



### **Fascinating Wiltshire**

- You can visit both Scotland and Ireland within ½ mile of one another in North Bradley parish!
- In the year 1010 a monk named Eilmer made wings and 'flew' from Malmesbury Abbey. He glided for 200 yards before landing and breaking his legs, blaming the lack of a tail for the short flight.
- Sir Isaac Pitman (January 4, 1813 - January 12, 1897) was born in Trowbridge. Knighted in 1894, he developed the shorthand system known now as Pitman Shorthand. He was also an inventor and teacher.
- The village of Brinkworth is the longest village in England.
- Joseph Priestley discovered oxygen in 1774 at Bowood House. He worked there as librarian to the Earl of Shelbourne and tutor to his sons, and was provided with a room off the library as a laboratory.
- During the filming of the 1968 Doctor Dolittle film in Castle Combe, Sir Ranulph Fiennes – then a member of the SAS – angered by the filmmakers' attempts to enlarge a pond for a scene in the movie, set charges in the dam they had built (using the army's explosives) and attempted to destroy it. As a result he was fined £500 and dismissed from the regiment.
- Stourhead house was the inspiration for Lady Penelope's residence in the original Thunderbirds puppet series in the 1960's.
- Swindon station had the first railway refreshment rooms in 1842.
- William Golding was a teacher at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury when he wrote Lord of the Flies.
- The most valuable Christmas card was bought for £20,000 in 2001 in Devizes. The card, illustrated by John Calcott Horsley, was originally sent in 1843.
- According to the Met Office the coldest day recorded in Wiltshire was on 13 December 1981, when temperatures in Lacock fell to minus 18.2°C. Marlborough was a positively balmy minus 13.8°C on the same day.
- The private status of Savernake - Britain's only privately owned forest - is maintained by shutting the forest to the public one day per year.
- The largest man-made mound in Europe, mysterious Silbury Hill, near Avebury, compares in height and volume to the roughly contemporary Egyptian pyramids. Probably completed in around 2400 BC, it apparently contains no burial. Though clearly important in itself, its purpose and significance remain unknown.
- Happy Land - not a setting for a fairy tale, but an area of the pretty village of Ashton Keynes! Who wouldn't want to live at that address!
- Several place names in Wiltshire include "Winterbourne", a winterbourne is a downland stream that is dry in the summer months!
- Bremilham Church near Malmesbury is Britain's smallest, measuring just 4m x 3.4m!
- Amesbury is linked to the Arthurian legend as it is popularly believed that Guinevere retired to the original convent at Amesbury after leaving Arthur. Legend holds that she is buried in the grounds of the former Abbey.
- People from many Wiltshire towns and villages are blessed with a sobriquet or nickname, often associated with folklore, legend or historical fact. Villagers from Aldbourne are known as Dabchicks following the sighting on the village pond of a mysterious bird. Elsewhere, in Bradford on Avon, the golden fish that adorns the top of the town's lockup is reputedly meant to be a gudgeon. As a result, those born and bred in the town can lay claim to being gudgeons.
- A dispute about corruption in the Chippenham constituency brought down the government of Robert Walpole, 1730-1742, still the longest reign of any prime minister in history.

- Bradford on Avon was the birthplace of the rubber industry in this country. In 1848 Stephen Moulton, an Englishman living in New York and a friend of Charles Goodyear, came back and set up a factory to apply Goodyear's discovery of vulcanisation in the redundant Kingston Mill
- The oldest working beam-engine in the world is to be found at Crofton, near Marlborough. The 42-inch bore Boulton and Watt machine was built in 1812, fitted at Crofton Pumping Station to provide water to the higher reaches of the Kennet and Avon Canal. It is still steamed on occasion for the benefit of visitors to the site.
- The small town of Wilton lies three miles west of the City of Salisbury, and was the administrative centre of the county until the 11th century. Wilton was also responsible for the name given to the County of Wiltshire
- Liam Gallagher named his band Oasis after the leisure centre in **Swindon**.
- The spire of Malmesbury Abbey was its crowning glory and soared 30ft higher than Salisbury. It is thought that in the 16th century a lightning strike turned water in the masonry on which the spire stood, in to steam so that the stone would have literally exploded. Down came the spire and the great golden ball on the pinnacle fell, so local legend has it, into the High Street, halfway down where the George Inn stood.
- If you have felt cold over the last few days you will have sympathy with the residents of Lacock in December 1981 when temperatures of -18.2°C were recorded!
- A Trowbridge woollen cloth mill, Palmer and Mackay, supplied Queen Elizabeth II with Culloden tartan for her to wear at the Trooping of the Colour.
- Swindon began as a Saxon village. The name Swindon is derived from the Saxon words swine dun meaning pig hill or the hill where pigs were bred. Swindon is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086).
- The old steam hooter at the Railway Works in Swindon could be heard in Devizes - if the wind was blowing in the right direction!
- Avebury Stone Circle dates from 2800 BC onwards. There were once over 500 stones making up the original stone circle and avenue of stones and the circle's circumference is almost a mile in length.
- America's first - and arguably most famous - president, George Washington's, family crest, and the basis for the US flag, originates in Garsdon, near Malmesbury. In the tiny parish church is the mural monument, created in the 1680s to Sir Lawrence Washington. The memorial has been fully restored and replaced in its original position on the north wall of the Chancel Most of the carved stonework has survived and, most notably, the repainted Washington coat of arms (surmounted by the family crest of an eagle rising) is once again resplendent in red, white and blue.
- One of the most complete and unaltered Saxon buildings in Britain is to be found at Bradford-on-Avon. St Laurence's Church was left by the Normans, who built their own place of worship nearby. It was used as a school, residence and workshop until rediscovered in the 19th century. Built in the 8th century it was renovated in the 10th or 11th, still in Saxon times.
- On March 10 1498, Thomas Wolsey - later to become Cardinal Wolsey - was ordained in St Peter's; one of the two churches which stand at either end of Marlborough's wide High Street.
- Malmesbury stakes its claim to be the oldest borough in England on the fact that it was granted a charter in the year 924 by King Edward
- The little-known mud springs of Royal Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire are a weird, beguiling natural phenomenon. According to a journalist from The Independent in 1998 "They are not much to look at and can be rather dangerous. But they do steadily discharge the most exquisite fossils along with vicious grey ooze and they seem to be unique, not just in Britain but in the world."

**For further information or to arrange a press visit please contact Florence Wallace, Travel Trade & PR Manager, [flowallace@visitwiltshire.co.uk](mailto:flowallace@visitwiltshire.co.uk) Tel: 01722 341309 or 07436 588860**