

Walk H - John Corbett Way (6¾ - 7¼ miles linear walk)

Probably more than anyone else, the "Salt King" changed the character and landscape of both Stoke and Droitwich. The John Corbett Way starts at Avoncroft Arts Centre (close to his matrimonial home at Stoke Grange), goes past Stoke Prior Church where he is buried, through Stoke Works where his fortune was made, on to Wychbold with its Almshouses, then alongside his magnificent Chateau Impney and finally into Droitwich. Most of the farmland was owned by him. Whilst the walk can be done in the day, breaking it into sections makes it easier to describe. Keep a lookout along the Way for the signs of the Raven, his trademark.

Parking is available at the start of the walk and in Shaw Lane (points 5, 6 & 8). The Navigation, Ewe & Lamb and The Crown will probably allow walkers to park but please check. Parking at the end of the walk in the public car park outside Waitrose (point 16).

Note: large parties must make prior arrangements with Avoncroft Arts Centre if using their car park (tel. 01527 833829, e-mail: avoncroftarts@btconnect.com).

SECTION 1

Stoke Heath / Avoncroft Arts Centre - Stoke Works

Easy no stiles. Reasonable footwear. About 2 miles.

1. **Avoncroft Arts Centre.** From the Avoncroft Arts Centre car park, return down the driveway to the A38 and turn left almost on yourself through the gate onto the enclosed path. Cross the driveway leading to Stoke Grange (Corbett's matrimonial home, now occupied by Bromsgrove School). Previously, it had many interesting associations as Avoncroft with the Cadbury family, adult education and farming improvements. Cross the Cricket Ground and leave through the opening and kissing gate.

2. **Ewe and Lamb.** Turn left and left again on signposted and made-up bridleway. The buildings on the right were part of Avoncroft Cattle Breeders one of the earliest artificial insemination establishments. Continue straight ahead where it becomes unmade. Needle Mill Lane was possibly part of a Roman road from Hanbury. In the middle ages the Bishop of Worcester had a road from Stoke Prior to his palace at Alvechurch. Cross River Salwarpe and go up drive to Fish House Lane (Bridleway sign). Turn right and right again through kissing gate in brick wall (Footpath sign). Aldham House was a former vicarage and Ann Aldham painted many of the local buildings in the 1870s.

3. **St Michael's Church.** The present building dates back to the 12th century with a mixture of Gothic features:- Early English, Decorated, Perpendicular. Thanks to Corbett it was largely restored in the late 19th century. His grave together with his brother's is in the churchyard. Go through the churchyard past the War Memorial and through the lychgate. Turn left into Hanbury Road.

4. **Navigation Inn, Stoke Wharf.** Continue to the canal bridge and picnic site. There is a circular permissive walk through woods around the Harris brushworks. Turn right along towpath. The towpath is not a public right-of-way but walkers are permitted to use it. There are refreshments at the café on the Metal Ores Ind. Estate (open weekdays and Saturday morning). Leave at next road bridge.

SECTION 2

Stoke Works - Wychbold Crown or Upton Warren - Corbett Alms Houses

Relatively easy. Stiles. May need boots especially on alternative walk around Nature Reserve after very wet weather.

Salt was known in Droitwich from Roman times. It was confirmed in Stoke with the building of the Worcestershire & Birmingham Canal (1791- 1815) Two independent Salt/Chemical Works were built either side of the canal. John Corbett managed, and then owned the two works dropping the chemical business. His engineering genius was to use cast iron pipes so that brine at the lower depths could be extracted without impurities. Some claim it was the largest Salt Works in Europe. He had his own canal fleet and railway system - the two engines being Raven and Elephant. The business merged into the Salt Union and then ICI. The Eastern side became Uniroyal, producing industrial latex, then passed to Bayers, Polymer Latex and now One Property Group. The Western side became Bayer's Distribution Warehouse, Aliberts and now Corbett Business Park. Plaques outside give a brief history of the site. The playing field was given to the Parish Council by ICI, the last owners of the salt works.

5. Stoke Works - Boat and Railway Inn. Go south past the Boat and Railway and the former village school. Note John Corbett's Raven symbol over the entrance. Until the 1970's there followed Sagebury Terrace, a row of salt-workers cottages, again provided by John Corbett. Each had a garden stretching to the railway. Keep alongside the canal to the Butcher's Arms Cottage.

6. Former St Mary's Church Hall. Turn right by F/P sign (To St Mary De Wyche Church - another Corbett benefaction). Cross the former Midland main line, continue straight ahead initially to the left and then right of the hedge.

7. Great Western Branch. Cross bridge and stile at bottom. Keep straight on for about 25 yards.

For alternative route (shown below) Cross stile on right.

Otherwise continue diagonally left towards church. Go through three gates on farm track and in hedge and leave through gate immediately by church wall.

8 Wychbold Church. Consecrated in 1888 and financed by John Corbett. It was built of Malvern Granite in a 14th century style. Continue left at fork along Stoke road and right into Chequers Lane.

9 Wychbold Crown. You can either turn right for about 500 yards to the John Corbett Alms Houses and then along Section 3 **or** turn left and continue on Section 4 below.

Alternative Route (from step 7 above)

8 Sagebury Farm. Head half left to the opposite corner of the field. Cross stile and then go slightly left down towards the lowest point in the field, close to the lake. Cross stile and go along open track between hedge and fence around the lake.

9. Upton Warren Christopher Cadbury Nature Reserve. This is in two parts with a marked contrast between the saline and fresh water lakes and their bird life. Entry is through the Sailing Centre on the A38. There is a small charge for non-Worcestershire Wildlife Trust members. Go through gate at the end of the track, keeping alongside hedge on left. This becomes the fence around the Droitwich transmitter (Radio 4 long-wave) - note the interesting 1930's buildings. There is an exhibition about the transmitter in St Richard's House at the end of the Way. Cross stiles to road and turn left.

SECTION 3

Upton Warren -Corbett Almshouses - Wychbold Crown

This section might cause problems for those with mobility problems because of the nature and number of stiles. This had been discussed with the County Council. The paths are passable but you can avoid them by continuing along the A38 to the Crown Inn. Good shoes or boots advisable. About 1 mile.

10. Almshouses. [Note the Raven sign] - Retrace your steps along the alternative route and turn left at the footpath sign on the opposite side of the road. Cross the brook and go through side gate and then left over stile. (If you turn right alongside the brook, there is a pleasant walk past Webb's garden area leading back to Upton Warren Church and the Swan/Premier Inn on the A38). Go diagonally across three fields and stiles to Waymarked Post. Turn left along enclosed path and cross two stiles alongside brook. Keep to the right facing old field boundary over stile (waymarked) to a stile in the fence line.

11. Salwarpe Bridge. Cross over the bridge. Turn right and 'half-left' after stile. Go through opening to gate by cottage and into lane for about ¼ mile, ignoring permissive path. Cross stile on right (footpath sign) and go half left to far end with stile just before opposite corner (waymarked). The Right of Way then goes right but, if overgrown, go 'half-left' into the pub car park. To follow section 4, turn right along the A38.

SECTION 4

Wychbold Crown - Droitwich

The path to Rashwood Farm has ladder stiles which can be avoided by keeping to the A38 past the Robin Hood Public House and taking the second lane on the left to reach public bridleway at point 13. Good shoes or boots are advisable. About 3 miles.

12. Crown Inn and Lodge. Turn left along A38 to M5 junction with its Harvester Pub (Wych Way Inn), Mendi Restaurant, Holiday Inn, McDonalds and Post Office. Go under the motorway and take footpath (*footpath sign*) on left immediately by motorway exit. Go through shrub and over stile. Keep alongside motorway across field. Cross three ladder stiles in copse, initially keeping alongside motorway; then follow newly created track. Leave through gate. Go along track along edge of retirement homes. Keep straight on through gate into field and leave by stile with gate.

13. Rashwood Farm. Turn right into farm courtyard. Turn left to gate with bridleway sign. Take bridleway to gate then straight across second field to bridleway gate by parkland.

14. **Chateau Impney.** This was built in French Chateau style. It is currently a hotel with an equally impressive interior. They do morning coffee and afternoon teas - Tel: 01905 774411 - and, if possible, will show the interior.

Continue along bridleway past derelict building and Conference Centre. At the bottom of the yard turn left by No Entry sign along bridleway over railway bridge into enclosed path. Keep straight on alongside back of the houses. Follow path, bearing right to join Impney Way (opposite No 14). Note the viewing platform by the canal tunnel.

15. **Droitwich Canal.** Just like Stoke Works the canals were vital for the import of coal and export of salt. Droitwich is an end-on junction between the canal to the Severn at Hawford which could take vessels from Sharpness and Avonmouth and a narrower link to the Worcester and Birmingham canal. Just beyond the motorway is a large marina and there is a towpath walk all the way back to Stoke Wharf or the 40 mile Wychavon Way to Broadway.

Turn right at the roundabout along the B4090 and then right along the towpath as far as Vines Park, There are various exhibits and a statue to St Richard whose blessings in 1250 saved the Upwich Pit. Look up at the blackened church tower.

16. **Droitwich Town.** Cross the Saltway ring-road and the opposite car parks to reach the High Street. Well worth an inspection. Note all the signs of subsidence - one of the reasons for the salt industry's demise. Go left up St Andrews Street. For the last time note John Corbett's Raven on the side of the hotel. He also built the Worcestershire Hotel, now an impressive apartment building. To the left were the Lido and Highfields Hospital which provided brine bath treatments until fairly recently.

The Way finishes at the Heritage Centre which houses a small museum and tourist information centre. Perversely, while John Corbett was largely responsible for the industrialisation of Stoke, his drive eventually led to the end of salt making in Droitwich and its gentrification. My favourite pub is the Hop Pole in Friar Street.

You can return to Bromsgrove along the Monarch's Way Long Distance Path - it is *only* a total of 128 miles via Boscobell. The path mirrors King Charles's escape from the Battle of Worcester to Shoreham. The train or 145/145A buses will be quicker if more pedestrian but there is also Walk J (John Corbett Return Walk).

Bus Routes

Bus No	Route	Points Served
145	Bromsgrove – Stoke Prior - Droitwich (Mon-Sat)	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 12 & 16
145A		Also links with Bromsgrove station

For times contact Traveline: 0871 200 22 33 www.traveline.info

Trains

West Midlands Railway serves Birmingham -Bromsgrove – Droitwich - Worcester – Hereford.

For train times ring 08457 484950 or visit <http://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/planjourney/search>

If you encounter any problems please ring Worcestershire County Council-Public Rights of Way Section 01905 768289 or visit http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20237/public_rights_of_way

For Tourist Information ring:

Droitwich Tourist Information Centre 01905 774312. They stock a good collection of books and guides.

For ideas on circular walks and more about John Corbett go to www.stoke-pc-worcs.gov.uk

Revised CDJ

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