



# springtime in

# Great Malvern

Sally Rowland takes to Great Malvern where the hills provide a stunning backdrop to the thriving town and where generations of writers and artists have found inspiration thanks to its natural beauty.

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Malvern, famous for its Spa water, the Morgan Motor Car and above all its rolling hills is a magical place which has a gothic elegance and natural beauty about it that comes into its own in the spring and summer. From the hills you can see some of England's grandest views, towards the Cotswolds, northwards to Shropshire and westward to the Brecon Beacons and the Black mountains of Wales. Add to this a busy town centre, thriving arts and cultural scene, a huge variety of restaurants and a spring show to rival Chelsea, and it is easy to see why Malvern has become a magnet for townies looking for slice of civilised country life.

Designated an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty it dips into Herefordshire, Worcestershire and a small part of Gloucestershire and the famous hills provide not only an inspirational backdrop but are the source of many great springtime walks. The Malvern Hills are a nine mile range of ancient rocks, the best known feature being the ridge that runs almost perfectly from North to South and provides ideal walking conditions and stunning views. The Victorian town lies at the northern end of the hills on the Worcestershire side and there is direct walking access (very steep so be prepared for a 20 minute hike up) from the town via St Ann's Road to Happy Valley and St Ann's Well and café – a perfect spot for a delicious and very peaceful lunch after the vertical challenge. The town's magnificent natural setting is celebrated this month too with a series of organised walks organised by the Malvern Walking Festival which runs from June 6th-9th and this year includes over 28 guided walks such as a sunrise walk, a children's treasure hunt in Priory Park and a linear 11 mile Malvern Hills 'End to End' walk.

Famous for its Spring Gardening Show every May, Malvern's RHS show is regarded as the celebratory prelude to the gardening year. It is like a mini Chelsea in a less competitive and more relaxed atmosphere. Although there may not be quite as much variety as Chelsea, for those who would rather not brave the crowds, it is a great alternative and gives the town a perfect platform to showcase its gardening heritage.

Within weeks it is the turn of the Three Counties Show from June 13th-15th, which attracts visitors from all over the neighbouring counties. Started in the 18th century it is thought to be the world's oldest agricultural show and farming is still at the heart of the show with displays this year of top pedigree livestock, angora and dairy goats, native breed cattle championships and a wool handling competition to name but a few. For those seeking some adrenaline there is a great line up of events in the main arena with the theme for 2008 of 'Services' with displays by the Equimax Metropolitan Police Activity Ride, the White Helmets and The Red Devils. The Country Living Village Fair will feature the best of local arts and craft products and there will be a regional food and drink village showcasing the best local produce too.

Malvern's arts scene is as vibrant this spring as ever. It is a place that has famously inspired generations of writers and artists including George Bernard Shaw, Sir Edward Elgar and CS Lewis who famously found inspiration for his classic book 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' in the town. The story goes that after drinking in a Malvern pub one winter evening with 'The Hobbit' and 'Lord of the Rings' author JRR Tolkien they walked home as it started to snow. They saw a lamp post shining out through the snow and Lewis turned to his friend and said 'that would make a very nice opening line to a book.' The rest as they say is history and you can still see one of the famous Malvern lamps in the Priory Church Yard.

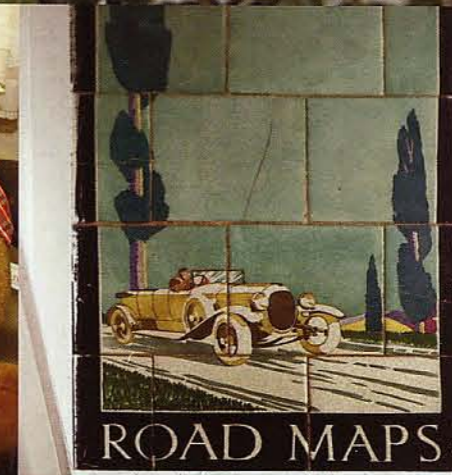
That cultural legacy continues today with the Malvern Theatre, an Edwardian building which has been transformed into one of the most innovative regional theatres in the country, frequently playing host to pre and post West End London plays. In June you can catch a dazzling comedy called 'The English Game' exploring the modern British psyche through the lens of the game of cricket or in complete contrast an Agatha Christie murder mystery 'And Then There Were None'. There is also a great cinema in the light and airy complex which screens a mixture of current and art house releases. Later in the year make a note to catch the 'Autumn in Malvern' Festival which offers a



The historic Abbey Hotel The Abbey offers its guests amazing views of Vale of Evesham and the Malvern Hills.



A statue of composer Edward Elgar, overlooks the town centre and is adorned with flowers in keeping with the Malvern Spring Gardening Show.



Close to the town centre, Priory Park offers visitors a pretty open space with ornate bandstand and water fowl lake.

'FROM THE HILLS YOU CAN SEE SOME OF ENGLAND'S GRANDEST VIEWS'

feast of classical music, film, literature and art events with this year's highlight being a concert in Malvern Priory, by the St Petersburg String Quartet.

If high culture and natural beauty were not enough, just walking around the fine Victorian town with its gothic architecture and crested turrets (don't miss the leafy roads around Malvern College which boasts some fine Victorian houses adorned with intricate stone work and high arches) is a pleasure in itself. The town has resisted chain store domination and thanks to the steep hillside setting (you could get fabulously toned legs living here!) it is an unconventional commercial centre. Think of 'the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker' and you get the idea of what a diverse choice of independent shops there are here. The main drag is along Church Street and Belle Vue Terrace as well as Priory Steps tucked behind The Priory's historic churchyard. There is an eclectic mixture of antique shops, independent clothes shops like 'Isis' and 'The Dressing Room' as well as some highly sought after charity shops which go to prove that the lucky ladies of Malvern certainly pass on some desirable designer clobber.

For food take your pick from Thai, Italian or traditional British restaurants like Priors Croft opposite the theatre, or the simple Blue Tea Rooms, Leaf Café or the splendid art nouveau tiled cafe Pepper and Oz next to the museum. Malvern is a town confident in its individuality and established style, so whenever you feel the need to 'head for the hills' this is a town which really does seem to have it all. **CS**