's oldest footpath, The Ridgeway National Trail. Walkers and cyclists can also take the Phoenix Trail, following the route of the former railway from Bledlow's Old Station (now a B&B) to Thame.

Roam within just a few miles of Bledlow to visit the National Trust's West Wycombe village and West Wycombe Park, the Hellfire Caves, the Home of Rest for Horses at Speen, Lacey Green Windmill, Chinnor to Princes Risborough Railway or Rupert Brooke's favourite Pink & Lily Pub, also at Lacey Green.

[Bledlow to Turville, via the AA4010 to West Wycombe, then via Fingest on country lanes: 14.5 miles]

Turville

Seen in *'Murder on St. Malley's Day'*, *'Who Killed Cock Robin'* and *'The Straw Woman'*.

Tiny Turville is doubly déjà vu: the setting for many scenes in *Midsomer Murders* is also the home of *The Vicar of Dibley*. The centrepiece of the valley village is Dibley's St. Mary the Virgin Church, with its neighbouring cottages and Bull & Butcher pub (*RG9 6QU*). Alongside *Midsomer Burgers*, the pub menu offers Chitty Chitty Bangers and Mash in tribute to the now private windmill, which featured in the film. The path up to the windmill is steep but views are well worth the climb.

En route to Hambleden: follow the brown signs to the Chiltern Valley Winery and Brewery for a taste of award winning wines, ales and liquor.

[Turville to Hambleden, via country lanes: 4 miles]

Hambleden

Appearances include *'Blood Will Out'*, *'Down Among the Dead Men'* and *'Who Killed Cock Robin'*.

Midsomer murderers must wait their turn in Hambleden. Film crews come flocking to capture the impeccably charm of its quaint post office, pub (*RG9 6RP*) and church and the brick and flint cottages grouped round the village square. The long list of screen successes filmed here includes *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Sleepy Hollow* and the *New Avengers*, *Band of Brothers*, *A Village Affair*, *Poirot*, *Rosemary & Thyme* and *Down to Earth*.

Head for Hambleden Mill at Hambleden Lock, featured at the end of *Stranglers Wood*, to catch a Salter Brothers passenger boat to Marlow or Henley. Cross the river by a series of footbridges to pick up The Thames Path National Trail: turn left for a short stroll to the Flower Pot Hotel at Aston or right to walk to Henley, following the course of the Royal Regatta.

[Hambleden to Little Marlow, via country lanes and the A4155: 7.5 miles]

Little Marlow

Appearances include *'Faithful unto Death'*, *'Tainted Fruit'* and *'Sauce for the Goose'*.

Another small village that's big on charm. The attraction lies in its delightful little High Street and picturesque green, with its old manor house, half-timbered inn and very lovely 14th-century church (*SL7 3RT*) where master of suspense Edgar Wallace is buried. Make this a stop en route to Georgian Marlow, where a graceful suspension bridge spans the River Thames at its broad and beautiful best.

Joyce Barnaby joined other judges at Marlow's Danesfield Hotel to choose The Perfect Village in *Judgement Day*. Choose a Tuesday night to stay in Marlow to enjoy a tour of the Rebellion Beer Company Brewery, at Marlow Bottom.

[Little Marlow to Beaconsfield, via the A4155: 7 miles]

Denham

'Blood Wedding' opens Series Eleven of *Midsomer Murders* with Cully's wedding to fiancé Simon. The long-awaited event was filmed at St Mary's Church (*UB9 5BH*), in Denham Village, where producer Brian True-May was married. The chosen home of such famous names as Sir John Mills and Cilla Black, Denham Village remains a haven of picturesque charm, with more than its fair share of excellent pubs. The Swan Inn, for example, is the 2008 Good Pub Guide Buckinghamshire Dining Pub of the Year.

Beaconsfield

Seen in *'Written in Blood'*, *'Blood Will Out'*, *'Ghosts of Christmas Past'*, *'Four Funerals & A Wedding'*, *'Dead in the Water'*, *'Hidden Depths'*, *'House in the Woods'*, *'Blue Herrings'* and *'Small Mercies'*.

Pretty Old Beaconsfield is a lovely mix of half-timbered cottages, well-heeled shops and enticing restaurants and pubs. Enid Blyton once lived round the corner, just over the hedge from Bekonscot Model Village, a magical Toy Town of 1930s England in miniature that is now the oldest model village in the world. Parking

for Bekonscot is beside the interesting Catholic Church of St Theresa (*HP9 2/W*); the tower end of the church, with its Martyrs Chapel, is a memorial to its most famous parishioner - G. K. Chesterton.

Other attractions on hand include Milton's Cottage at Chalfont St Giles and the Quaker Village of Old Jordans, where the Mayflower Barn is reputed to incorporate timbers from the Pilgrim Fathers' ship. The garden of Enid Blyton's other Buckinghamshire home at Bourne End is open periodically in the summer.

[Beaconsfield to Forty Green, via country lanes: 1.5 miles]

The Royal Standard of England, Forty Green

Seen in *'Death in Chorus'*:

King Charles I raised his standard here to muster support in the Civil War and Charles II gave it its name in tribute. The oldest free house in England, the award-winning pub (*HP9 ODP*) has now been selling ale and food for 950 years. Their website and car park display boards, gives details of local walks.

[Forty Green to Penn, via country lanes: 1.5 miles]

Penn

Appeared in *'A Tale of Two Hamlets'*:

Familiar to viewers as The Bookshop (*HP10 8LB*) in Lower Warden, Penn's Cottage Bookshop is a well-known treasure trove of second-hand books.

[Penn to Penn Street, via country lanes: 2.5 miles]

Penn Street

Seen in *'Second Sight'*:

Holy Trinity Church (*HP7 OPX*), seen in *'Second Sight'*, has a less publicised claim to fame: it is said that the ashes of British spy Donald Maclean were secretly scattered here by torchlight, on the grave of his parents Donald and Gwendolen Maclean.

Take your pick of two award winning pubs: The Squirrel and The Hit or Miss are adjacent to the spacious green that also serves the thriving village cricket club, which plays over 50 fixtures a year.

[Penn Street to Little Missenden, via country lanes: 2.5 miles]

Little Missenden

Seen in *'The Killings at Badgers Drift'*, *'Destroying Angel'*, *'Who Killed Cock Robin'* and *'A Worm in the Bud'*.

(HPF OQZ) This small, unspoilt village is a stone's-throw from the main Amersham - Aylesbury road. Visit the tiny Crown pub, with its pretty garden served by a special hatch from the bar and just cross the road to join a level stretch of the South Bucks Way beside the banks of the River Misbourne.

Composer David Matthews called the annual Little Missenden Festival of music "England's best-kept secret festival." It showcases young talent as well as internationally-famous artists and composers.

[Little Missenden to Amersham, via the A413: 4 miles]

Old Amersham

Seen in *'Death of a Hollow Man'*, *'Death in Disguise'*, *'Blue Herring'*, *'Who Killed Cock Robin'* and *'Sauce for the Goose'*.

A broad and picturesque high street is lined with half-timbered period cottages, one of which houses Amersham Museum (HPF ODP). The choice of pubs and restaurants is generous and boutiques selling clothes, shoes, antiques and gifts make for very elegant browsing. The Crown Hotel, opposite the old Market Hall, enjoyed a starring role in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

The annual Amersham Festival of music spans three or more weeks, plus an autumn/ winter season of concerts.

[Amersham to Chenies, via the A404: 5 miles]

Chenies Manor House

used as the actor Edward Aladice's house in *'Judgement Day'* and The Museum in *'Beyond the Grave'*.

(WDS GER) Formerly known as Chenies Palace, this Tudor house in its enchanting garden recalls many-a royal visit. Elizabeth I stayed here, as did Henry VIII: it was while staying here that his fifth wife, Catherine Howard, was said to have enjoyed the liaison with Thomas Culpepper that clinched her death sentence.

[Chenies to Chesham, via country lanes: 6 miles]

Chesham

Seen in *'Written in Blood'*.

Midsomer Murders keep coming back to Chesham's Old Town and pedestrianised High Street. (HP5 1HG) The Market Square shop featured in *Written in Blood* is now an old-fashioned tearoom and sweet shop, with two antique and bric-a-brac shops next door. You'll find Chesham's Museum in the family-friendly Gamekeepers Lodge pub, on Bellingdon Road.

Explore Chesham's Old Town on the Heritage Open Days weekend, held annually in September.

[Chesham to The Lee, via country lanes: 6.5 miles.]

The Lee

Seen in *'The Killings at Badgers Drift'*, *'Death's Shadow'*, *'Death of a Stranger'* and *'Painted in Blood'*.

DCI Barnaby frequently stopped off for pint at The Cock & Rabbit (HP16 9LZ), the delightfully photogenic pub and restaurant beside the village green. The Stewart Liberty family built the pub when they remodelled the green, in the early 1900s. The gateway to their former home at 'Pipers' displays the figurehead from the navy's last wooden warship, HMS Impregnable, whose timbers were used in extending the famous family store - Liberty's of London.

[The Lee to Great Missenden, via country lanes: 3 miles]

Great Missenden

Appeared in *'Painted in Blood'*.

Roald Dahl put this typical little Chilterns town on the visitor's map. He lived and worked at Gipsy House, where his wonderful garden opens periodically under the National Gardens Scheme and to raise funds for the Roald Dahl Foundation. The former NatWest Bank in the sleepy High Street now houses the highly acclaimed Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre (HP16 9LZ), opened in 2005.

[Great Missenden to Aylesbury, via Wendover and the A413: 10 miles]