

B36 TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN STRATFORD UPON AVON

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B36 TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN STRATFORD UPON AVON SCRIPT

DATE: 26 JULY 2011

The drive from Ironbridge Gorge to Stratford upon Avon is not that far but involves using Britain's M5 motorway, an I-5 copycat only with greenery. The motorways are three lanes and crowded beyond belief day and night. The trucks are restricted to 55 MPH which is our exact cruising speed. That means we spend our entire freeway existence sandwiched between 18 wheelers. The exit pointing toward Stratford upon Avon was a welcome relief because it meant two lane roads over gentle, rolling hills at the north end of the Cotswolds.



We didn't know what to expect from the city of Shakespeare's birth, life and death.

It certainly has enough of the brick and timber structures to qualify as quaint, including the home of his birth itself.



The rest of the city is a mix of antique, period and modern buildings. While one foot is firmly planted in the past the other is clearly trying to paw its way out of the box. Here in the downtown area we had a pint in the oldest pub in town and walked next door to the Radio Shack lookalike for a GPS battery.

Quaint looking houseboats are tied up at the docks on the River Avon but sit in the shadow of the more modern (and still controversial) design of the Royal Shakespeare Company theater building.



The tower serves no other purpose than to take people to the top for a view of nothing much. Oh, it isn't free either. But, first things first. We had to find the B&B that would offer shelter for the next four nights.



Each new town gives us a chance to exercise our propensity for getting lost...even with the simplest directions. To get into the mood, I'm tempted to insert something Shakespearean, like "Wherefore art thou Church Farm Barns?" but it's too cutsey poo so I won't. Just wanted you to know I was thinking about it.



The name Church Farm Barns is an exact description of its former use. We're told an American was so taken with the area that he converted the existing farm buildings to their present use. The conversion was recent so everything was new and modern except we still had to walk down the hall for a shower and daily relief.



We were greeted by Minty, a woman from India who turned out to be the chief cook, clerk, caretaker and bottle washer for the entire place. She was absolutely fascinated by the MG. Being in one place for several days gave Ray a chance to bring the blog more up to date while Louise put a new slant on the term "room service."



There was a good reason for all this spiffing up. On Tuesday we would visit the Aston Martin manufacturing facility in the nearby rural village of Gaydon, an unusual spot for the assembly of one of the world's most beautiful and exciting vehicles.

The reason became clear when the road signs also pointed to the Jaguar and Rover factories next door. This was the legacy of when all those brands were owned by Ford and proximity must have been considered important in the manufacturing process.





The Aston Martin building is fairly new and distinctly modern featuring a glass-enclosed visitor's reception center capably manned by Lynne Stewart. Our host, Sarah Durose, asked us to come for lunch



so we prepared mentally for a visit to the company cafeteria. Our first surprise of the day was a catered lunch in the client's reception room. This is the place where well-heeled customers come to choose the colors and textures of the high-quality hides that will grace the interior of their newest Aston Martin.



Lunch consisted of an assortment of fruits, quiche, cold meats, several salads topped off with parfaits and Louise's favorite, chocolates.

EUROPE 2011

B36 To Be Or Not To Be In Stratford Upon Avon

We were joined for lunch by Jeanette Green and Melanie Johnson all members of the Aston Martin Racing Team Communications staff that we met a Le Mans. Lunch was followed by a personally guided tour of the Aston Martin manufacturing facility by Simon Stanton.



He is well suited for this role since he began in the body and paint shop. He's been steadily moved up to this position as the face of the company to clients. He not only knows the process but also the people who make it happen. We spoke with various craftsmen at each step of fabrication and assembly and were very impressed with how a modern facility can still produce a product with personality...including signature sign offs along the line. No wonder they begin at 90,000 in U.S. dollars.



Unfortunately, no photographs are allowed inside the factory so these words will have to do. Fortunately for us, we still have the images in our minds. Waiting for us at the end of the tour was Sarah Durose with a final surprise.



Stay tuned. Louise and Ray