

# 6 The Cotswolds and Children's Literature in Japanese Fantasy: the Case of Castle Combe

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In the Introduction to this volume, Takayoshi Yamamura mentions the Japanese government's 2005 definition of contents tourism (PAGE REF HERE). Here, I would like to quote that definition at slightly greater length:

We would like to call 'contents tourism' tourism that utilises content related to a local area (movies, TV dramas, novels, manga, games, etc.) to promote sightseeing and related industries.

The basis of contents tourism is to add 'narrative' and 'thematic' qualities to a region—'an atmosphere/image specific to the region generated by contents'—and to utilize that narrative quality as a tourism resource. (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport et al., 2005: 49)

I quote this in full because, while the second sentence appears a natural extension of the first, potentially it carries quite a different emphasis. The first stresses the importance of specific movies, dramas and manga to contents tourism, but the second talks in more abstract language, of atmosphere (*fun'iki*) and narrative and thematic 'qualities' (*monogatarsei* and *tēmasei*); moreover, it speaks of *adding* these qualities to a place rather than exploiting what already exists there. In this chapter I want to explore the space between these two conceptions of contents tourism, suggesting that the ways in which Japanese tourists engage with the Cotswold region of England exemplify a range of interactions, some based firmly on specific content (for example, stories set in the Cotswolds), others more loosely on the region's power to catalyse the pre-existing desires and fantasies of tourists themselves through tropes and genre scripts.

Tourists arrive at any destination already equipped with what John Urry famously dubbed the 'tourist gaze': the 'particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations' that frame and modify their experiences. As Urry put it, 'when a small village in England is seen, what [tourists] gaze upon is the "real olde England"' (2011: 5). Similarly, readers have a repertoire of genre expectations that shape the interpretative approach they take to new texts. Indeed, these capacities may work in combination: literary scholars have noted 'the dominance and significance of certain aspects of the environment in the children's literature of different cultures' and the 'topographies regarded as typical in the representation of foreign landscapes' (O'Sullivan, 2005: 39) – associations that inform readings of individual texts. In this chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which place, contents and fantasy engage through Japanese tourism in the Cotswolds, and particularly in the small village of Castle Combe.

## Japanese Tourism in the Cotswolds

The Cotswolds are a range of hills in southern England, lying mostly in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. Historically important for sheep-farming and the wool trade, the region grew rich in the Middle Ages before falling into relative decline in the nineteenth century, as the rise of cotton made wool less profitable. It was thus largely bypassed by the industrial revolution, and retains many traditional buildings built from its signature yellow (or 'honey-coloured') limestone. It remains a rural area, and is now popular with wealthy retirees and commuters seeking escape from urban life. Tourism is a major industry, and among the most enthusiastic tourists to the Cotswolds are those from Japan.<sup>1</sup>

Japanese tourists to Britain usually base themselves in London. When they leave the capital it is typically to visit places that can be easily reached from there in a day trip. The standard itinerary includes cities such

as Oxford and Bath, and individual sites such as Stonehenge. But what of the countryside? Two rural areas are strongly promoted in Japanese tourist literature about Britain: the Lake District and the Cotswolds. Of these, the Lake District's status as a popular destination can be explained, in addition to the natural beauty of its landscapes, in 'classic' contents tourism terms. Its fame for Japanese people is bound up with Beatrix Potter and her most famous creation, Peter Rabbit; Potter's former home at Hill Top is a place of literary pilgrimage (Williams, 2013). The popularity of the Cotswolds at first seems more puzzling. The Cotswolds have no dominant literary locus like Potter's home at Hill Top or Shakespeare's at Stratford-upon-Avon. Writers, artists and other notable figures of history have of course lived in and written about the Cotswolds, but there is no individual for whose sake people visit in large numbers. No great events of history took place in the Cotswolds, no important battles were won or lost there. True, there are some small but historic cities at the edge of the area: Bath, Cheltenham, Gloucester, and slightly further afield, the larger cities of Bristol and Oxford – but when people think of the Cotswolds they do not generally picture these, but the picturesque villages and small towns and the countryside between them, none of them especially famous except for being pretty and for their bucolic names: Moreton-in-Marsh, Stow-on-the-Wold, Bourton-on-the-Water, Wotton-under-Edge, and so on.

INSERT FIG 6.1 HERE

Figure 6.1. A sign in Japanese at Moreton-in-Marsh Station

Nevertheless, the Cotswolds have proved hugely attractive to Japanese tourists – to the extent that the railway station in Moreton-in-Marsh, where visitors from London arrive by train, has introduced bilingual signs for Japanese travellers (Fig. 1). In some Cotswold villages – Bourton-on-the-Water, Bibury and Castle Combe among them – Japanese tourists at times constitute the majority of visitors, and this is reflected in the visibility of Japanese-language signage and Japanese-language souvenirs. There is no single reason for this popularity. One factor is no doubt the practical fact that the Cotswolds can be visited in a day trip from Paddington Station in London; several tourist guides in Japan include suggested itineraries for just such an outing (e.g. Diamond Publishing, 2017: 296). However, the Cotswolds are no more accessible from London than some other areas equally replete with beautiful countryside and picturesque villages. Some contingent circumstances may have played a part in cementing the Cotswolds' reputation in Japan. On 8 August 1890 William Morris (a figure long influential in Japan [Nakayama 1996]) remarked in a letter to the designer Kate Faulkner that Bibury in the east Cotswolds was 'surely the most beautiful village in England, lying down in the winding valley beside the clear Colne' (Morris, 1996: 188). The claim of Bibury to be 'the most beautiful village in England' has been relentlessly leveraged ever since, not only by Bibury itself but by the region as a whole. This hyperbole has found its way into the representation of the region in material produced in Japan, where foreign tourist culture is characterised more than that of most Western countries by visiting approved destinations rather than on encouraging 'off-piste' exploration.<sup>2</sup> In 1921 the future Emperor Hirohito is said to have stayed in and praised Bibury as part of a six-month European tour, which may have further entrenched the region's position in the Japanese touristic image of Britain, even if most current-day Japanese visitors are unaware of the connection. More generally, the dominance of the Cotswolds is no doubt also a matter of success breeding success. The Cotswolds are prominent in Japanese tourist literature: numerous books are devoted to them specifically, and they punch well above their weight in general guides to Britain. In JTB Publishing's guide to the United Kingdom, for example, 20 pages are devoted to the Cotswolds, more than twice the number accorded to the whole of Scotland (JTB Publishing, 2017). Given this exposure, it is natural that the Cotswolds should form part of the itinerary of future visitors, too.

More relevant than these circumstantial elements to a discussion of contents tourism are the ways that the Cotswolds are used in imaginative and narrative terms – especially those associated with fairy-tale and children's literature. A recurrent theme of Cotswolds tourism for Japanese people is that in stepping into the Cotswolds one is stepping *out* of history, out of the modern world, into a place and lifestyle that have endured for centuries, and that in so doing one is entering a realm abstracted from the usual rules of time. Naturally, this is to a large extent an illusion; the area's appearance is the result of its being consciously preserved and maintained, not least for tourists. In some places, such as Castle Combe, bye-laws ensure that such egregious signs of modernity as television aerials are not visible; in others, social pressure works

to maintain a what is regarded as an appropriate appearance.<sup>3</sup> The Cotswold tourist experience is a result of a collaboration between the inhabitants and visitors in the creation of a selective vision of place, which excludes from view (literally, as far as brochures and postcards are concerned) anything that does not fit the narrative of rural timelessness. If the honey-coloured limestone and wisteria-fronted cottages of the Cotswolds are assiduously maintained by the residents and businesses who depend on tourists for their prosperity, they are no less curated by the tourists who come to see them.

The question remains, what use is made of this perceived quality of timelessness? How is it processed and understood by visitors? For some visitors, it seems that stepping out of history offers an escape from everyday worries. David Strachan, proprietor of Totteoki Tours, a small company that offers Japanese visitors personal tours of the Cotswolds, recalls:

One woman... there was a couple and their teenage daughter. We met them at the station. They'd come from Japan to London, London to Moreton, into our vehicle. We took them to a little village. She got out and burst into tears, because, she said, she didn't realise anywhere could be so beautiful. She was like that the rest of the day, overwhelmed by everything.

Another mother and daughter, at the end of the tour I asked them what they thought of it, and the mother said, 'I feel like I've been cured.' And then she went all wet-eyed, and her daughter said she'd been under a lot of stress, she lived in Tokyo, and her job and family situation was really stressful, and spending the day just chilling out in the Cotswolds just made it all go away. (Strachan, 2017)

The reality of Tokyo 'goes away'; but what takes its place? I suggest that the experience of the Cotswolds is to a large extent filtered through Japanese visitors' knowledge of, and associations with, children's literature. My own encounters with Japanese tourists in the Cotswolds have typically elicited comparisons with picturebooks (*ehon*) and nursery stories (*otogibanashi*), as well as more specific children's texts such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Rabbit* and *Harry Potter*. Being in the Cotswolds allows visitors to interpolate themselves imaginatively into this kind of fictional environment. This is not contents tourism as conventionally understood: none of these texts is set in the Cotswolds.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, with their traditional architecture, rurality and lack of obvious markers of modernity, Cotswold towns and villages evoke a certain aesthetic strongly associated with fairy tales and strikingly distant from the daily experience of most visitors from Japan, where few domestic buildings date back as much as a century. Moreover, an image of rural England is absorbed by Japanese people at a young age, not only through literature but also through other aspects of children's culture. The Sylvanian Families toys, for example, developed by the Japanese company Epoch and first sold in 1985, were designed to evoke a rural English, middle-class lifestyle much like that of the Cotswolds. With its animal characters, they also recall a childlike, diminutive world of the kind Beatrix Potter created in her stories.

Size is an important part of this aesthetic. Stroud and Cirencester, the largest towns in the Cotswolds, have populations of 32,000 and 19,000. The other settlements are all much smaller. Bourton-on-the-Water has a population of just 3300, Bibury less than 700. Individual buildings are often built with low doors and ceilings designed for smaller-framed generations. This element of 'snugginess' is another element associated with children's texts. As Jerry Griswold has noted, 'Only in children's literature is littleness so frequent a topic ... and only in that genre does the word *little* appear so frequently in titles' (2006: 51). The Cotswolds offer a smallness that allows visitors to indulge aspects of the imagination that evoke fairy tales and children's stories about beings, small and large. When the Japanese produce Cotswold-inspired attractions in Japan, such as Yufuin Shopping Village in Oita Prefecture, or Dreamton near Kameoka in Kyoto Prefecture (of which more below), there is typically an emphasis on the smallness and 'cosiness' of the environment, which offers a bespoke pleasure to child visitors and a regressive one to adults.

### Three Types of Contents Tourism in Castle Combe

*Kin-iro Mosaic* and "traditional" contents tourism

The appeal of the Cotswolds, in the general terms in which I have described it here, fits rather imperfectly the first part of the definition of contents tourism quoted at the start of this chapter, as ‘contents related to the local area (movies, television dramas, novels, manga, games and so on)’. The Cotswolds has no Beatrix Potter, nor even Harry Potter. Yet the region is flexible and effective in terms of the second part of that definition, the addition of narrative and thematic qualities, and of an atmosphere that can be exploited as a resource for contents tourism. The Cotswolds’ power to evoke narrative possibilities in visitors who come equipped with the imagery of literature and culture of childhood, makes it a potent contents tourism location.

Some of the ways in which children’s-literature-related contents tourism manifests in the Cotswolds can be seen by turning from a region-wide perspective to a more specific location. Castle Combe in the south Cotswolds is a small (population 350), famously pretty village, in which almost all the houses are built of Cotswold stone and are several centuries old. In the words of one Japanese guide book, its ‘rows of stone houses seem to have been taken from a fairy-tale’ (Kobayashi, 2015: 124). Castle Combe is on the regular itinerary of many Japanese tourists, particularly those coming from nearby Bath. Public transport links being sparse, Japanese visitors generally come as part of a tour, which may include a visit to a village pub, tea room, or the local manor house. Linguistic interactions are basic, with few or no residents being fluent in Japanese, and most Japanese having minimal English.

INSERT FIG 6.2 HERE

Figure 6.2. Castle Combe, Packhorse Bridge.

Castle Combe has been used as a television and film set on many occasions. Among other roles, it was transformed into the harbour of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh in the 1967 musical version of Hugh Lofting’s *Dr Dolittle* books, and the English village in Steven Spielberg’s 2011 film of Michael Morpurgo’s First World War novel, *War Horse* (1982). One might expect that tourism would be generated by such appearances in television and film, but, despite brief surges of interest at the time of the films’ release, this kind of film-induced tourism accounts for only a small proportion of visitors. In this respect Castle Combe can be contrasted with nearby Lacock, a larger village just outside the Cotswolds, which openly trades on its many appearances in television and film, ranging from *Pride and Prejudice* to *Downton Abbey* and *Harry Potter*.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the Cotswolds in general and Castle Combe in particular have benefitted from the Japanese custom of anime tourism. Given that the Cotswolds are an area of England well known in Japan, it is not surprising that several manga and anime have been set there, although the word ‘Cotswolds’ is not always used.<sup>6</sup> The most relevant example to Castle Combe is *Kin-iro Mosaic*, a television anime aired by Studio Gokumi from 2013 and based on the four-panel manga by Yui Hara (2010). The story is largely set in a Japanese high school, but in the first episode (‘In Wonderland’) Shinobu, a middle-school student, visits England for a homestay and becomes friends with Alice, an English girl of the same age. After Shinobu returns home, Alice learns Japanese in England and transfers to Shinobu’s school to join her and her friends. *Kin-iro Mosaic* tells of their life together in Japan, but frequently refers back to Alice’s home in the Cotswold countryside.

In the manga, Alice’s home is depicted as a wooden-walled building set amid snow-topped mountains more redolent of Japan than the Cotswolds (Hara had not at that point visited the United Kingdom), but Studio Gokumi sent a team to photograph specific locations, modelling Alice’s house on Fosse Farmhouse, a guesthouse just outside Castle Combe (see also Takayoshi Yamamura’s chapter in this volume); other Cotswold locations included Cirencester, Bibury, Kemble Station and Bathampton. Even the address of Fosse Farmhouse (‘Fosse Farmhouse, Castle Combe, England’) can be seen on a pot of homemade jam briefly glimpsed on Shinobu’s Japanese breakfast table in the second episode (‘Even if I’m Small’). These references naturally generated interest among fans, and Caron Cooper, the proprietor of Fosse Farmhouse, found that the number of her Japanese visitors increased dramatically after the anime was broadcast in 2013. By 2017 she estimated that some 70% of her overnight guests were Japanese, almost all attracted by the anime, and many including *Kin-iro Mosaic* as part of an anime pilgrimage around Britain or even Europe (Cooper, 2017). One room in Fosse Farmhouse is now a *Kin-iro Mosaic* shrine, featuring merchandise and signed photographs and messages from famous visitors, including the voice actresses and

Yui Hara herself. Visitors practise most of the forms of otaku behaviour Takeshi Okamoto has described as characteristic of anime tourism (2015: 24-26): taking pictures of locations from the same angles as the anime, re-enacting scenes, creating photograph albums in which a figurine or doll substitutes for the anime character, and so on. Because visitors generally want to see the house exactly as it was shown in the anime, Cooper finds it difficult to change any of the ornaments, the bed spreads, and so on. In this sense, Fosse Farmhouse has become as fixed in 2012 (when the studio photographers came) as the characters in the anime itself.

INSERT FIGURE 6.3 HERE

Figure 6.3. *Kin-iro Mosaic* Shrine at Fosse Farmhouse.

Anime contents tourism now generates a significant proportion of Fosse Farmhouse's revenue, but there is none of the co-ordination with public tourism bodies that has become common in Japan, where anime studios and city and prefectural governments often work together to co-promote an anime and its setting, resulting in promotions such as the Anime Tourism Association's 88-Stop Pilgrimage ('Anime Pilgrimage Sites', 2018). Cotswold tourism officials have done nothing to foster this market, seeing it as too niche to warrant the use of their limited resources (Jackson, 2018). Until recently, indeed, they were unaware of this kind of tourist activity, although that situation may be changing; in April 2018, Fosse Farmhouse won an award for the 'Story of the Year' from the Automobile Association on the basis of its anime connection ('Britain's best B&Bs', 2018), and in early June the story was taken up by most British newspapers and news websites, even briefly topping the 'most viewed' item ranking on the BBC's news website ('The English B&B', 2018). Clearly there is a potential appetite in Britain for anime tourism, at least as a human-interest story.

### Do-it-yourself contents tourism

*Kin-iro Mosaic* notwithstanding, contents tourists constitute only a small percentage of Japanese visitors to Castle Combe. Most of those who come by coach or minibus as part of a tour do so not for the sake of a specific narrative but for the village's rustic beauty. Nevertheless, at least one business owner has attempted to grow her sales by creating a kind of do-it-yourself contents tourism experience. Anna Roberts sells cream teas from the Old Rectory Tea Room in Castle Combe (her shop is featured in some Japanese tourist guides [e.g. Kobayashi, 2015: 125]), but also uses her premises to sell souvenirs. These include knitted toy mice, which are popular with Japanese visitors. A toy is just a toy; but a toy with a story is more powerful; and a toy with a story set in a real place more powerful still. Accordingly, in 2017 Roberts self-published a book about the mice and Castle Combe, entitled *Mouse Tails of Castle Combe*.

*Mouse Tails* tells of a family of mice, the Whiskerfords, who are tired of living in London and long to move to the country. Eventually they arrive in Castle Combe and take up residence in the local tea room. This is a fantasy for tourists, but it is also the story of the author's own family, as she explains on the back cover:

In 2003, Anna and Mike Roberts moved into the Old Rectory house here in Castle Combe, where they now run a Tearoom from the ground floor of their private family home.

This is a story about them, told through a family of mice called 'The Whiskerfords.'

All the characters in the book can be seen displayed in the tearoom windows and are based on real life villagers. (Roberts, 2017: Back Cover)

By telling her own story through a family of mice, Roberts takes quite a typical story (a London couple buy a house in the country) and filters it through a long tradition of children's literature, of animal stories, and even more specifically of mouse stories (the ancient story of the Town Mouse and the Country Mouse is one obvious precursor). She thus infuses the place with 'narrative quality,' both for herself and potentially for her readers. Roberts has even constructed a mouse front door on her staircase, to pique the

interest of visitors to her tea room. Copies of the door are, of course, for sale in the shop, along with the mice and the book itself. After all, this is not just a fantasy, it is also a business, and the creation of these contents allows different aspects of that business to be integrated through narrative. For example:

They carried on all the way down the street until they reached the Rigglesby's Tearoom. The heavenly smell of freshly baked scones came drifting out of the half-open stable door and poured out onto the street. (Roberts, 2017: n.p.)

In this passage and others like it, the village, the book, the toys, and even the cream teas all combine to promote each other.

*Mouse Tails* is as much a tourist guide as it is a story, and it contains many soft-focus pictures of the various buildings in the village. Although Japanese visitors may not be able to read the English text fluently, the book potentially functions as an *omiyage* (or souvenir) to remind them of Castle Combe. Anime studios may not yet be cooperating with local government in the Cotswolds, but here a similar strategy is being carried out at an individual level: this is contents tourism grown from seed.

### Stay-at-home contents tourism

Not every Japanese person with an interest in Britain has the resources or even the desire to travel there. To cater to such people, a number of places have been constructed in Japan that recreate, or at least gesture towards, a certain vision of Britishness. These include British Hills in Fukushima, a village complex used primarily for educational purposes, and tourist attractions such as Yufuin Floral Village in Oita Prefecture. Most relevant to Castle Combe is Dreamton near Kameoka, in Kyoto Prefecture. Dreamton is the creation of Mayumi ('Marie') Haruyama, the Anglophile scion of a family of traditional weavers from Nishijin, Kyoto. Inspired by the hospitality and way of life she encountered on a visit to the Cotswolds, Haruyama created Dreamton in the early 2000s, in tribute to the aesthetic, craft and social values of the region. The name 'Dreamton' is of course significant, marking it as a place that can be used to give dreams solid form – whether those of the owner or of visitors. Dreamton comprises a restaurant, a row of bed-and-breakfast cottages, a chapel for weddings, an antique shop, and various other buildings in the Cotswold style. The distinctive honey-coloured Cotswold stone had to be reproduced using concrete, but the effect is convincing, and the interiors are largely furnished with British items purchased by Haruyama during her regular antique-dealing trips to the United Kingdom. Notably, the image used to advertise the Pont-Oak restaurant, which was the first stage of the project, is a picture of Castle Combe, a place that has in some ways served as an archetypal model of a Cotswold village.

In interview, Haruyama stressed that she does not wish Dreamton to be a theme park (Haruyama, 2018), but rather as far as possible a recreation, allowing visitors an immersive experience in which they feel themselves to be truly in England. In the case of Dreamton, the village of Castle Combe isn't just associated with existing contents (an anime, a children's book), it *is* the contents – a place designed to reproduce the same associations, the same atmosphere and thematic qualities as the Cotswolds themselves.

INSERT FIGURE 6.4 HERE

Figure 6.4. Dreamton

### Conclusion

In the Cotswolds, the absence of strong associations with specific works or authors, of the kind exemplified by Beatrix Potter in the Lake District, limits the possibilities of one familiar kind of contents tourism; but it opens up the space for a more creative use of the region's landscape. The Cotswolds are a flexible imaginative space, in which both tourists and those who curate tourist sites make use of generalised imagery and narrative associations of folktale, nursery stories and traditional children's

literature, and project them onto the Cotswolds, idealising that region as a site for such contents: rural, set slightly back in time and slightly to one side of history. Within this environment, I have identified three examples of contents tourism associated with the small village of Castle Combe. Each is associated not with a major industry but with a small enterprise owned and promoted by an individual businesswoman: Caron Cooper, Anna Roberts and Marie Haruyama. It is easy for such small-scale enterprises to fly beneath the radar of large tourism organisations and of academic notice, but in fact this literal ‘cottage industry’ is typical of the scale at which tourism in the Cotswolds operates. Its ingredients include the material reality of the Cotswolds themselves, the fantasies and expectations of the people who visit, and the ways in which these are shaped by children’s literature and other existing cultural structures. The varying types and degrees of relationship these enterprises have to narrative contents suggests that the addition of ‘atmosphere’ and ‘thematic qualities’ may in many cases be far more than a way of exploiting or adding to existing contents; it may also constitute those contents.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> There are no official figures for the number of Japanese visitors to the Cotswolds, but an informal survey of retail business owners and staff in Tourist Information Offices across the region suggests that they make up a significant proportion of tourists, and that in those towns and villages particularly promoted in Japan (notably Bourton-on-the-Water, Bibury and Castle Combe) may be the most numerous foreign visitors.

<sup>2</sup> Morris’s words echo even as far as the website of the Hotel Monterey Grasmere in Osaka, the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor of which boasts a reproduction of Brockhampton Church in Herefordshire, which is used for wedding ceremonies. According to the hotel website, ‘The design imitates the churches of the Cotswolds, described by the renowned designer William Morris as the most beautiful in England. Our chapel recreated the beauty of the Cotswolds, from its rolling green hills to its traditional arts and crafts culture.’ This, despite the fact that Morris was not discussing churches, and that Brockhampton (though designed by an Arts and Crafts architect) lies some thirty kilometres outside the Cotswolds (Hotel Monterey [n.d.]).

<sup>3</sup> The case of a yellow car in Bibury, vandalised because it was thought to spoil tourists’ photographs, is one noteworthy example of recent times (‘Notorious Yellow Car’ 2017).

<sup>4</sup> J. K. Rowling was born and brought up near the Cotswolds, but never lived there herself nor set any scenes from the Harry Potter books there. That said, parts of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002) and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2009) were filmed in nearby Lacock, which is built in the Cotswold style and is regularly included in the Cotswold itineraries followed by Japanese tourists.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Lacock boasts a Harry Potter-themed shop, and books such as *The British Television Location Guide* (2013) are on prominent display at the village’s National Trust shop.

<sup>6</sup> Kore Yamazaki’s *The Ancient Magus’ Bride* (2013-) is an example of a story in which both manga and anime make use of Cotswolds settings (including Broadway, Burford and Bourton-on-the-Water), without ever naming any of these locations.