Midsomer Murders & The Thames

Sarah Osborne, Tourism Angles

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South Oxfordshire's Midsomer 2015

- **15,000 visitors**
- **£1M visitor spend**
- **Media reach 16M; value £380,000**
- **200,000 unique visitors to website**
- **40 businesses engaged in Midsomer**
- **Significant increase in coach groups**

Midsomer and the media

Our boat trip? It was murder

Kevin Pilley watches out for 104 evil killers (and George Clooney) during his Midsomer locations cruise along the Thames

RUDDER to neutral! Engine lever in position. Cast off moorings. Stow fenders! Barnaby ahoad! Causton-bound! Via Clooney-on-the-Water!"

We left the Hobbs of Henley boatyard with owners Jonathon and Sury waving us off, unsure whether they would ever see us again, this being the most murderous stretch of the River Thames.

We passed magician Paul Daniels' house at Wargrave, and saw Debbie McGee.

And then the humming began.

There's nothing quite like cruising the Midsomer Country section of the Thames – while impersonating a theremin. There's something about the stretch of water from Henley to Wallingford (which includes the fictitious Martyr Warren and Merton Fendle) that immediately turns you into an early electronic musical instrument designed by a Russian physicist.

'A theremin's the only musical instrument you don't touch with your hands,' said Paul Thomas, our Upper Thames helmsman, captain, and explainer of on-board loos and

on the river. A probable Phillip Schofield. Perhaps a Jeremy Paxman spot too. But the fiction was much easier to see than the reality.

You can do walking, self-drive and coach tours of Midsomer Country. The area extends to Buckinghamshire and Berkshire, but South Oxfordshire is the undisputed murder capital of TV Britain.

Since 1997, 260 premeditated murders have been committed there.

And now you can tour 'MM Land' by boat, either self-drive or chauffeured. Paul, the son of a Concorde engineer, skippers the new, 36ft luxury river cruiser, Midsomer. His

bosses, the Hobbs family, have been providing pleasure boats since 1870. The new craft could have been called HMS Barnaby or the S.S. Sgt Troy. Or, perhaps even The Randy Gardener, as that was the role the present Detective Chief Inspector Barnaby (Neil Dudgeon) played in an episode called Garden Of Death long before he joined the Causton CID.

British TV's most popular shows.

So far, 17 series of Midsomer Murders have been broadcast – that's 104 episodes – with six more whodunnits, originally adapted from Caroline Graham's novels, due to be aired in January 2016.

Five-times Olympic rowing gold medallist Redgrave appeared in Dead In The Water, filmed at the 2004 Henley Regatta. Orlando Bloom played a local burglar and gigolo found stabbed to death with a pitchfork in Judgement Day in the third series.

Superman Henry Cavill has also guest-starred.

The programme has a UK audience of six million and is shown in more than 200 countries. And Midsomer Country is leading the UK film and TV location tourism boom.

Visitors come from all over to Dorchester, to find The Pigeons, used as the Butterball Tea Room in Small Mercies (2009) or the town's post office, seen in Things That Go Bump in The Night. Dorchester also ...use In The Woods. ...ow the Six Bells at

...dsomer St Michael ...mission) has been ...e last as The Black ...t And The Good. It ...ves to find Badgers ...nal was a village ...the Chilterns.

A tour of dozens of fictional crime scenes proves a surprisingly life-affirming affair for television's Midsomer Murders fan CATHERINE COOPER

TRAWLING round the south Oxfordshire countryside enthusiastically ticking off murder scenes may seem a bit macabre but as fans of hugely popular TV series Midsomer Murders, my husband and I are unlikely to be alone in this pursuit.

The murders in question are grisly, improbable in their frequency and entirely fictional. Since first being screened in 1997, more than 80 episodes of Midsomer Murders have been made and the series has since been sold to more than 200 markets worldwide.

The local authority in south Oxfordshire, where much of the series is filmed, has belatedly cottoned on to this popularity, creating a website detailing locations used in the series.

It's not just spots where characters have been killed. Also included is everything from the pubs where Det Chief Insp Barnaby (the lead, formerly played by John Nettles and now replaced by Neil Dudgeon) drinks, to beautiful backdrops. Many are linked in two driving tours.

We start off at historic Mapledurham House, which was "Bingham House" in one of the most recent Midsomer episodes.

Its mill, the only one still in use on the Thames, is also instantly recognisable from the film The Eagle Has Landed. All the electricity cables in Mapledurham village were buried for the 1976 film starring Michael Caine, giving it a "land that time forgot" feeling.

The village is as peaceful as the main house is majestic. We spend the first night at the Beetle & Wedge Boathouse in Moulsford-on-Thames, a riverside restaurant housed in an old boathouse with a great wine list and an imaginative menu, some of which is cooked over an open-flame grill in the restaurant.

We stay in one of its three simple but comfortable rooms complete with a huge bathroom and a roll-top bath. The next morning, we head to Wallingford, a historic small town/large village on the river, which often features in Midsomer as Causton, Barnaby's

BACKDROP: Catherine revels in Mapledurham's screen history

centre of operations. While it isn't as chocolate-box pretty as some villages we visit, its other claim to fame is it was Agatha Christie's home for much of her life.

The Wallingford Museum is currently holding a "Christie to Causton" exhibition, showing off its fictional, crime ridden history.

After a drive through Ewelme, a village so crammed with ancient cottages and general prettiness it looks more like a film set than a real place, we have lunch at The Six Bells in Warborough.

Outside the thatched, 16th century pub set on the village green, which has made several Midsomer Murders appearances as at least four different pubs, a waggish regular has left a plastic, bloodied severed hand in the woodpile. The houses in the village are again mainly timbered or thatched cottages and in summer cricket is played on the green. It is England at its most English.

Matt Unekman, the new manager of The Six Bells, is keen to make the most of his Midsomer connection and the lunch menu features some "Murderous Classics".

"There have been seven 'murders' around Warborough over the years," he tells me. "I'm gutted that the previous landlord threw away the fake pub signs they used for filming. I could have done theme nights."

We spend the evening in Thame,

which has been host to Midsomer filming at least 10 times as Causton and various other locations. We stay at the Georgian Spread Eagle hotel, which apparently appeared as The Morecroft Hotel in an episode where Barnaby gets hit after intervening in a fight in the bar.

Since then, the interior decor has changed and the bar and restaurant are now modern and opulent with lots of brown and gold. Some rooms have similarly been modernised. Ours had a huge bed with furry cushions and throw and a fabulous bathroom, while others are more "cottagey".

FROM THAME we head to Greys Court near Henley-on-Thames, a 15th-century family home with incredible gardens, now owned by the National Trust. It appeared in Midsomer as a monastery and is very relaxed and informal for a stately home. Visitors can roam the house, sit on the sofas and touch almost anything they like.

The garden, complete with a lily moat, is designed so that there is almost always colour.

We have lunch at The Bull & Butcher in Turville, another quintessentially English pub with open fires, a large garden and an old, very deep well.

Midsomer Murders filming has taken place in Turville several times but it is perhaps better known as the parish of The Vicar Of Dibley and for the windmill in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

Driving around this area with so much green space and so many gorgeous, sleepy villages it is hard to believe that you are only an hour away from London.

Whether or not you are a Midsomer Murders fan, a visit to "Midsomer" makes you feel like you have stepped back into an old-fashioned, gentler way of life; more than 200 "murders" to its name notwithstanding.

ON SET: Tour guide Steve Hodgkinson outside Wallingford Town Hall

Picture ... by Denis Kennedy

Making killing out of Midsomer tours

A Midsomer sites dream

EXPRESS

£260

Mrs. O

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Top 10 Midsomer Murders Locations

PLACES, THINGS TO SEE & DO | JUNE 16, 2011 BY GUEST | 2 COMMENTS

The British love affair with an intriguing murder mystery is well documented. Fans of the long-running 'Midsomer Murders' are treated to weekly whodunits, all set in the finest British countryside. From country pubs to village greens, and from churchyards to country houses, Mark Pawlak reveals his Top 10 Midsomer Murders locations.

Wallingford

Perhaps the most recognisable Midsomer location, Wallingford is 'Causton' in the series. This market town fringes the banks of the Thames and the show's lead character, DCI Barnaby, is often seen wandering here. Keen eyes will identify the Corn Exchange and maybe even some of the show's extras, taken sometimes from the town.

Want to find the right location? A murder helps

Chiara Cavaglieri looks at the 'TV effect' on prices as 'Broadchurch' pulls in house-hunters as well as viewers

Reality TV shows such as *The Only Way is Essex* and *Geordie Shore* don't always do their locations any favours, but if an area is looking its best, even a murder plot can boost interest. Local estate agents are thrilled when they see a picturesque backdrop on a popular series; the return of the ITV crime thriller *Broadchurch* has already generated a tripling in property searches

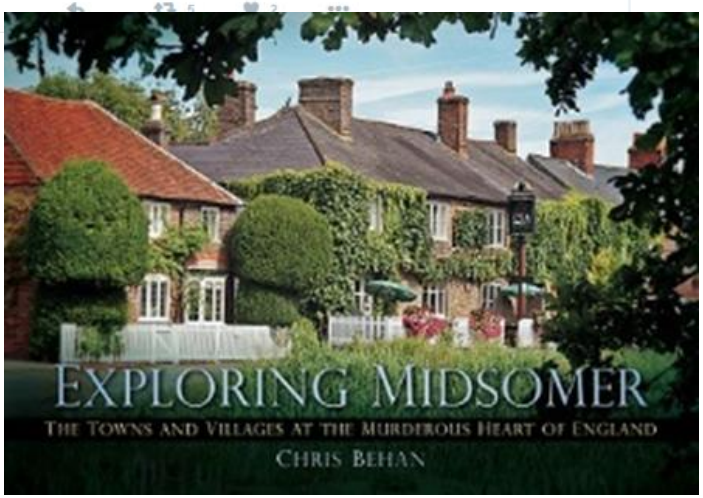
"Others may decide to invest in a buy-to-let property due to the increased interest the show has created."

In the market town of Bridport, just over a mile inland from West Bay, average asking prices are up 10 per cent to £325,319 in the past year, according to data from the search engine Home.co.uk. Local agents say values vary considerably depending on the precise location, with one-bed flats available for less than

Port Isaac, Cornwall

A city like Oxford doesn't really need help from *Inspector Morse* to reel in the tourists, but in some instances a show can put an area on the map. Nicola Oddy of Stacks Property Search says the ITV comedy drama *Doc Martin* did just that for the Cornish village. "The constant stream of tourists attracted by the series benefits the area financially, and properties

Business Success



Business Success

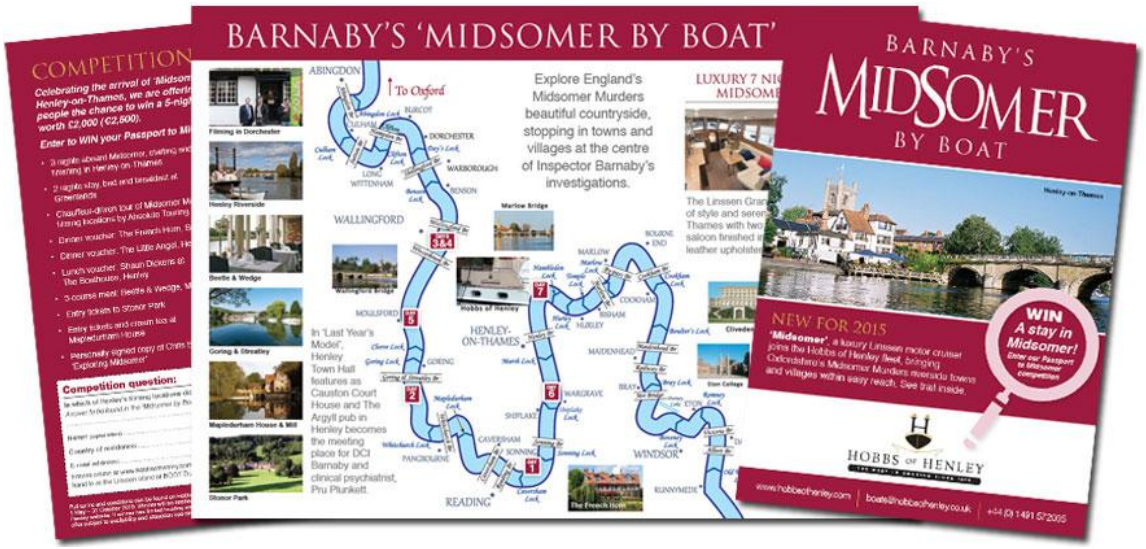
Tourism Angles and Midsomer

- 5 x Midsomer town trails
- 3 x driving trails
- Website visitmidsomer.com
- PR agency
- Brand awareness in the market place
- Business engagement and support
- Group market – tour operators & guides

team

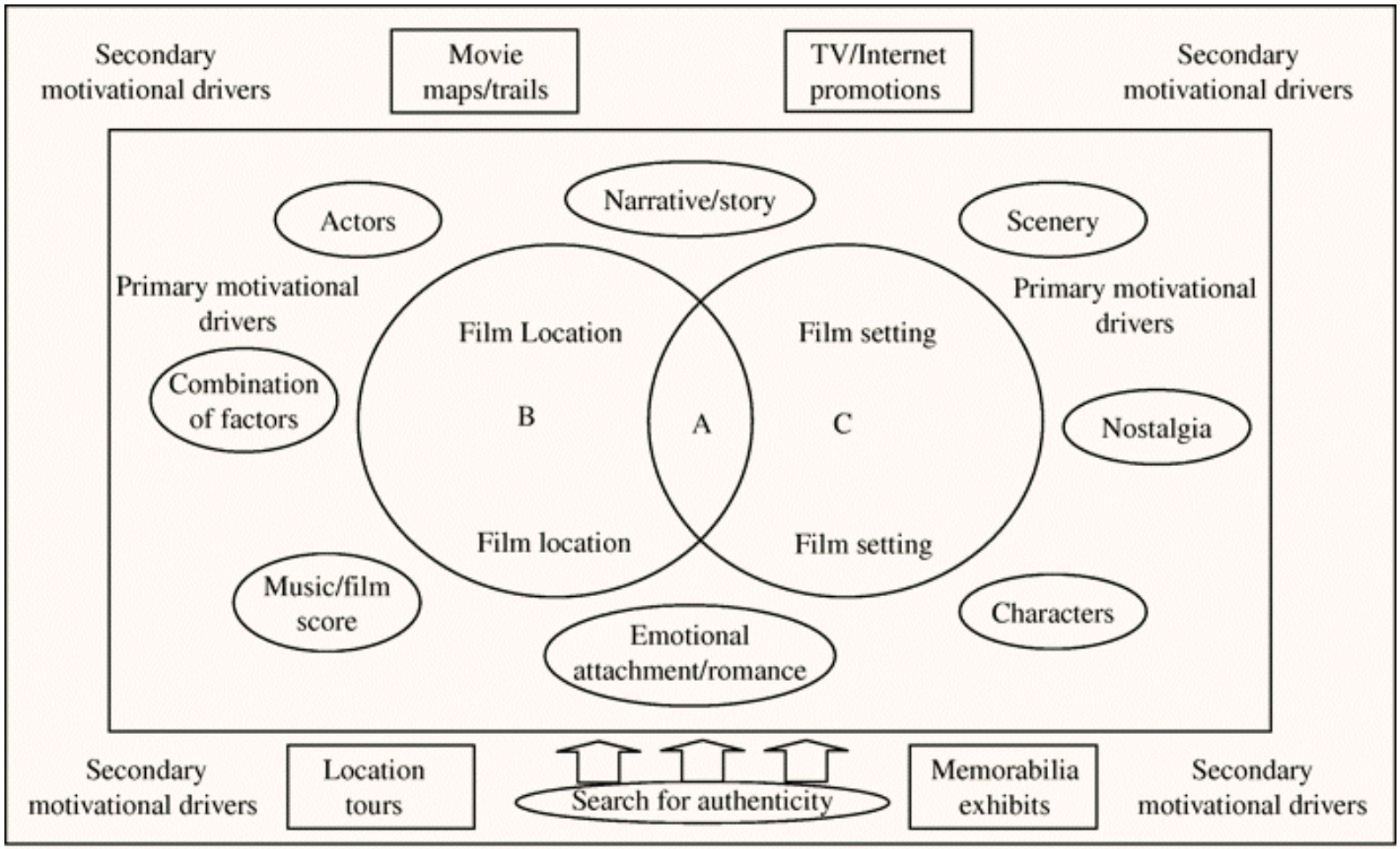
Hobbs of Henley and Midsomer

MAIL ON SUNDAY
29th August 2015
Circulation 3.7M
Value £148,000



team

Screen Tourism



A: Tourists who visit both film setting & film location
B: Tourists who visit film location only
C: Tourists who visit film setting only

Source: Authors own work © Bolan (2010)

team

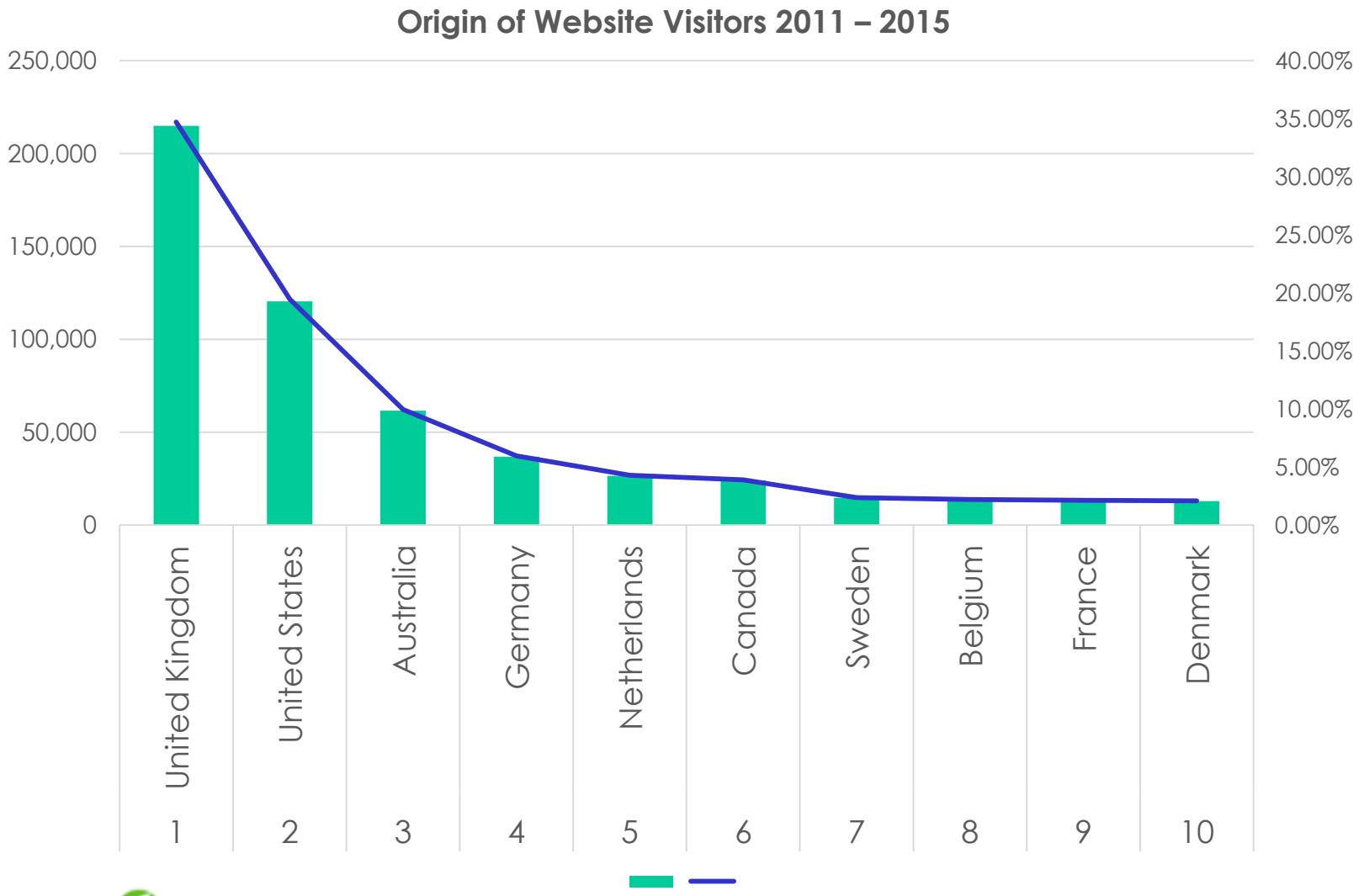
Downton Abbey

Bampton

Alnwick Castle

About the Show

Who are the fans?



Find out more…..

TOURISM ANGLES

Sarah Osborne

sarah2108@msn.com

07787 122050

Jackie Ellis

jackie@tourism-angles.co.uk

07969 997985

- The Crown, Sydenham
- The Argyll, Henley
- The Peacock, Henton
- Greenlands, Henley
- Basildon Park, Highclere, Bampton – Downton Abbey
- The Six Bells, Warborough
- Loddon Brewery, Dunsden
- The Swan, Streatley
- BritMovie Tours, London