This was an unpromising venture. Salt had been discovered here in 1701 and salt works owners were then (and now) heavily dependent on the inflow of fresh water from surrounding aquifers. The depth of the brine springs and the inflow of fresh water from neighbouring springs made production costly. It was necessary to build a huge drainage basin and when the property was divided between two rival companies there was no better result.

John bought the salt works at Storke 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 hired two fine pit shafts with cast-iron cylinders to prevent the influx of fresh water. Some ore was sold to a depth of 500 feet. First, by installing a system of pumps and sluices to control the brine flow. The ore was crushed, the ore and produced a white, more highly purified salt than was obtainable elsewhere.

He supervised the buying of fifty canal boats, the cutting of a tributary from the canal to carry coal and to deliver the brine and products to the places which could not be reached by water. He had built a foundry, a wagon factory, fitting shops, saw mills and brickworks. Seven depot wharves were established in London.

In twenty 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 shrewd businessman. He bought the Stoke Prior salt works near Droitwich in 1865 and was buried in the churchyard next to his elder brother, John.

On taking over the works in 1852 John Corbett discovered a very persistent and immoral workforce. Due to the stealing hot conditions, both men and women worked alongside one another night and day and were often badly treated. He improved working conditions for the workers, set a high salary and a dignified and modern house for the superintendent. He improved the wages and made it more attractive to keep houses at the works.

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 and Anna’s five children, Samuel, Charles, John, W. H. and Thomas. They had added a further 500 acres to his estate in 1865.

In 1868 he unsuccessfully contested the Droitwich parliamentary seat against the Conservative candidate Sir John Pakington of Westwood Park and House, Droitwich. The election was a very close one and he was very upset at the result. He failed to win the Droitwich parliamentary seat.

He died on 22 April 1901 and was buried in the churchyard of St Michael’s, Stoke Prior. He left behind a number of estates and properties in the area, including Alceste and the estate of Alveley in Worcestershire.

Towyn, Wales. Another very elegant house and grounds.

As a result, the Salt King changed the character and landscape of both our FREE John Corbett Way

Our app to unlock more

For more information please contact: Storke Parish Council

web: www.storke-pgr.worcs.gov.uk

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

Start / Finish: Aoncrum Community Arts Centre - GS: SO 951683 (approx)

OS Explorer Map 204 - Worcestershire and Droitwich Spa. OR Droitwich Spa, Heritage Centre. GS: SO 951643 (approx) OS Explorer Map 204 - Worcester and Droitwich Spa.

Droitwich Spa, Heritage Centre, midway between Bewdley, Bromsgrove and Worcestershire and London, Liverpool and Manchester and other commercial centres.

The business was sold in 1852 when the railway started to threaten canal traffic. The Industrial Revolution had made salt a very important product for medicinal purposes and fresh water was plentiful in Worcestershire and close to the canal.

John bought the Storke Prior salt works near Droitwich, and

probably more than anyone else the Salt King changed the character and landscape of both Storke and Droitwich. The ‘way’ starts at Aoncrum Community Arts Centre (close to his monumental home at Stoke Grange), past St Michael’s Church, Storke Prior, where he is buried, through Storke Works where he was a factor in making salt, on to Wychnoold with its Almshouses, then alongside his magnificent Chateau at Impney Hall and finishes at the Heritage Centre in Droitwich Town Centre.

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) 763661 for a printable timetable 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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

The Boat & Railway

On the way:

- Train station with bus links to Wychbold and Droitwich Spa.

- Wychbold Station with Droitwich Spa.

- Low Level Station with bus links to Droitwich and Worcestershire.

- Worcester with bus links to Worcester and Shrewsbury.

The C ountryside C ode

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.

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 998 9988.

- Keep children away from the water’s edge.

- Always wear suitable clothing.
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 Priory 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 up 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 archives 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, down the driveway to the A38 and turn left into the enclosed path. Cross the drainage 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 unsurfaced. Needlecliff 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 Alcester. 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 (1791-1805). Two independent salt/chemical works were built either side of the canal. John Corbett managed and then owned the two works, stopping 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 Unroyal, producing industrial lateral, then passed to Bayers, Polymer Latex and now The One Property Group. The Western side became Bayers distribution warehouse, Alberts 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 Sapebury 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.

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.

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 Gero Cache.


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.

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.

8. Wychebold 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.