

Midsomer Norton Audio Trail - Introduction

[Ambient sound: Medieval market sounds, medieval music, coal mining, general industrial]

This is Midsomer Norton. You may have lived here all your life, or maybe it's your first time on these streets. Either way, you're very welcome here. Today we'll be guiding you through over 1,000 years of history along our High Street, brought to life with local voices both past and present, real and imagined. Follow the map to explore the twelve stops along this route. You'll cross the road in a few places, so please take care as you go.

Midsomer Norton's history is fascinating, but it's also a bit of a tease; there's loads we don't know, and may never know unless we find new evidence in old documents or archaeological digs. So much of the past still lies buried underneath our feet. So what you'll discover today is a mixture of what we can be certain about and what we can only guess. There's something quite exciting about that.

Long ago, the local community was made up of two big estates, held by rich landowners. In the 1200s, one of those estates came into the hands of a rising young knight called Hugh de Vivonne. In 1242, the King gave Hugh permission to hold Thursday markets at his manor, and six years later he began hosting an annual summer fair too. Fairs were noisy

celebrations where medieval traders sold fine goods like spices, textiles and tools, and crowds were entertained by processions of dancers, actors and musicians. These markets and fairs continued in various shapes and forms over the following centuries and have become an important part of our town's identity today, shaping a lot of what you'll see along the trail.

Another big part of the town's history comes from its links to the mining industry. On your way, you'll see how Midsomer Norton flourished after the discovery of the Somerset coalfield. Big private houses were built, like the Hollies, the Old Priory and the neighbouring Hole in the Wall, not to mention those in the Island and in Silver Street. Meanwhile, rows and rows of cottages were built for working class people contributing not just to the mining industry, but to brewing, boot and shoe making, paper making and printing too. The growing community was served by a variety of churches, pubs, and the market hall - some of which we'll see shortly.

In many ways, Midsomer Norton is a typical rural Somerset town. Yet many people who have walked these streets have found something special here. The famous author Evelyn Waugh used to visit for his summer holidays, staying with his grandparents who lived near the bottom of Silver Street. He wrote:

Voice 1: I suppose that in fact I seldom spent longer than two months there in any year, but the place captivated my imagination as my true home never did.

We hope that this place might capture your imagination, too.