

The Cherry Tree, Stoke Row

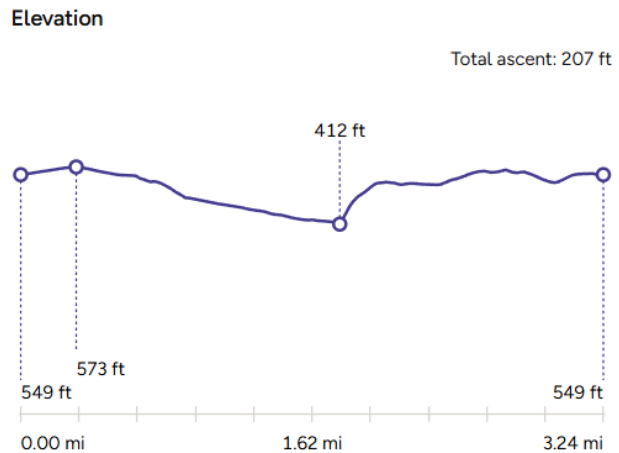
The Maharaja's Well Walk, 3.25 miles

OVERVIEW

The route begins with one of Oxfordshire's most unusual landmarks.

Leaving the pub, a short stroll along the village street brings you to the Maharaja's Well, built in the nineteenth century after a donation from the Maharaja of Benares to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

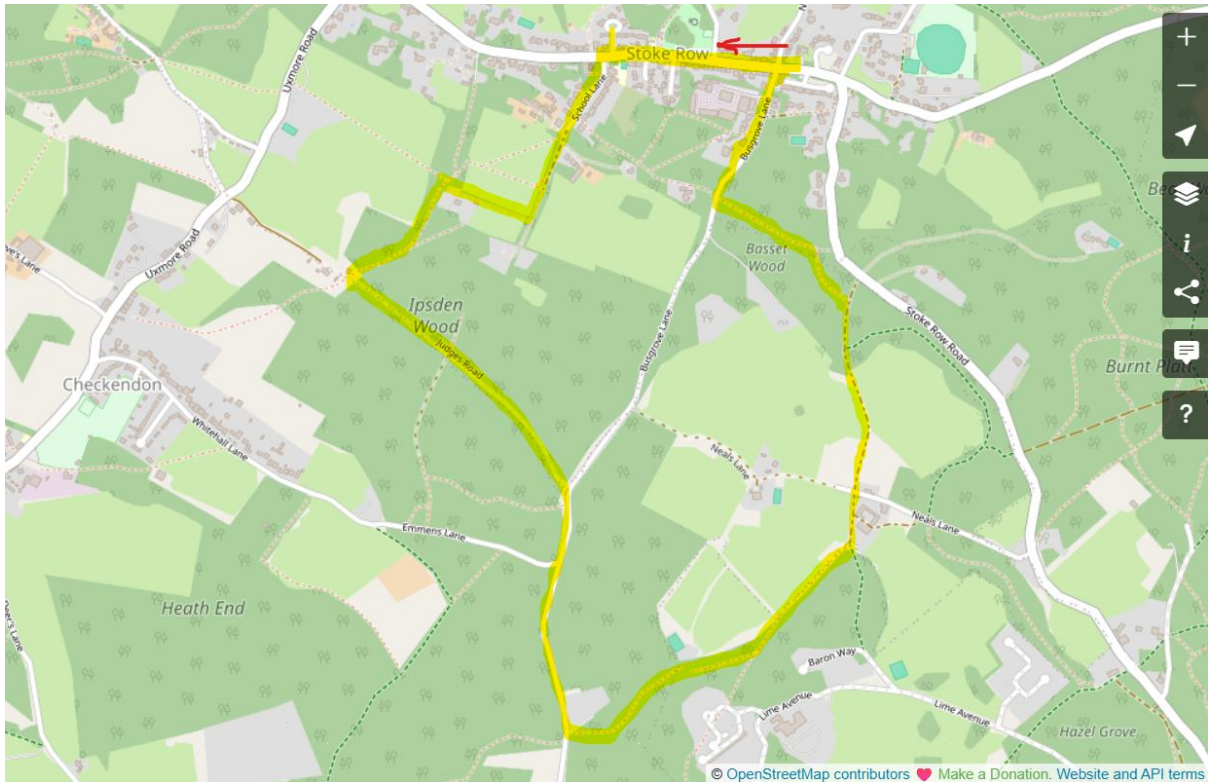
It is an extraordinary sight in a small English village and a reminder of connections that once stretched across the British Empire.



Beyond the village, the walk explores the wooded heart of the Chiltern Hills through a mixture of quiet lanes, shady woodland paths and estate tracks. This is principally a woodland walk, offering a calm and sheltered escape before returning along a designated Quiet Lane to Stoke Row and The Cherry Tree.

Start/Finish	The Cherry Tree, Main Road, Stoke Row, Henley on Thames, RG9 5QA. 01491 282975.		
Parking	At the Cherry Tree.		
Grid Reference	SU 683 840		
What3Words	///meanwhile.powder.retiring		
Distance	3.25 miles / 5.2 km	Time 1.5 hrs	Ascent 200 ft / 65 m
Paths/Terrain	Pavements, lanes, footpaths, woodland tracks.		
Difficulty	Easy		
Public Transport	There's a Reading to Watlington bus service that passes through the village; and another between Woodcote and Henley.		
Toilets	At the pub.		
Other Pubs Nearby	The Crooked Billet in Stoke Row is more restaurant than pub, but worth visiting; The Rising Sun at Highmoor Cross; The Black Horse at Checkendon; and the Unicorn on Kingwood Common are good. Also see my pub walk entry for The Red Lion at Peppard Common.		

DIRECTIONS



1. Leave The Cherry Tree, turning right up Stoke Row's main road. Pass the excellent village store and café on the other side of the road. You'll soon reach the Maharaja's Well.
2. St John the Evangelist Church is slightly further on. Cross over to follow School Lane. After the last house, Beech End, the road becomes a farm track with fields either side, separated by hedges.
3. Keep following this track, ignoring the first footpath sign on your right. Instead, take the Permissive Footpath that's signposted, running at a right angle to the track. It follows the field edge straight ahead.
4. Continue to the end of the field, and stick with the well-marked path into woodland. Stay left. There's a tumble down shed on your left.
5. Stay on this woodland path. You'll come to a yellow way marker, next to a fence running on your right. Follow the direction of the marker, slightly downhill.
6. The path briefly emerges from the woodland, with a cottage a little to the right. Turn left here, back into the woodland. This is called Judges Road.
7. Continue straight ahead through the woods, until the path emerges onto a road, called Busgrove Lane. Follow this road, passing a lane – Emmens Lane - joining from the right-hand side.

8. Again, continue straight ahead until you come to houses on your left. Smithy Cottage and Harewood House. Just beyond the second house, a footpath leads to the left into the woods, signposted Stoke Row 1 ½ miles.
9. This leads into the woodland of Wyfold Court, a house that will remain hidden to us. Wyfold Court is a Grade II* listed mansion, built between 1874 and 1876 for Edward Hermon, a renowned Mancunian cotton magnate and a Member of Parliament for Preston. Designed by George Somers Clarke, a pupil of Sir Charles Barry who had helped to prepare the drawings for the Houses of Parliament, the house was reputed to be one of the grandest houses in England reflecting the French Flamboyant Gothic style. The mansion was converted into eleven apartments in the late 1990s by the PJ Livsey group under the guidance of English Heritage, thus retaining many of the original features.
10. Go uphill on this woodland path, then through a gate. Continue on the path until you reach a lane in front of the Wyfold Disability Riding Centre. Head to the right on the lane, then follow way markers into woodland again, with the fields of the riding centre to your left. (Hidden out of sight in the woods on your right is Wyfold Court).
11. Continue to follow this path until you reach Neal's Farm. Turn left here on a track that leads in front of the farm. Cross Neals Lane, continuing straight ahead, following the bridleway sign.
12. There are fields either side of you for a while here, before the track once again re-enters woodland. After a driveway that drops down to the left, intriguingly called Moonraker, look for a path on the left-hand side that runs next to a rail fence.
13. This path deviates left after a time, and soon leads onto a 'Quiet Lane' (it's Busgrove Lane again).
14. Turn right here and make your way back into the village. At the junction, The Cherry Tree is to your right.

NOTES: The Maharaja's Well: A Chiltern Story with an Indian Heart

At first glance, the Maharaja's Well seems entirely out of place in a small Oxfordshire village. Its ornate canopy and distinctive design hint at a story far beyond the Chiltern Hills.

The well was commissioned in 1864 by the Reverend Thomas Stevens, the vicar of Stoke Row, to provide a reliable source of clean drinking water for villagers.

Funding came from an unexpected benefactor: the Maharaja of Benares, who donated £200 after Stevens had spent time working in India. The gift reflected a friendship formed thousands of miles away and resulted in one of England's most unusual village landmarks.

Today the well stands as a reminder of the global connections that existed during the Victorian era. While many villages possess a traditional well or pump, few can claim one funded by Indian royalty. More than 160 years after its construction, it remains Stoke Row's defining landmark and one of Oxfordshire's most distinctive curiosities.