

NORTON FITZWARREN

Norton Fitzwarren lies two miles WNW of Taunton, in the former hundred of Taunton Deane.¹ The village, along the road from Taunton to Milverton, is dominated by the parish church which stands on rising ground above the road.

Called Nortone in 1086, Nortun by Tantone, c.1100, Northtone in 1489 and Norton Veel by Taunton from 1343 to 1633, reflecting the ownership of the manor by the le Veel family, which ceased before the end of the 14th century, it possibly takes its name from ‘north tūn’, a settlement north of another or of the river Tone. The parish was also called Norton Pyntley in 1548 and in an Elizabethan Chancery case.² The manor was named Norton Fitzwarren by c.1560 from the Fitzwarrens, lords from the later 15th century, the name by which the parish was later known.³

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT AND BUILDINGS

BOUNDARIES AND PARISH ORIGINS

In 1840 Norton Fitzwarren was bounded on the north by Bishops Lydeard and Kingston St Mary, east by Staplegrove, south by Bishop’s Hull and Bradford on Tone, and west by Hillfarrance and Heathfield and covered 1,304 a.⁴ By the Somerset Review Order of 1933 it was amalgamated with Heathfield civil parish and covered 2,054 a. in 1939, its extent in 2000.⁵

LANDSCAPE

¹ This article was written in 2018, revised in 2026.

² Suff. RO Bury St Edmunds, 449/4/2; TNA, C 2/ELIZ/P11/52.

³ TNA, STAC 5/T34/20; STAC 7/6/22; Ekwall, *English Place-Names*, 344-5.

⁴ SHC, tithe map.

⁵ *Kelly’s Dir. Som.* (1939); R. Johnson, *100 Years of Norton Fitzwarren* (Norton Fitzwarren, 2000), 2.

Norton Fitzwarren parish lies largely on sandstone, with North Curry sandstone at Knowle Hill. Quaternary alluvium north of the River Tone extends north-west along Halse Water and the West Somerset Railway. Norton Camp prehistoric hillfort is situated on ancient river deposits 50 m. above sea level, in contrast to the surrounding streams at 25 m., suggesting that it represents the remains of a gravel valley floor before the surrounding surfaces were worn away. The Halse water from the Brendon Hills and its offshoot Norton brook unite south of Norton village and join the Back brook, which formed most of the boundary with Staplegrove, to discharge into the Tone. The southern boundary with Bishops Hull followed a lost watercourse.⁶

COMMUNICATIONS

Roads

The Taunton to Milverton and Wiveliscombe road passes east to west through the centre of the village. In 1740 Norton Fitzwarren was discharged from a fine for not having repaired its section.⁷ In 1752 the Taunton Trust turnpiked the road as far as Wiveliscombe. Widening proposed in 1839–40 was not carried out.⁸ It is now a minor but busy road, the B3227. The Taunton to Minehead road, also turnpiked in 1752, runs north-west across the parish past Langford and is the present A358.⁹ A side road through Langford connects the Minehead and Kingston roads crossing the Back brook or stream by Barhams Bridge recorded in 1725.¹⁰ East of the village Montys Lane links the Wiveliscombe and Minehead roads north of Knowle Hill and another lane runs south to Allerford and Hillfarrance.

⁶ Geol. Surv. Map, 1:50,000, sheet 295 (1984 edn.); H. Prudden, *Geology and Landscape of Taunton Deane*, 76.

⁷ SHC, Q/SR/308/97.

⁸ J.B. Bentley and B.J. Murless, *Som. Roads*, 56; SHC, Q/RUP/148; Q/RUO/35.

⁹ Bentley and Murless, *Som. Roads*, 55.

¹⁰ SHC, DD/SP/44 (1735).

Station Road, from the Wiveliscombe turnpike to the site of the railway station, was formerly a private carriage road of Charles Noel Welman. In 1876 the vestry accepted his proposal to dedicate it and took responsibility for its maintenance.¹¹ The bridge over the Norton Brook was replaced in 2021.

Railways

By 1844 the Bristol and Exeter Railway had been extended from Taunton to Exeter through Norton Fitzwarren south of the village. The West Somerset line, authorised in 1857, was completed to Watchet in 1862 and extended to Minehead in 1874 and the Devon and Somerset Railway to Barnstaple opened as far as Wiveliscombe in 1871. Both lines branched off the main line at Norton junction.¹²

A station opened at Norton Fitzwarren in 1873 handling local passenger services only; long-distance services did not stop there. The West Somerset railway built a goods siding at Norton Bridge in 1872.¹³ Following a parish council request the Great Western Railway agreed to provide a corrugated iron goods shed and a 30-cwt crane at Norton station in 1895.¹⁴ In 1931 Norton station was enlarged with two island platforms and in 1936 the track quadrupled to accommodate increased traffic. A signal box erected in 1932 was extended in 1936. Track widening apparently necessitated the demolition of the stationmaster's house but not the Railway Hotel.¹⁵ In 1936 a new stationmaster's house was planned near the Congregational church.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid. D/P/n.fitz/9/1/2 (Jul. 1876).

¹² C. R. Clinker and C. van den Arend, *The West Somerset Railway* (rev. edn) (Dulverton, 1989), 4; C. Maggs, *The Taunton to Barnstaple Line* (1980), 11, 20.

¹³ I. Coleby, *The Minehead Branch 1848-1971* (Witney, 2006), 131, 135, 140.

¹⁴ SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/6, 2-5, 24-7.

¹⁵ Coleby, *Minehead Branch*, 132-3, 135, 139, 141.

¹⁶ SHC, D/R/ta/24/2/144.

Norton junction was the scene of two serious accidents. In November 1890 a passenger train ran into a stationary goods train and ten passengers were killed.¹⁷ A sympathetic jury acquitted the signalman charged with causing the disaster.¹⁸ On 4 November 1940 the driver of a Paddington to Penzance train misunderstood the signals, resulting in a crash with 27 fatalities, mainly naval personnel.¹⁹

Norton station closed to passenger traffic in 1961 and to goods traffic in 1964, although a private siding for Taunton Cider's factory operated until the 1980s.²⁰ Both branch lines were recommended for closure under the 1963 Beeching Report. The Minehead branch closed to freight traffic in 1964 and to passenger traffic in 1971 and the last service on the Barnstaple line ran in 1966. The Minehead line remains open as the West Somerset heritage railway.²¹ From 1940 railway sidings served the military supply depot, which closed in 1966.²²

Post, carriers, buses and telecommunications

By 1856 telegraph works in the village were jointly owned by the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company and the Electric Telegraph Company.²³ There was a postwoman by 1851 whose daughter-in-law kept the village post office, open by 1861.²⁴ The post office closed in 2017 but a counter opened in a local supermarket.²⁵

By 1923 Norton Fitzwarren village was on the bus route between Taunton and Wiveliscombe, with four buses on weekdays and two on Sundays.²⁶ In 1946 the morning

¹⁷ TNA, RAIL 1053/79/35.

¹⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 24 Nov. 1890, 6.

¹⁹ TNA, RAIL 1053/126/211.

²⁰ Coleby, *Minehead Branch*, 135.

²¹ Maggs, *Taunton to Barnstaple Line*, 19-20; Clinker and van den Arend, *West Som. Railway*, 46-7, 50.

²² TNA, EW 22/92.

²³ SHC, Q/RUP/255.

²⁴ TNA, HO 107/1923; RG 10/2375; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1861).

²⁵ *Norton News*, Oct. 2017, 5; Dec. 2017, 1, 5.

²⁶ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1923).

service was inadequate, with men being left behind because the bus was full.²⁷ In 1950 the service was hourly including Sundays. By 1980 Western National Omnibus provided buses for pupils attending secondary school in Taunton, which continued in 2026. The First Bus Dulverton and Cotford services provide Norton with an approximately hourly service but no evening or Sunday services. The Minehead buses provide frequent services through the east of the parish seven days a week with the late evening services being diverted through the village centre.²⁸

POPULATION

In 1086 there were 21 tenant households and six slaves in Norton and two tenants at Ford possibly indicating *c.*120 people.²⁹ In 1327 11 people were assessed in Norton, eight in Venhampton and eight in Langford.³⁰ In 1377 there were 117 poll-tax payers in the village, 22 at Langford and 29 at Venhampton.³¹ The parish could provide 12 men for the 1569 muster.³² In 1641 116 adult males were recorded.³³ In 1674 49 people were exempted from hearth tax.³⁴

By 1791 the parish averaged 11 christenings and six burials.³⁵ The population in 1801 was 371, and rose steadily to 639 by 1851 before stagnating and even falling to 530 in 1891 before recovering to 630 in 1911 and 653 in 1931. The absorption of Heathfield civil parish in 1933 and especially the considerable military presence caused a rise to 2,075 in 1951. Military personnel were undoubtedly responsible for the male to female gender imbalance: 1,568 men, but only 507 women. Housing development increased the resident population,

²⁷ SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/7, 27 May 1946.

²⁸ Ibid. A/AGH/1/255.

²⁹ *Domesday*, 251.

³⁰ F. H. Dickinson (ed.), *Kirby's Quest for Somerset*, 144-5.

³¹ C. C. Fenwick (ed.), *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, 424.

³² E. Green, *Certificate of Musters in the County of Somerset*, 274.

³³ *Som. Protestation Returns*, ed. Howard and Stoate, 107-8.

³⁴ *Dwelly's National Records*, vol. 2 (1976), 308.

³⁵ J. Collinson, *History of Somerset* (1791), III, 272.

which reached 2,411 in 2001 and 4,069 in 2021.³⁶ By 2024 the resident population was estimated as 4,580.³⁷

SETTLEMENT

‘When Taunton was a furzy down, Norton was a market town’ possibly refers to the Norton hillfort or to North Town in Taunton.³⁸ The village apparently grew up around the church and Norton Court, with settlement along the former Taunton to Wiveliscombe road. There were small settlements at Fitzroy, Ford, Langford and Venhampton. A cluster of buildings around the former rectory has been interpreted as evidence of a one-time separate settlement.³⁹

Prehistoric to Anglo-Saxon settlement

Norton Camp is a circular hillfort about 140 m. across on a natural hill behind the church. Palaeolithic handaxes were found there site and the hillfort is believed to have dominated settlement and farming in the Taunton vale from the Neolithic period onwards.⁴⁰ Evidence of Bronze Age settlement was found there and at Wick Lane. Iron-Age pottery and possible late Iron-Age of roundhouses have been found at the hillfort. It was probably partly abandoned in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. but apparently re-occupied during the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. Evidence for a supposed Roman amphitheatre is doubtful. Roman pottery has been found in several places including a probable production site near Montys Farm.⁴¹

³⁶ *Census*.

³⁷ https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/southwestengland/admin/somerset/E04013216__norton_fitzwarren: accessed 13 Jan. 2026.

³⁸ C. Gathercole, *An Archaeological Assessment of Taunton*, (Taunton, 2002), 7; J. Toulmin, *The History of Taunton* (ed. J. Savage, 1822), 559.

³⁹ Gathercole, *Arch. Assessment of Taunton*, 49-50.

⁴⁰ J. Orbach, *Pevsner: South and West Somerset*, (2014), 500; Somerset HER, 15708; Gathercole, *Archaeological Assessment of Taunton*, 2.

⁴¹ Gathercole, *Arch. Assessment of Taunton*, 2, 5, 6-7, 12; Som. HER, 14355, 15708, 22831, 37341.

Little is known of Anglo-Saxon settlement in Norton. By 722 it was possibly part of the estates of Ine, king of Wessex although there is no evidence it was his fort.⁴² Norton and Ford were recorded in 1086.⁴³

Medieval and early modern settlement

A medieval field system, probably dating from the 11th to 14th centuries, was identified at Wick Lane.⁴⁴ Venhampton was recorded as Fenhampton from the mid 13th century and Langford in 1219 and 1327.⁴⁵

By 1626 Wooney rectorial manor had ten tenements in Langford and six cottages along the street near the church.⁴⁶ Fitzroy was a small settlement by 1660.⁴⁷ Hearth tax exemptions in 1674 suggest many small cottages and a degree of poverty.⁴⁸ Morse's Building and Home Place were 17th-century houses facing the main street. Morse's had a north-south aligned east wing and a plaque above a fireplace dated 1608 but jointed crucks suggested 16th-century origins. Home Place was roughcast and tiled with brick ridge stacks with a north-south aligned rear wing and later extensions. Both were demolished to extend the cider factory, which started with three-storied weather-boarded and timber-framed building also demolished.⁴⁹

Settlement from the 18th to 21st centuries

In 1791 the village had 48 houses in a straggling street along the turnpike road near the parish church. Venhampton, one mile north-west of the village, had three farms and a cottage,

⁴² Gathercole, *Arch. Assessment of Taunton*, 2.

⁴³ *Domesday*, 251.

⁴⁴ M. Alexander and N. Adam, 'Bronze Age and Later Archaeology at Wick Lane, Norton Fitzwarren', *PSAS*, CLVI, 1-17.

⁴⁵ T. Hunt, *The Medieval Customs of Taunton Manor*, 79; Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest*, 144-5; Green, *Feet of Fines 1196-1307*, 39-40.

⁴⁶ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/3/1/3; D/D/rg/387/2.

⁴⁷ Below, landownership, Fitzroy.

⁴⁸ *Dwelly's National Records*, vol. 2, 308.

⁴⁹ Somerset HER, 24630-2.

Langford, half a mile north, contained three farms and 10 cottages, Fitzroy, 1 ¼ mile north, had one farm and three cottages, and Ford, ½ mile west, had three farms.⁵⁰ Venhampton and Langford returned jurymen in 1825. Venhampton declined while Langford retained its separate identity and remains a large hamlet.⁵¹ The increased population in the early 19th century led to the subdivision of several houses and the building of small terraces in the village.⁵²

By 1925 Norton Fitzwarren had 16 local authority houses and six under construction.⁵³ By 1936 Taunton Rural District Council proposed replacing 17 houses in Norton Fitzwarren, four were deemed unfit for habitation, and built 16 houses under the 1936 Housing Act.⁵⁴ During the Second World War military facilities including prisoner of war and army camps, supply depots, water tanks, air raid shelters, pump houses and sanitary blocks changed the built environment albeit temporarily but included some permanent housing. By 2017 those sites had largely been redeveloped for housing and commercial use.⁵⁵

In 1946 returning ex-servicemen with families squatted in disused army huts. In the village of 223 separate houses and cottages eight were unsuitable for habitation and 28 more were needed. Taunton Rural District Council received permission to build and took responsibility for huts occupied by squatters, some still occupied in 1953. The War Office released 8 ½ a. of land for residential development in 1950 but materials shortages delayed building. By autumn 1953 houses were under construction along Rectory Road, Manor Road until 1946. Former military sites including Burnshill east of the village were redeveloped

⁵⁰ Collinson, *Hist. Som.*, III, 271.

⁵¹ SHC, Q/RJL/35/14; D/P/n.fitz/3/1/2.

⁵² *Ibid.* tithe award; OS Map 1:10560, LXX. NW (1889 edn).

⁵³ SHC, D/PC/b.hl/1/2/2.

⁵⁴ *Taunton Courier*, 22 Apr. 1936, 2; SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/6/10, 17.

⁵⁵ Somerset HER, 27020-27088.

from the late 1970s.⁵⁶ Beauford Park, a mobile home site, was established opposite in the 1950s.⁵⁷

In 1998 900 new houses were proposed for the Taunton Cider site.⁵⁸ By 2017 the development included a small retail site. Further development extended the village to Silk Mills Road on its eastern boundary, the railway on the south and Station Road in the west where further development to Ford was delayed due to its high flood risk.⁵⁹

BUILT CHARACTER

The only medieval building remaining in the village is the parish church. Court Place, now Norton Court, was built c.1600, but is largely 19th-century.⁶⁰ At Langford Farthings and Castle Cottage are altered late-medieval dwellings, Castle Cottage being roughcast and Giffords Farmhouse is an altered 16th-century hall house with a chimney, timber framed partitions and cusped trusses. Fitzroy House of late 18th-century brick has late 19th and early 20th-century additions.⁶¹ Knowle Lodge or Cottage, across the road, may have been slightly later but was demolished 1840-1 to create Norton Manor.⁶² Further south the much-altered Courtlands was probably built in the 1830s.⁶³

Montys Farmhouse is dated 1787 with farm buildings of 1809. The house is roughcast over random rubble, as are 18th-century Bay House and Mayford in the village, Gothic style Japonica and Laburnum opposite with pantile roofs and several other cottages.⁶⁴ Pantiles remained popular into the 21st century. In the late 19th and early 20th century the village had several thatched and cob cottages, subsequently demolished. Later dwellings were

⁵⁶ SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/2/4/7, 4/2/7.

⁵⁷ *Taunton Courier*, 19 Apr. 1958.

⁵⁸ *Taunton Times*, 24 Dec. 1998, 1.

⁵⁹ <https://nortonfitzwarren-pc.gov.uk>: accessed 19 Feb. 2026.

⁶⁰ Below, landownership, Norton Court.

⁶¹ Orbach, *S. and W. Som.*, 500; Somerset HER, 40575, 40583.

⁶² *Bath Chron.* 24 Apr. 1828; SHC, Q/REL/35/14; tithe award; TNA, HO 107/959/14.

⁶³ SHC, Q/REL/35/14; tithe award.

⁶⁴ Somerset HER, 40571, 40586, 40590.

constructed of brick with slate or tiled roofs, like the terraced brick houses built along Station Road c.1900. Some individually-designed houses were built like early 20th-century Manor Farm, now Old Manor Farmhouse, and at Pen Elm.⁶⁵ The village in 2026 was dominated by residential estates of houses and low-rise flats.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Johnson, *100 Years of Norton Fitzwarren*, 21; TNA, IR 58/82131, 617, 618, 620, 630. 651.

⁶⁶ Ruth Johnson, *pers. comm.* 2017.