

The John Corbett Way: Fact File

Start / Finish: Avoncroft Community Arts Centre. GR: SO 951683 (approx). OS Explorer Map 204 'Worcester and Droitwich Spa'. OR Droitwich Spa, Heritage Centre. GR: SO 899632 (approx). OS Explorer Map 204 'Worcester and Droitwich Spa'.

Length: 7½ miles, 6 hours (approx.) at a steady pace.

Parking: Parking is available at the Avoncroft Community Arts Centre, Stoke Works, and Droitwich Spa Town Centre.

Gates and stiles: 8 gates and stiles on the main route, 16 gates and stiles in total if you use the alternative route.

Terrain: Mostly flat, level terrain, some gates and stiles after Stoke Works (see map for details). Depending on the time of year the normally dry surface may be slippery and wet in places.

Waymarking: Simply follow the John Corbett Way 'Raven' symbol (shown right) and direction arrows and you won't get lost.



John Corbett - the 'Salt King' - a 7½ mile linear walk

Probably more than anyone else the Salt King changed the character and landscape of both Stoke and Droitwich. The 'Way' starts at Avoncroft Community Arts Centre (close to his matrimonial home at Stoke Grange), past St Michael's Church, Stoke Prior, where he is buried, through Stoke Works where his fortune was made, on to Wychbold with its Almshouses, then alongside his magnificent Chateau at Impney Hall and finishes at the Heritage Centre in Droitwich Town Centre.

Dual-purpose QR code: Scan the QR code to download our FREE John Corbett Way app. Scan the code again using our app to unlock more fascinating information about the John Corbett Way.

For more information please contact:

Stoke Parish Council

web: www.stoke-pc-worcs.gov.uk

You can find out more about the John Corbett Way at: www.johncorbettway.org.uk



RETURN POSIBILITIES

Return To	From	
Stoke Heath	Stoke Prior	Bus141 Walk B Shorter Alternative
Stoke Heath	Stoke Works	Bus 141 Walk B Bus 141 Bus 144 Walk J Bus 141 or 144 Bus 141 or 144 Walk J Train & Bus 141 or 143 Monarch's Way, 128 Miles
Stoke Heath	Wychbold Church Wychbold Almshouses	Bus 141 Walk B Bus 141 Bus 144 Walk J Bus 141 or 144 Bus 141 or 144 Walk J Train & Bus 141 or 143 Monarch's Way, 128 Miles
Stoke Heath	Wychbold Crown Droitwich	Bus 141 Walk B Bus 141 Bus 144 Walk J Bus 141 or 144 Bus 141 or 144 Walk J Train & Bus 141 or 143 Monarch's Way, 128 Miles
Stoke Prior	Stoke Works	Bus 141 Walk F Bus 141 Walk A then B Canal Towpaths Bus 141
Stoke Prior	Wychbold Church Wychbold Almshouses Droitwich	Bus 141 Walk F Bus 141 Walk A then B Canal Towpaths Bus 141
Stoke Works	Wychbold Church	Bus 141 Walk J then B Walk A Bus 141 Canal Towpaths Bus 141 Walk J then A
Stoke Works	Wychbold Almshouses Wychbold Crown Droitwich	Bus 141 Walk A Bus 141 Canal Towpaths Bus 141 Walk J then A
Wychbold Church	Droitwich	Bus 141
Wychbold Almshouses	Droitwich	Bus 144 Walk J
Wychbold Crown	Droitwich	Bus 141 or 144 Walk J

For details of all Stoke walks please download from parish web site - www.stoke-pc-worcs.gov.uk Please note: Walks A to F are circular, G to J are linear.

Find out more

For more information

Visit Droitwich Spa Heritage Centre in Victoria Square, Droitwich, WR9 8DS or e mail: heritage@droitwichspa.gov.uk

For more general enquiries telephone the Worcestershire Hub on 01905 765765, e-mail: worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk

For up-to-date bus timetable information, call 01905 765765 for a printed timetable or visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/bustimetables

For general journey planning advice visit www.traveline.org

Information correct as of May 2013

The Countryside Code & Safe Walking



- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.
- During or following prolonged wet weather, check the river level by telephoning: [Environment Agency Floodline 0845 988 1188](tel:08459881188).
- Keep children away from the water's edge.
- Always wear suitable clothing.

A Brief history of the 'King of Salt'



John Corbett was born at Delph, Brierley Hill, in Staffordshire on 12 June 1817. He was the eldest child, in the family of 6 sons and one daughter, of Joseph and Hannah (Cole) Corbett. John, the eldest; Mary Anne born 1819, who married Thomas Millward in 1837 (7 children); Joseph born 1822, hotel keeper, who married Jane McDougall about 1843 and probably had 13 or 14 children and emigrated to Australia in 1858; William born 1824, died in infancy, Henry born 1826, tobacconist and coal merchant, married and had 5 children; David born 1830, one child and Thomas born 1833 and died unmarried in 1906 and was buried in the grave next to his elder brother, John.



Joseph and Hannah married at Halesowen, Worcestershire on 13 April 1817.

His father, Joseph, ran a successful business carrying goods and merchandise by canal boat and owned land in both Shropshire and Worcestershire. John attended Mr Gurney's school at Brierley Hill as a child and from the age of eleven helped on his father's boats until he was 23. At the age of 14 he skippered a barge to London.



He devoted much of his leisure time to unaided study of mechanical problems. At age 23, in 1840 he was apprenticed for 6 years to W Lester, chief engineer of Hunt & Brown of the Leys ironworks, Stourbridge.

Following his engineering apprenticeship he became a sleeping partner in his father's business, Corbett & Son of Brierly Hill. A large fleet of boats was maintained between the Staffordshire district and London, Liverpool and Manchester and other commercial centres.



The business was sold in 1852 when the railways started to threaten canal traffic. The Industrial Revolution had made salt a vital mineral for various chemical processes and brine water was plentiful in Worcestershire and close to the canals.

John bought the Stoke Prior salt works near Droitwich, Worcestershire.

This was an unpromising venture. Salt had been discovered here in 1827 and vast sums of money had been spent in the sinking of brine pits and the erection of the salt works. The depth of the brine springs and the inflow of fresh water from neighbouring springs made production costly. Six owners in turn became bankrupt and even when the property was divided between two rival companies there was no better result.

John bought the salt works at Stoke Prior in 1852 from both companies which were on opposite banks of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal.

Within a few years he transformed the enterprise. He lined new brine pits with cast-iron cylinders to prevent the inflow of fresh water. Some were sunk to a depth of 1000 feet. By installing a system of pumps and pipes he was able to double the intensity of the heat and the steam and produced a whiter, more finely grained salt than was obtainable elsewhere.

He supervised the buying of fifty canal boats, the cutting of a tributary from the canal to where the salt was stored, and the building of a railway to carry coal to and from the places which could not be reached by water. He had built a foundry, a wagon factory, fittings shops, saw mills and a brickyard. Seven depots were established in London.

In twenty five years he converted an annual output of 26,000 tons of salt to 200,000 tons and built up a near perfect system of salt manufacture. Besides being a successful salt producer, he was a model employer.

On taking over the works in 1852 John Corbett discovered a very permissive and immoral work force. Due to the steaming hot conditions, both men and women worked alongside each other near naked for six days per week and often sleeping anywhere in the factory. He put an end to female labour in the salt works, which is commemorated by a window in St Michael's Church, Stoke Prior, the money for which was raised by public subscription.

He also built model houses for his work people giving them Wychbold Church, gardens, schools, lecture rooms, a club house and a dispensary and much more. They received rations of beef and coal at special times of the year.

He married, in April 1856, Anna Eliza O'Meara, daughter of William O'Meara of Ireland. Anna had been brought up in France due to her father's works in Paris.

In 1861 he was living at Rigby Hall, Aston Fields, near Bromsgrove, along with his wife, Anna and 3 daughters, Mary Eliza (1858-1951), Anna Camille (1859-1927) who married Captain William Bertie Roberts and Kathleen (or Katherine) Hannah Matilda (1861-1927), who married Charles Nisbett Thrustan. He and Anna later had two sons Roger John (1863-1942) who lived in New Zealand for a number of years and Walter John (1867-1904), who remained unmarried and another daughter Clare (1876-1965) who married Edmund Corbet.

For some time the family lived at The Grange, Avoncroft, near Stoke Prior and John was often seen driving his horse and carriage daily to the works in Stoke Prior.

In 1868 he unsuccessfully contested the Droitwich parliamentary seat against the Conservative candidate Sir John Pakington of Westwood Park and House, Droitwich, Worcestershire.

He and Pakington became rivals and it was partly due to this rivalry and his desire to upstage Pakington that in about 1869 he bought from Lord Somers part of the large estate of Impney near Droitwich and from Athelstan Corbett (no relation) the Manor of Ynys-y-Maengwyn, near Towyn, Wales. Again another very elegant house and grounds.

John Corbett contributed to Towyn development by the erection of an esplanade and sea wall.

At Impney he erected a magnificent French style chateau built in the style of Louise XIII . It took 2 years to build and was completed in 1875. Over time John created stunning formal landscape gardens to complement Impney Hall. It was regarded as one of the finest houses in Worcestershire at the time and was likely to stand for 1000 years. The name was changed in 1947 to "Chateau Impney" when the house opened as a hotel.

In 1874 he was elected as Member of Parliament for Droitwich which he held until 1884, followed by election of MP for Mid-Worcestershire until 1892.

He was never prominent in debate in the Commons however he showed an interest in local taxation, alterations to the law on land tenure and was an advocate of women's suffrage.

He opposed home rule for Ireland and joined the Liberal Unionists in 1886 and was returned with a large majority in 1886. He retired as MP upon dissolution of Parliament in 1892.

In 1889 he sold the salt works to the Salt Union.

John Corbett was the supporter of many philanthropic institutions in the Midlands.

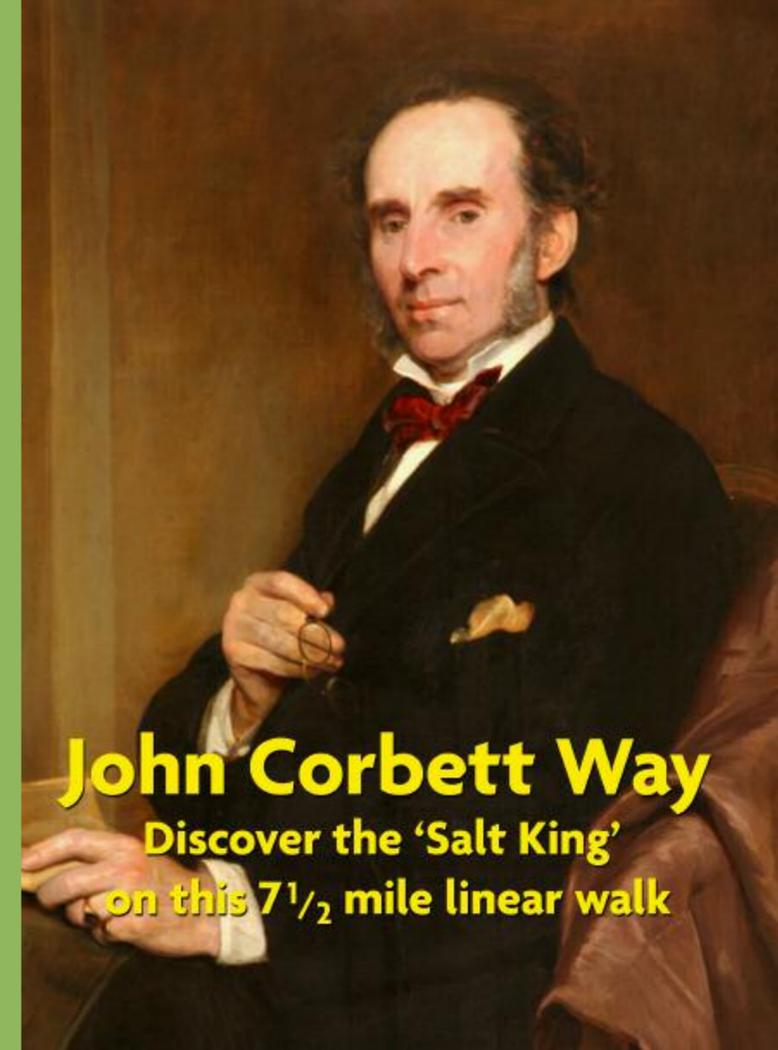
In 1892 he bought 'The Hill' estate at Amblecote, which had stood empty and dilapidated for some years, along with its 30 acres of grounds for £6500. After adding a further £5000 to restore and convert the buildings, he presented both to a board of trustees for the funding of the Corbett Hospital to cater for the local community. The Hospital was opened on 31 July 1893. John Corbett was a much respected philanthropist and many communities benefitted greatly by his generosity.

The Salters Hall, capable of holding 1500 people, was presented to the town of Droitwich. He contributed to the funds of Birmingham University, of which he was a governor and of Bromsgrove Cottage Hospital.

Taking the waters was fashionable at that time and he helped develop Droitwich as a health resort and in 1889 erected the St Andrew's Brine Baths (which were rebuilt twice in the 20th century). He restored the Raven Hotel, then a 16th century house, built the Worcestershire Hotel and established other luxurious hotels. To Brierley Hill he presented a church clock and memorial windows in memory of his parents.

During his life he had become director of a bank, a JP, the Deputy Lieutenant of Merionethshire as well as a Liberal MP.

He died on 22 April 1901 and was buried in the churchyard of St Michael's, Stoke Prior.



John Corbett Way

Discover the 'Salt King' on this 7½ mile linear walk

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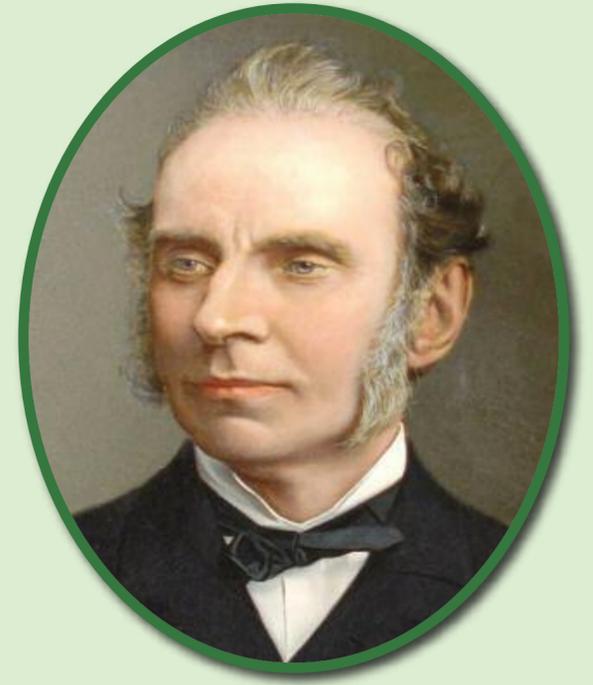
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The John Corbett Way



Probably more than anyone else The Salt King changed the character and landscape of both Stoke & Droitwich. The Way starts at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Stoke Heath, (Close to one of his matrimonial homes at Stoke Grange), 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 is better. Keep a lookout for the signs depicting the Raven, his trade mark.

Section 1

Avoncroft Arts Centre to Stoke Works - Easy, no stiles. Reasonable footwear. About 2 Miles.

Avoncroft Arts Centre The parish council currently maintains its archive here. Much of the material was donated by local industries and historians. If you would like to view the collection please contact John Ellis 01527 570287. From the car park return down the driveway to the A38 and turn left into the enclosed path. Cross the driveway leading to Stoke Grange (One of Corbett's matrimonial homes 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 & leave through the opening and kissing gate.

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. Needlemill 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 1870's.

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.

Navigation Inn, Stoke Wharf. Continue to the canal bridge and picnic site. There is a circular permissive walk through the woods around the L G Harris factory. Turn right along the towpath. The towpath is not a public right of way but walkers are permitted to use it. Refreshments (weekdays) and a shop (summer). Leave at next road bridge.

Section 2

Stoke Works to Wychbold Crown or Upton Warren-Corbett Almshouses Relatively easy. Stiles. May need boots, especially on alternative walk around nature Reserve after very wet weather.

5. Stoke Works to Boat and Railway Inn. Salt was known in Droitwich from Roman times. It was confirmed in Stoke with the building of the Worcester & 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 the brine at 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 were named 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 The One Property Group. The Western side became Bayers distribution warehouse, Aliberts and now Corbett business park. Plaques, outside, give a brief history of the site.

The playing field opposite was given to The Parish Council by ICI, the former owners of the salt works. Go south past the Boat and Railway and the former village school. Note 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 Butchers 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 to the right of the hedge. This is a Geo Cache.

7. Great Western Branch. Cross bridge and stile at bottom. Keep straight for about 25 yards. (For alternative route via Upton Warren, Christopher Cadbury Nature Reserve and John Corbett Alms Houses download walk H on Stoke Parish Website). Otherwise continue diagonally left towards church. Cross stiles on farm track and in hedge and leave through gate immediately by church wall.

8. Wychbold Church. Consecrated in 1888 and partly 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.

8a. Almshouses. For those wishing to see The Corbett Almshouses turn right from Chequers Lane, (Note the Raven sign). Then retrace your steps back to The Crown or use section 3 of the alternative route.

Section 3

Wychbold Crown to Droitwich - The path to Rashwood Farm has ladder stiles which can be avoided by keeping to the A38 past the Robin Hood and taking bridleway on the left. Shoes. About 3 Miles.

9. Crown Inn and Lodge. Turn right along A38 to M5 junction with its Harvester Pub, Mendi Restaurant, Holiday Inn, Mc Donald's and Post Office. Go under motorway and take footpath (F/P) sign on left immediately by motorway exit. Go through shrub and over stile. Keep alongside to motorway across field. Cross three ladder stiles in copse, initially keeping alongside of motorway then bear right along old fence line. Leave through gate. Go along track along edge of retirement homes. Keep straight on through gate into field and leave by stile with gate.

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

Chateau Impney. This was built as a French Chateau in the style of Louis XIII. It is currently a hotel with an equally impressive interior. They do morning coffee and afternoon teas - 01905 774411. Continue along bridle path 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 houses. Follow path bearing right to join Impney Way (opposite No. 14). Note the viewing platform by the canal tunnel.

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 of St Richard whose blessings in 1250 saved the Upwich Pit. Look up at the blackened church tower.

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 is the Lido Park, which was funded by John Corbett. 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. John Corbett's dream was to turn Droitwich into a Spa Town.