The Great Malvern ‘Alternative Town Centre Walk’

This is an abridged version of walk 4, from the ‘Pictorial Guide to the Malvern Hills’ Book Two: Great Malvern Available from the Tourist Information Centre, Malvern Book Co-operative, Malvern Gallery, Malvern Museum and Malvern Priory.

Priced £8.50

This historically rich and culturally diverse circular walk around Malvern town centre and onto the lower slopes of the Worcestershire Beacon is unusual in that it visits nooks and crannies not often seen or appreciated by visitors to Malvern. Allow 1 hour without refreshment stops for which there are many!

The Abbey Hotel

On departing the Abbey Hotel note the blue plaque to the most famous guest to enjoy the comfort of the Hotel, Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia, who spent time here whilst in exile. Opposite is the delightful Promenade Gardens complete with fountain first opened in 1880. To the right is the Priory Gatehouse, one of two buildings surviving from the Benedictine monastery and is home to the Malvern Museum of Local History and is open daily from 10.30 am.
After passing through the Priory Gatehouse, head left up the steep incline to the Wells Road (A449). Continue for a few hundred metres away from the town to the former Tudor Hotel and now apartments, Map Reference SO 7748 4569. This was Dr. James Gully’s, water cure establishment. Admire the attractive ‘Bridge of Sighs’ linking the two buildings. Continue a short distance up the Wells Road and cross over near the ‘Great Malvern’ sign onto the grass via the steps. Return towards the town through the large iron gates of the Rose Bank Gardens past the rhododendron bushes towards the three seats overlooking Malvern’s wonderful Buzzards sculpture. This is also the location for the start of the annual Beacon Race.

Ahead is the Mount Pleasant Hotel. There is a small plaque amongst the roses and shrubs in memory of Sir Edward Elgar 1857-1934. Continue up the path and the ‘99 Steps’. On reaching the top, walk down St Ann’s Road to the distinctive tall Italianate building, formerly the Aldwyn Tower Hotel. The blue plaque describes how Franklin Delano Roosevelt convalesced there aged 7 in 1889.

Continue to the junction, to the right is the steep downhill sections of St Ann’s Road. Our ‘alternative walk’ goes straight ahead following the small footpath adjacent to the large Malvern stone wall of number 34 Happy Valley. The path emerges through a heavy wrought iron gate a short distance from the Holly Mount United Reformed Church. Follow the path down the side of the church and through the wrought iron gate decorated with green apples into the ‘Labyrinth’, which claims to be an ancient form of pilgrimage for those unable to make the journey to the Holy Land. It is attractively laid out and is quite secluded, making this an ideal spot for contemplation.

On leaving this ‘alternative’ Holy Land, the walk passes by the icon of twentieth century retail extravagance, the Brays departmental store in the Worcester Road. Map Reference SO 7749 4617. Continue down the Worcester Road and on the opposite side to the Kosihaus store is Montreal House where Charles Darwin and his daughter stayed. The blue plaque commemorates the bicentenary of the birth of Darwin.
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Montreal House

Return, and opposite Brays the small footpath tucked next to Burton House leads down into the Waitrose car park. Walk towards the vehicle exit and on the left down a small flight of steps is the Rose Gully Spring in Back Lane. The spring and the surrounding feature recognises Dr Gully who was well known for establishing the water cure in Malvern.

Return along the unmade road towards the exit of the supermarket with Green Link Organic Foods lower down the slope and turn right up the steep Edith Walk to the wonderfully unusual ‘Theatre of Small Convenience’. This is well worth a visit to experience an eclectic performance in reputedly the smallest theatre in the world. After enjoying the show, walk back down and turn right into Church Walk past the supermarket and Benedictos Italian Restaurant onto the steeply sloped Church Street.

Turn left, opposite is Cecilia Hall hidden between two attractive bow fronted glass windows of the Oxfam Shop. Elgar rented the hall for his pupils taking violin lessons. Cross over the traffic lights to the entrance of the estate agents. Here you will see a small brass plaque describing the former Malvern Town Gentlemen’s Club where Elgar and other gentleman took refuge.
Continue a short distance to the Malvern Theatre which is well worth visiting to view the various art displays and the fascinating water clock high up on the balcony bar along with Elgar’s bust. Do take time to admire the ornate Winter Gardens Fountain with four cherubs sitting on a marble basin near the restaurant entrance. Continue out of the theatre down the steps to the well groomed Winter Gardens. Head towards the children’s play area where amongst the mature Cedar trees is carved a sculpture of a woman diving into the sea accompanied by a fish and otter, in keeping with Malvern’s water theme. Stroll towards the Victorian bandstand and cross over the pretty wooden bridge above the Swan Pool, originally the Benedictine monks source of freshwater fish for their meals. Ahead is the ‘Splash’ sports complex.

Turn right alongside the pool past the attractive brick/stucco arches to an alleyway on the left where a little way down is Spa Cottage built in the 1840’s. The Chalybeate Well under this cottage was visited by people seeking a cure for their ailments during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Return to the Swan Pool, turn left and take the exit through the stone and brick gateway, turn to the right through the attractive Winter Gardens and past The Malvern Bowls Club. The path leads up to a small blue wrought iron gate, Map Reference SO 7771 4572. Turn to the right onto Orchard Road. The theatre and Priory are to the right.
Continue left onto Abbey Road to the magnificent Park View House opposite the Malvern Baptist Church. Look out for the green plaque on the wall of the impressive duck-egg-blue painted building built in 1845. This was formerly the first large scale, purpose built hydropathic establishment in England.

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