



AllWays Traveller

Woburn, Bedfordshire, UK

[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)

## Historical grandeur, natural beauty and those wild animals at Woburn

**Woburn is a small Georgian market town in Bedfordshire, England.**

It can trace a history back to a hamlet first mentioned in 969 and detailed in the Domesday Book of 1086.

Woburn holds a popular Oyster Festival on the first weekend of September and a monthly farmers market which bring visitors to the town itself.

But it's Woburn Abbey, sitting on the doorstep, with its free roaming deer park and the Woburn Safari Park that makes this a major traveller destination.

Woburn Forest will become *Center Parcs* fifth holiday village when it opens, at a cost of £250 million, in 2014.

### Ashley Gibbins

Managing editor  
**AllWays traveller**



### A place to stay

[www.woburn.co.uk](http://www.woburn.co.uk)

Those looking to spend a couple of nights in the area should check out Flitwick Manor, a very comfortable and friendly four-star, Georgian country house hotel in its own landscaped grounds.



### One of life's little pleasures



At the tail end of the hours drive from London one passes through the 3,000 acre Woburn deer park.

With one eye on the road and the other on these beautiful creatures grazing serenely in rolling Bedfordshire parkland, I experienced one of life's little pleasures.

All too quickly it was over. Only thing for it, turn around and do the deer park drive again.

The deer form a quartet of attractions for those looking to spend time in Woburn. The others are the historic market town itself, Woburn Abbey, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Bedford, and the Woburn Safari park.

But let's get back to those deer.

#### The Woburn Abbey Deer Park



The Woburn Abbey Deer Park, is one of the largest private conservation parks in Europe.

Here you will see *Pere David's Deer*, a genuine success story in themselves, as well as *Sika*; *Axis*; *Chital* and *Barasingha* deer.

You should also look out for those stubby *Muntjac* and the *Chinese Water* deer who roam individually rather than in a herd and occasionally, the rare and very shy *Rusa* deer.

To extend a viewing of the deer, there is a network of public footpaths across the Deer Park, which start from Woburn village and Woburn Abbey.

#### The Pere David's

Pride of place goes to the largest herd of *Pere David's Deer* in the UK, and a breed saved from extinction, in the 1880s, by the 11th Duke of Bedford.

He brought the last known remaining animals to Woburn and nurtured the breed that now boasts several hundred breeding successfully here.

*Pere David's Deer* from this herd have even been returned to China to foster a breeding programme in their original homeland.

### Wrest Park



Wrest Park, a country estate near Silsoe is managed by English Heritage and offers a delightful half-day out if the weather suits. Longer if you can catch one of the many outdoor events in its calendar.

#### The house



The fine Grade I listed country house at Wrest Park was built between 1834 and 1839, by Thomas de Grey, 2nd Earl de Grey, in the style of a French Chateau.

One of the landed gentry, and a keen Francophile, Grey was also an amateur architect and the first president of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Visitors to Wrest Park today can view the grand staircase and ground floor rooms of the mansion, which has an exhibition charting the history of the house and the de Grey family.

## Woburn Abbey



Woburn Abbey is the 'seat' of the Duke of Bedford and gets its name from the abbey first founded by Cistercian monks in 1145.

On Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, in 1538, the abbey was given to the first Earl of Bedford and has remained in the family's hands ever since.

Anna Maria, the wife of the 7th Duke, is said to have started the very English tradition of afternoon tea in the 19th-century.

### Opening to the public

The idea of opening Woburn Abbey to the public occurred to the 13th Duke in 1953. He had inherited an all but derelict house - and very heavy death duties - from his father (yes the 12th Duke).



There was talk of handing over Woburn Abbey to the National Trust, but the new duke who was determined to retain ownership of the house 'opened its doors' in 1955.



Visitor proceeds since then have enabled the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and now Andrew, the 15<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford to continue with the restoration of this magnificent building.

Visiting Woburn Abbey today, it is impossible not to appreciate the sheer weight of history resting on and within the house.

Wall to wall paintings comprise one of the finest art collections open to the public. In addition to a whole host of 'family' portraits, there are works by Rubens, Van Dyck, Velasquez. and Canaletto.

If there is one thing worth the price of admission to anything anywhere it is the collection of 24 Canaletto's in the dining room at Woburn Abbey. Another of life's moments.

### The antiques centre

The Woburn Abbey Antiques offers the chance to browse one of the largest collections of antiques for sale outside of London.

[www.woburn.co.uk](http://www.woburn.co.uk)

## The gardens



Interesting though this is, it is the 92 acres of formal gardens and parkland that rewards a trip to Wrest Park.

Surrounding the house itself is a six acre walled garden, and formal Italian and Rose gardens.

Beyond is a large expanse of lawns and woodlands with a grand canal leading to a Baroque style pavilion built in 1711.

This provides an extensive area of natural relaxation and reflection during quiet periods and a stunning venue for major events.

The highlight among these is the St George's Day, weekend, celebration when re-enactment groups from throughout the country converge on Wrest Park to stage displays, demonstrations and performances of life in England in the centuries gone by.



The property was closed to the public for many decades until English Heritage began what is an ongoing restoration and revival programme.

A new visitor centre and restaurant has recently opened and extensive work undertaken to the gardens and parkland.

[www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/wrest-park](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/wrest-park)

## The Woburn Safari Park



The Woburn Safari Park, was opened in 1970 to add another income stream to maintenance and management of the Duke's estate.



As a member of the British and Irish and the European Associations' of Zoos and Aquariums, the safari park is committed to the welfare of animals and the protection of endangered species.

For the many hundreds of thousands of families who visit each year it is driving through enclosures where a large pride of lions, white rhino, elephants, tigers, bears, monkeys and giraffe roam freely.



Out of the car there are walk through animal enclosures, a petting zoo and the always entertaining animal shows.

[www.woburn.co.uk/safari](http://www.woburn.co.uk/safari)

### Woburn

Woburn has endured a turbulent history including having been destroyed by fire on no less than three occasions

The first time, a mediaeval fire spread rapidly though the settlement of thatched roofed dwellings. Then during the English Civil War between Parliamentarians or *Roundheads* and Royalists, or *Cavaliers* (1642–1651) Cavalier forces burnt much of what was a Roundhead supporting Woburn.

The third fire destroyed much of the town in 1724, leading to a rebuilding in the Georgian style architecture that can be enjoyed today.

During its 19<sup>th</sup> C heyday, Woburn was a staging post on a nationwide coaching network and had 27 inns, a handful of these remain, with restaurants and tea shops, to offer visitors a fine choice of fare.

[www.woburnvillage.co.uk](http://www.woburnvillage.co.uk)

## Bletchley Park and the code breakers



Bletchley Park is just over the county border in Buckinghamshire.

During the World War II Bletchley Park was the site of the UK's main decryption where ciphers and codes of several Axis countries were decrypted, most importantly the ciphers generated by the German Enigma and Lorenz machines.

The high-level intelligence produced at Bletchley Park, codenamed Ultra, provided crucial assistance to the Allied war effort and is said to have shortened the war by two to four years.

[www.bletchleypark.org.uk](http://www.bletchleypark.org.uk)

### The Bird of Prey Centre, Biggleswade



The Bird of Prey Centre, one of the largest of its kind in the UK, is situated in the grounds of the Shuttleworth Estate, and is home to over 200 birds of prey including owls, hawks, eagles, falcons, kites and vultures.

In addition to regular displays and events there is a walk through barn owl aviary and the chance to walk and picnic by the lake.



[www.birdsofpreycentre.co.uk](http://www.birdsofpreycentre.co.uk)

## A place to stay : Flitwick Manor



Flitwick Manor, on the outskirts of the village of the same name, is six miles from Woburn and while Flitwick itself may not be a great deal to write home about, this place certainly is.

This four-star, Georgian country house hotel, sits in particularly attractive landscaped gardens and wooded parkland and one knows the stay will be a special one when driving down the tree lined drive to its front door.



Once inside the welcome is relaxed and friendly.

The bedrooms and lounge areas at Flitwick are furnished with fine period pieces and chairs and sofas that almost demand to be sunk into with a newspaper, good book (or in my case iPad).

Flitwick's restaurant, which enjoys AA rosette status, serves classic British fare and dishes inspired by the continental cuisine in very convivial surroundings. And if any place is suited to a quintessential English afternoon tea, this is it.

[www.menzieshotels.co.uk/hotels/south-central/woburn-flitwick-manor](http://www.menzieshotels.co.uk/hotels/south-central/woburn-flitwick-manor)

## Whipsnade Zoo



Whipsnade Zoo is a zoo and safari park located at Whipsnade, near Dunstable.

It is owned (with London Zoo in Regent's Park) by the Zoological Society of London, a charity devoted to the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats.



The zoo covers 600 acres and has areas including *Lions of the Serengeti*, a walk-through lemur enclosure, the *Rhinos of Nepal* and *Cheetah Rock*.

[www.zsl.org/zsl-whipsnade-zoo](http://www.zsl.org/zsl-whipsnade-zoo)

More information :

[www.visitbedford.co.uk](http://www.visitbedford.co.uk)

## AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



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The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

## Ashley Gibbins



Ashley is Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*