

Inside the humble Cotswold village set for stardom

by Fred Redwood

WHY Wigginton? That was the question on the lips of the locals in the Cotswolds with the news that Jay-Z, the richest musical artist in the world, and Beyonce, the fourth-richest female artist, are buying 58 acres of land just outside Wigginton, Oxfordshire, together with planning permission to build a spectacular new country house.

For, to put it politely, Wigginton, with its overgrown verges and closed-down pub, lacks the chocolate-box perfection of classic Cotswolds towns and villages, such as Burford and Bourton-on-the-Water.

'It's probably because Wigginton is more authentic than the tourist honeypots,' says Sharon Barnard, buying agent for Stacks Property Search, which specialises in buying for wealthy Americans. 'It's more real there. People aren't overly impressed when a celebrity moves in – and newcomers like that.'

Not that Jay-Z and Beyonce, with their



Idyll for idols:
Wigginton and, below, Beyonce and Jay-Z

combined fortune of £2 billion, will be doing without life's little luxuries. Their chosen means of transport when visiting their

estate is by helicopter, and their planned mansion will have seven bedrooms and nine bathrooms, with views over a lake.

There are other reasons why wealthy people, particularly Americans, like the Cotswolds. 'Violent crime in the States is a real worry, which makes Wigginton even more appealing,' says Sharon. 'But they also like to be near their own celebrity circles and the neighbouring villages are stacked with high-profile individuals.'

The Beckhams, for example, live in a lavish £12 million estate near Chipping Norton. Their house has its own lake, swimming pool, sauna and football pitch. The couple evidently love country life – in conversation with the Queen recently, David described the satisfaction he got from keeping chickens. Victoria has given a glimpse of their house to Netflix, commenting that they try to get there at weekends as often as they can.

Meanwhile, Kate Moss owns a ten-bedroom Grade II-listed mansion in Little Faringdon, bought in 2012, while the younger generation of royals are also Cotswolds residents. Princess Beatrice, who together with her husband Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi and their three children, live close to Blenheim Palace in a £3.5 million farmhouse with six bedrooms.

Just last year, Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi purchased a stunning £15 million farmhouse. And, despite reports that the mansion has been put on the market due to its lack of facilities for Portia's horses, the couple were recently spotted having a drink with James Blunt at their local pub, the Farmer's Dog, owned by Jeremy Clarkson.

The chic new private members' clubs are favourite meeting places for the great and the good. Soho Farmhouse is just along the road from the Beckham's mansion, making it convenient for them to drop in. The Club by Bamford and The Lakes by YOO, are also nearby and both are

popular with wealthy Americans. Any friends dropping by will likely stay at Estelle Manor, the luxurious 85-acre retreat where a one-night stay can cost up to £6,750.

Although these celebrities evidently enjoy relaxing in each other's company, surely they face difficulty in being accepted by 'average' rural villages? 'That's not true,' says Mark Forest of Seccombes estate agents in North Oxfordshire. 'These are all vibrant communities with lots going on in them in terms of sport and the arts. If people make the effort to join in, then they will be accepted, whoever they are – simple as that.'

The best place to get to know the locals is the pub, and the Cotswolds has some beauties. The Swan Inn at Swinbrook, with its lovely garden on the banks of the River Windrush is a haunt of David Cameron's. The Wild Rabbit at Kingham is renowned for its food – and the Beckhams and Kate Moss are frequent diners. The Fox at Lower Oddington, owned by Baroness Bamford, serves food influenced by Daylesford Organic. The Killingworth Castle, a smart but understated pub near Woodstock and Blenheim Palace, is a favourite among past and present Formula 1 drivers including Jensen Button and George Russell.

The Cotswolds covers 800 square miles and you cannot fail but to be impressed by its honey-golden stone buildings and rolling hills. Property, however, is expensive. The average detached house there is £668,000. Where can you get the best value in the region?

'It's less touristy in the south Cotswolds,' says Adam Lock of Stacks Property Search. 'Try between Cirencester and Stroud, which has an interesting bohemian vibe.'

Sharon Barnard recommends Warwickshire. 'Look in places like Cherington, Brailes and Whichford, all of which are beautiful. Yet you get more house for your money. Or you could try Wigginton. You may be surprised who you bump into.'

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