

## **2 Midsomer Norton Audio Trail - St. John's Church**

*[Ambient sound: church bells, medieval choral music, funeral cart]*

The building you're looking at is old, but it would have astonished people living here one thousand years ago. There was probably a church back then, but it would have been much smaller and under the control of the main church in Chewton. The small settlements of Norton and neighbouring Welton were really just outlying farms in those days.

Change came after William the Conqueror invaded England in the 1100s. He and his descendants gave property around here to their loyal followers, to be held "for as long as it shall please the King". In the 1100s a group of Friars from Merton Priory in Surrey were given some land and constructed a grand stone church. In about 1150 they appointed Norton's first recorded vicar, named Sir Bricius.

The church in Chewton also kept some property here, and there were many arguments over who actually controlled St. John's and who had the right to conduct funerals and other ceremonies, or who would receive local peoples' annual tax payments. Some people from Welton, when they died, had to be carried five miles across country on farm carts just so they could be buried at Chewton. What long sad journeys they must have been!

Over the next few centuries the Norton friars became richer and more influential. In the 1400s they added arches, vaults, buttresses and stained glass to their church. They heightened the tower and added an impressive band of decorated quatrefoils, a bit like four-leaf clovers, along the roofline.

Look up to the tower – can you see a regal looking statue under the clock face? In the 1600s, while he was visiting Welton, King Charles II was so upset by the sound of the old and cracked church bells that he decided to pay for some new ones. The statue was set into the south side of the tower in recognition of the King's gift. Over the years other improvements were made, but by the 1800s the church had fallen into such a bad state of repair that it was pulled down and completely rebuilt to serve Midsomer Norton's rapidly growing population.

Most of what survives today is from that rebuild – but if you know where to look, you can still see traces of the medieval St. John's around the site as well as in various places around the town. Some of the old stonework exists in the garden of the old vicarage in North Road, and a few of those quatrefoils are set into its walls. There is another one in the end of the Council Chamber in the High Street – look carefully!

Before heading to the next stop, take a moment to step inside the church. Here, you'll see the Norman font and the intriguing remains of a timber tomb effigy known as the Midsomer Norton Knight.