

Midsomer Norton Audio Trail

Town Park

[Ambient sound: Coal mining, explosion, train tracks, steam engine, modern town]

Take a moment to step into our new Town Park, where the echoes of history intertwine with the vibrant present. It may look peaceful now, but for nearly 200 years it was a busy industrial hub.

The high, tree-covered ridge over to your right is what local people call the “batch”. This ridge isn’t natural - it’s actually a pile of waste from New Pit, which lay just beyond it. Coal mines were dangerous places and this one is remembered for a deadly incident that took place on 9 April 1908...

Voice 1: Make sure you damp it down!

Voice 2: Stand back from the coalface!

The workers fired explosives without dampening down the dust, resulting in an earth-shaking explosion which killed ten men. Rescuers courageously went down to look for survivors, and later they were presented with bravery awards by the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Nestled alongside New Pit was the Somerset & Dorset Railway, a lifeline that transported vast quantities of coal from this very site.

Voices: All Aboard!

Originating in the Midlands, the railway journeyed south, tracing a scenic route past Bristol, through Bath, over the picturesque Mendips, before finally reaching Bournemouth. Though its tracks fell silent in 1966, it is remembered fondly by local people. Fortunately, the station itself found a new lease of life, lovingly restored by the Somerset and Dorset Railway Heritage Trust. Visit today and you'll find a journey back in time through its museum, nostalgic train rides, and a preserved signal box.

The batch itself was reached via a high walkway that crossed the railway. The waste was taken across in tubs and the tip quickly expanded. Deserted houses and a pub were buried underneath it and when mining ended it was far higher than it is now. Within a decade it had been levelled out and flattened, and now it offers a spectacular view over our town. Access steps are to the left of the amphitheatre, which lies at the eastern end of the batch.

You can walk alongside the River Somer to where it opens out after 150 metres. On your way, take a look at the outflow from the relief tunnel that was built to stop flooding on the

High Street. The path continues towards the road to Radstock, or you can turn right and climb onto the Greenway path that has been laid where the trains used to run. Alternatively, head back into the High Street to browse our friendly independent shops, or enjoy a bite to eat, take in the atmosphere - and imagine Midsomer Norton in- the years gone by.

CREDITS

Myths and Memories of Midsomer Norton High Street trail was written by Nick Waton and Monica Evans, with contributions from the Merriman Theatre Company and the charity Sound Vision, and production by Somer Valley FM. It was created as part of Midsomer Norton's Cultural Programme, a strand of Historic England's High Streets Heritage Action Zones scheme. The Cultural Programme is led by Midsomer Norton Cultural Consortium and Midsomer Norton Community Trust, and is supported by Bath & North East Somerset Council and funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Heritage High Street Fund; the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Future High Streets Fund; and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.