

SOCIAL HISTORY

SOCIAL CHARACTER

The manor dominated the medieval parish but there is no evidence for a resident lord until the 1840s when Charles Noel Welman built Norton Manor.¹ In 1700 the manor was apparently powerless to prevent the Knowle Hill tenant felling timber and quarrying stone illegally.² Wealthier taxpayers in 1327 and 1581 were possibly non-resident.³ By 1782 William Hawker, lord of the manor, was the chief landowner, but several small freeholders held a dwelling or plot of land.⁴

The poor-law guardian reported c.1836 that beer shops were a great nuisance and poor wages and the distressed condition of the poor led to pilfering.⁵ In 1849 concerns were expressed about the 'excess and immorality' occasioned by labourers frequenting beer houses.⁶ In 1851 many paupers were recorded and in 1855 there was a spate of burglaries in the parish.⁷

By 1831 the parish had 111 families in 102 dwellings, suggesting subdivision, and two homes were uninhabited. Agriculture was the main employment and some women were domestic servants.⁸ By 1851 large houses increased the number of servants of both sexes especially Monty's Court with 15 resident servants and Norton Manor with six maidservants, a butler with his own servant and outdoor staff accommodation in the grounds. These were not always local there were many daily domestics in the parish. By 1891 530 persons lived in 123 dwellings of which 60 had five rooms or fewer. Sixteen were uninhabited including three in Venhampton, possibly due to the agricultural depression of the 1880s. Labourers were

¹ See landownership.

² TNA, C 8/360/65.

³ Dickinson, *Kirby's Quest Som.*, 144-5; A. J. Webb, *Two Tudor Subsidy Assessments: 1558 and 1581-2*, 122.

⁴ SHC, Q/REL/35/14.

⁵ TNA, HO 73/8.

⁶ *Morning Post*, 23 Jun. 1849, 2.

⁷ TNA HO 107/1923; SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/2, 10 Dec. 1855.

⁸ *Census, 1831* (Parl. Papers 1833 (149), i), pp. 604-5.

mainly agricultural but increasingly men worked for the railway, the brewery and the bakery. Domestic service employed mainly women and men worked as butlers, grooms, coachmen or gardeners. Nine people received parish relief.⁹

In 1896 the parish council, composed of major landowners, farmers and businessmen, found many dwellings had inadequate sanitary facilities, some had no drinking water.¹⁰

Despite new housing, in part to replace condemned dwellings, the housing shortage in 1946 led 12 families to occupy empty military huts, prepared to pay rent.¹¹ Despite some local opposition they were allowed to remain until 1953, waiting for local authority housing to be completed.¹²

By 2011 the percentage of people aged 20-34 was significantly higher than in Somerset overall, probably reflecting an influx of young people onto the new housing estates. A third of those aged 16-74 worked in public administration or related employment. Retail trades and health and social care employed large numbers but agriculture accounted for less than 5 per cent of the workforce.¹³

Migration

In c.1733 Elizabeth Thomas, born in Madron, Cornw., gave birth to an illegitimate daughter in a Norton Fitzwarren public house.¹⁴ In the 1760s many paupers were removed to nearby parishes but some had come from further afield including Bristol, Yeovil and Exminster, Devon. In the last case the man was removed but his family remained at Norton.¹⁵ By the 20th century migrants from overseas included people born in America and New Zealand.¹⁶

⁹ TNA, RG 12/1878.

¹⁰ SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/6, 20-4.

¹¹ *Taunton Courier*, 22 Apr. 1936, 2; *Som. Co. Herald*, 23 Oct. 1937, 11; 24 Aug. 1946, 6; SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/6/10, ann. rep. MOH (1938), 17; A/BVF/1/2; *Western Morning News*, 19 Aug. 1946, 2.

¹² SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/4/2/7, 5 Aug. 1953.

¹³ somerstintelligence.org.uk/community-profiles: accessed 5 Mar. 2018.

¹⁴ SHC, Q/SR/314/268-270.

¹⁵ SHC, Q/SO/13, ff. 354a, 338, 446.

¹⁶ TNA, RG 15/11232.

COMMUNAL LIFE

Little is known about early village festivities but the youngmen's wardens, appointed until 1643, presumably organised events to raise money for the church.¹⁷ In the 1780s a 'revel' was held on the Sunday after 3 May.¹⁸

The Village Club opened in 1897, the gift of Wilfred Marshall, lord of the manor, and his wife. A skittle alley was added and Marshall gave a piano.¹⁹ The club hosted numerous activities for its members, including regular dances and an annual dinner; for 120 members in 1901. The glee club, founded in 1900, and the village band from 1901 were among local groups that used the premises for meetings.²⁰ In 1919 Wilfred Marshall's widow Isabella conveyed the building and land to trustees with money to repair the building.²¹ A youth club met there by 1950 and a billiard room was added in 1954.²² In 1980 to keep its charitable status the Charity Commissioners required the club's facilities to be made available to all inhabitants of the parish.²³ It closed in 1998 and the building became the village hall, which hosted community events. By 2018 the skittle alley had been converted to a community coffee shop.²⁴

A scout troop formed in 1910, closed in 1921, re-formed briefly 1936-c.1939 and began again in 1976.²⁵ A Women's Institute, in existence by 1926, closed after 1980 but was revived in 1999. In 2002 it amalgamated with Staplegrove, which closed in 2008.²⁶

¹⁷ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 10 Apr. 1626, 29 Mar. 1630, 3 Apr. 1643.

¹⁸ McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey*, 277.

¹⁹ SHC, A/BLZ/1/1, 5 Jan., 7 Jan., 12 Jan., 26 Jan. 1897, 10 Nov. 1897.

²⁰ *Taunton Courier*, 25 Apr. 1900; SHC, A/BLZ/1/1, 17 Jan., 18 Feb. 1901.

²¹ SHC, A/BLZ/4/6, 30 Dec. 1919; *Taunton Courier*, 4 Feb. 1920, 4.

²² SHC, A/AGH/1/255; A/BLZ/4/1. Charity Commissioners gave date as 1920.

²³ SHC, A/BLZ/2/5.

²⁴ nortonfitzwarrenvillagehall.co.uk: accessed 26 Jan. 2018.

²⁵ SHC, A/BVF/5/3; A/BVF/1/2.

²⁶ *Ibid.* A/AGH/1/255; DD/WI/78/1/8, 11; 131/1/1; 131/2/7-8.

Sport and recreation ground

Cricket was played in the village by 1865, a club was revived c.1887 and a cricket ground was established near the railway before 1895.²⁷ The club was revived in 1905 and was in existence until 1950 or later.²⁸ In 1900 a proposed football club failed for lack of support but a football field was recorded in 1928, possibly it doubled up as the cricket ground.²⁹ The football club in the Taunton and district league, which claims to have been founded in 1896, played at the Stembridge Way ground in 2026.³⁰

Wilfred Marshall(d.1904) was Master of West Somerset Foxhounds until his death, c.1910 the Taunton Vale Foxhounds and Taunton Vale Harriers met in Norton Fitzwarren and in the 1930s the Culmstock Otter Hounds met there.³¹ In 1975 it was reported that hounds ran amok on the Hilly Park estate.³²

A children's recreation ground at the Village Club by 1917, was leased to the parish council in 1948.³³ In 1950 a field was used for sport, possibly football field of 1928, and fundraising for a new ground was apparently unsuccessful.³⁴ In 1972 the parish council wanted to buy part of the site of Burnshill Camp but the cost was too high.³⁵ Instead land was acquired off Stembridge Way, west of the village, before 1980. The playing fields have two football pitches, changing rooms, tennis courts and other facilities and were extended and improved c.2023.³⁶

²⁷ Ibid. D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/10, 3 Feb. 2003 *Western Daily Press*, 13 Sep. 1865, *Taunton Courier*, 16 Mar. 1887; *Devon and Somerset News*, 21 Feb. 1895; BNA accessed 9 Feb. 2026.

²⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 17 May 1905, 21 May 1930, 24 June 1950; SHC, A/AGH/1/255.

²⁹ SHC A/BLZ/1/1, 6 Nov. 1900; DD/BRO/4/7.

³⁰ Ibid. A/AGH/1/255; nfnews.co.uk/Norton-football-club: accessed 10 Feb. 2026.

³¹ *Taunton Courier*, 21 Aug. 1907, 4; SHC, DD/CM/170; A/BNK/1/1/22; *Devon and Exeter Gaz.*, 29 May 1933, 17; 14 May 1937, 17.

³² SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/2, 17 Feb. 1975.

³³ Ibid. A/BLZ/2/4, 4/6, 24 Jun. 1948.

³⁴ SHC, DD/BRO/4/7; *Som. Co. Herald*, 24 Jun. 1950, 8.

³⁵ SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/2, 6 Mar. 1972.

³⁶ Ibid. A/AGH/1/255; sports-facilities.co.uk/sites/view/6005988: accessed 19 Apr. 2018; Char. Com. reg. 1082631.

An activity centre operated at Burnshill between 1984 and 1999 and in 2003 there was a BMX track.³⁷

Libraries

A parochial lending library operated between 1865 and 1889, possibly situated in the parish church and providing religious works, history, biography, travel and children's books.³⁸ A subscription Magazine Club operated c.1897 and a Village Club lending library only in 1899.³⁹ A public mobile library service was provided by 1980 but ceased after 2017.⁴⁰

SOMERSET HERITAGE CENTRE

In 2010 the Somerset Heritage Centre was built on the site of the former supply depot's railway sidings to house the county archives and local studies reading room and historic environment services and the reserve museum collections.⁴¹

EDUCATION

Before 1845

A proposed Sunday school in 1789 may be that, which in 1818 educated six to eight children from the sacrament money.⁴² By 1833 there were three schools; one founded in 1831 was supported by the offertory and the rector, the other two educated 15 boys and 19 girls at their parents' expense. A Sunday school founded in 1831 with 28 boys and 36 girls was supported by subscriptions, and a second with 26 boys and 34 girls was funded by subscriptions and

³⁷ SHC, A/BGJ/1/7, 14 Jun. 1984; *Taunton Times*, 22 Apr. 1999; D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/10, 3 Feb. 2003.

³⁸ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/6/8.

³⁹ Ibid. A/BLZ/1/1, 12 Jan. 1897, 14 Sept. 1899.

⁴⁰ Ibid. A/AGH/1/255; *Norton News*, Oct. 2017, 18.

⁴¹ victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/items/somerset-heritage-centre; accessed 9 May 2018.

⁴² *Educ. of Poor Digest* (1819), 792.

contributions from the parish church.⁴³ In 1838 one school taught 30 boys and 17 girls, half of whom only attended on Sunday.⁴⁴

By c.1846 a village school with two schoolrooms taught 42 boys, 52 girls and 13 infants. Some pupils attended only on weekdays or only on Sundays. The £50 annual running costs were met by voluntary subscriptions and fees including £36 in salaries to two schoolmistresses.⁴⁵ It was presumably the 1859 National school.⁴⁶ In 1871 a nonconformist school, probably short-lived, and the National school taught at least 35 boys and 41 girls.⁴⁷ In 1872 the National school was rebuilt by J. Houghton Spencer on land donated by Charles Noel Welman funded by the National Society, the Diocesan Board, donations and a grant from the Education Department. It comprised a schoolroom, a smaller classroom and a teacher's house.⁴⁸ The mixed school for 113 children and was enlarged in 1891 for another 22 pupils.⁴⁹ In 1878 the children were given two three-week harvest holidays in June and August.⁵⁰ In November 1902 there were 93 pupils although the school could accommodate 137. Older children were removed to go out to work and in 1903 children apparently left because a demand for boys had arisen locally.⁵¹ Singing and physical education were taught, but grammar was not taught, spelling was weak, and arithmetic teaching was unsatisfactory.⁵²

The first meeting of school managers under the 1902 Education Act 1902 took place on 28 July 1903.⁵³ By 1905 the school had two teachers, one supplementary assistant, two pupil teachers and an average of 112 pupils.⁵⁴ In 1919 there were 123 children on the register,

⁴³ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, f. 98; *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (1835), 816.

⁴⁴ SHC, DD/S/AM/13, p. 17/

⁴⁵ *Nat. Soc. Schs. Inquiry, 1846-7* (1849), Som. 12-13.

⁴⁶ *PO Dir. Som.* (1859).

⁴⁷ *Returns of Civil Parishes in Eng. & Wales under the Education Act*, HC 201 (1871), 342-3.

⁴⁸ *Taunton Courier*, 20 Mar. 1872, 3.

⁴⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1902).

⁵⁰ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/3, 28 Mar. 1878.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* A/BGJ/1/3, 238, 252.

⁵² *Ibid.* C/E/4/380/297.

⁵³ *Ibid.* A/BGJ/1/3, 256.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* C/E/4/64.

falling to 92 by 1925 and 61 in 1932.⁵⁵ A school garden was recorded in 1927.⁵⁶ In 1939 five children left to attend secondary school but evacuee children arrived from a London school and additional teaching space was found in the Village Club. By February 1940 there were 84 children on the register and in May 1941 the evacuee and Norton Fitzwarren schools merged. Evacuee numbers apparently reduced and by October 1943 all the children were accommodated in the school building.⁵⁷

Public education after 1945

From 1945 children transferred to secondary education in Taunton at age 11 and numbers at Norton school fell to 63 with three teachers.⁵⁸ In 1948 the school became a Voluntary Controlled school. In May 1952 the headmistress and two assistant mistresses taught 83 children and once again accommodation was needed at the Village Club.⁵⁹ Probably as a result of new housing numbers rose to 123 in 1955, with four teachers.⁶⁰ The 1872 buildings were insufficient and in 1955 a new classroom unit was installed 100 yards up Rectory Road, to replace the Village Club. Numbers rose to 133 in 1971 but fell to 79 by 1983 before rising again.⁶¹

The school lacked space inside and out and was on a dangerous road. As early as 1946 a new school had been requested. It was scheduled to be built in 1978-9 but only in 1987 did the new Norton Fitzwarren Church of England school open off Blackdown View.⁶² There were 124 children on the roll by 2004, about a quarter from military families resulting in a high proportion of children joining and leaving during the school year. Performance in

⁵⁵ Ibid. A/BGJ/1/4, 238; 1/5, 40, 166.

⁵⁶ *Taunton Courier*, 10 Aug. 1927, 5.

⁵⁷ SHC, A/BGJ/1/5.

⁵⁸ Ibid. C/E/4/64; A/AGH/1/255.

⁵⁹ Ibid. A/BGJ/1/5, 267, 286-90.

⁶⁰ Ibid. C/E/4/64.

⁶¹ Ibid. A/BLZ/1/5, 14 Aug. 1950; 5/3, booklet; A/BGJ/1/6, 8 Sept. 1971; 1/7, 1 Sept. 1983, 2 Sept. 1986.

⁶² Ibid D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/7, 27 Jun. 1946; 1/2/2, 20 Jul. 1976; A/BVF/5/3, programme 21 Oct. 1987.

English, maths and science led to the school being rated unsatisfactory and placed in special measures.⁶³ The school was judged satisfactory by 2006 but by 2012 numbers had fallen to 61, the school became an academy in 2014 and was thereafter as Norton Fitzwarren Church School judged good. New housing was responsible for a dramatic increase in pupil numbers to 201 by 2017 and 324 by 2023 including the preschool.⁶⁴

Nurseries and pre-schools

By 1998 a pre-school, established in the village for over 15 years, was based in the playing field pavilion.⁶⁵ It was probably the pre-school by 2008 in the grounds of the primary school and placed under its school governors in September 2013 for children from 3.⁶⁶ A centre for children up to 5 and their families opened at Brock House, Vilberie Close, in 2008.⁶⁷ By 2014 the site housed a private nursery for babies and pre-school children rated outstanding with 132 children registered in 2020.⁶⁸ In 2018 a local charity for the families of Royal Marines opened Brambles nursery opposite the gates of Norton Manor Camp for service families and the wider community. It was also rated outstanding with 81 children from 0 to 4 in 2021.⁶⁹

Private schools

In 1887 Alexander Knox's private military school at Norton Court prepared students for the universities and for the army, taught French and German and advertised opportunities for

⁶³ reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/123798 (2004): accessed 27 Apr. 2018.

⁶⁴ reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/123798 (2006, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2023); [ELS/141162](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/141162) (2014): accessed 16 Feb., 27 Apr. 2018, 10 Feb. 2026.

⁶⁵ SHC, DD/TBL/97/13.

⁶⁶ reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/123798, 2008, 2014: accessed 27 Apr. 2018.

⁶⁷ *Somerset County Gaz.*, 16 Oct. 2008, 9.

⁶⁸ reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/EY464738: accessed 27 Apr. 2018, 10 Feb. 2026.

⁶⁹ *Somerset County Gaz.*, 1 Feb. 2018, 5; thebramblesdaynursery.co.uk/go-commando: accessed 27 Apr. 2018; reports.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/EY553802: accessed 10 Feb. 2026.

cricket and fishing. It had been founded in 1877 but moved to Norton Court after 1881 and had gone by 1889.⁷⁰

In 1987 the former primary school buildings were sold and became Manor School, a mixed Roman Catholic fee-paying preparatory school. It closed in 1999 but despite being sold for residential conversion *c.*2000, it remained empty until the 2020s and was Poole House in 2026.⁷¹

WELFARE

Poor relief

No overseers accounts survive but records of poor relief from the 1830s were entered in a vestry book.⁷² Pauper removals and child maintenance were enforced from the later 17th century.⁷³ Poor children were apprenticed between 1691 and 1816 or later, including to tradesmen.⁷⁴ A select vestry of nine members heard applications for poor relief in case of sickness or high food prices. A couple who refused accommodation in the poor house in 1830 were offered an additional 2s. in addition to their existing 3s. relief.⁷⁵

William Hewett represented the parish at the first meeting of the Taunton Union Board of Guardians in May 1836.⁷⁶ Norton Fitzwarren continued to provide some outdoor relief until the union workhouse opened totalling £38 8s. 11d. in the quarter to 25 December 1837.⁷⁷ More than 20 paupers were recorded in 1871 and in 1891 nine individuals received parish pay and six in 1901.⁷⁸ Expenditure on poor relief fell from £231 in 1875 to £94 in

⁷⁰ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1887), 237; *Morning Post*, 13 May 1887, 1; *Taunton Courier*, 7 Aug. 1889, 5.

⁷¹ *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 Jul. 1997, 11; Johnson, *100 Years of Norton Fitzwarren*, 32; get-information-schools.service.gov.uk: accessed 10 Feb. 2026.

⁷² SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/2.

⁷³ M.C.B. Dawes, *Quarter Sessions Records: 1666-77*, 27, 183; SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 14 Jun. 1815.

⁷⁴ SHC, D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 1691, 1693, 25 May 1770, 1816.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* D/P/n.fitz/9/1/2, 18 Jun. 1830, 10 Sept. 1830.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* D/G/ta/8a/1, 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* D/G/ta/8a/1, 127, 420.

⁷⁸ TNA, RG 10/2375; RG12/1878; RG 13/2279.

1893 when over five per cent of the population was still on relief.⁷⁹ Parishioners continued to receive outdoor relief until 1927 or later.⁸⁰

A parish poor house was recorded in 1699.⁸¹ In 1828 the vestry agreed to rebuild its south end. In 1836 it consisted of a freehold cottage north of the school called Leigh, which was sold in 1837 to defray the parish share of the cost of the union workhouse.⁸² By 1851 the building, still referred to as 'The Poor House' in 1895, had been converted into three dwellings.⁸³ Now called Leigh Cottages they survive in Rectory Road.

CHARITIES FOR THE POOR

In the harsh winter of 1342-3 the manor distributed more than 9 quarters of peas to 12 poor men and women for 25 weeks. This was possibly not a regular gift.⁸⁴ In 1599 William Cutting of West Tilbury left London property held of St Katherine's Hospital by the Tower to trustees to benefit of the poor of St Katherine's, East Dereham, Norf., and Norton Fitzwarren. The Norton poor were to receive 40s. before Christmas annually paid by the parish officers. By the 1690s ownership of the St Katherine's property was in dispute and there is no further record of the charity.⁸⁵

John Prowse reputedly left the poor 40s. annually payable at Lady Day (25 March) out of the Court farm estate but the bequest was not recorded in the church until c.1807.⁸⁶ In the 1780s it was paid out of Great Park.⁸⁷ Distributions ceased after 1817 probably as few poor parishioners were not receiving relief.⁸⁸ By 1873 the estate owners refused to pay the

⁷⁹ SHC, D/G/ta/57/21.

⁸⁰ Ibid. D/G/ta/27/9.

⁸¹ Ibid. D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, f. 68.

⁸² Ibid. D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 28 Mar. 1828, 4 Aug. 1836; 9/1/2, 22 Dec. 1836; D/G/ta/8a/1, 186; 57/4/1.

⁸³ TNA, HO 107/1927; SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/6, 20-4.

⁸⁴ Glos. Archives, MF1418 (Berkeley Castle Muniments BCM/A/3/14/1 (GAR386)).

⁸⁵ TNA, PROB 11/95/170; C 6/369/71; C 7/288/1.

⁸⁶ *5th Rep. Com. Char.* (1821), 475; possibly an error for James Prowse: above, landownership.

⁸⁷ McDermott and Berry, *Rack's Survey*, 277.

⁸⁸ *5th Rep. Com. Char.* (1821), 475.

40s. rent charge.⁸⁹ In 1894 the Congregational minister, Revd Dixon, calculated that the arrears built up over 73 years with compound interest at 5 per cent would amount to over £1,328, enough to build two or three houses for the poor. However, no evidence of Prowse's bequest was found except the charity board in the church, erected over 120 years after the alleged bequest, and the fact that the charity had been administered until c.1820. The charity apparently lapsed.⁹⁰

By 1873 a charity giving 5s. annually to eight of the oldest male parishioners to buy tools had been lost for many years.⁹¹ In 1875 Betty North left £2 15s. interest on £100 to be distributed to the poor as £1 in money and £1 in goods with 15s. to the church Sunday school.⁹² In 1898 £10 was distributed among the 20 oldest parishioners on St Thomas Day (21 Dec.).⁹³ Before 1962 it was registered as the Betty North charity to support the church Sunday school but by 2004 had ceased to exist.⁹⁴

James Summerhayes, by will proved in 1940, left the interest on the proceeds from selling his Rectory Road house, after the death of his wife Bertha (d. 1972), to provide for a district nurse in Norton Fitzwarren. From 1960 the charity was the Somerset County Nursing Association (Summerhayes Bequest) Trust for any district nurse employed in the parish or for the sick or infirm.⁹⁵ The charity had ceased to exist by 1994.⁹⁶

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

⁸⁹ *Endowed Charities, Somerset* (1873), 46-7.

⁹⁰ *Taunton Courier*, 9 May, 13 Jun. 1894.

⁹¹ E. Jeboult, *A General Account of West Somerset* (1873), 69.

⁹² SHC, D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/6, 19 Apr. 1895.

⁹³ *Supplement (1891) to Return of the Digest of Endowed Charities* (HMSO, 1892), 26-7; SHC, D/D/va/21/12.

⁹⁴ charitycommission.gov.uk/find-charities: accessed 10 October 2017.

⁹⁵ SHC, A/BTO/5; B. Summerhayes (1972), Nat. Probate Cal.: accessed 10 Oct. 2017.

⁹⁶ charitycommission.gov.uk/find-charities: accessed 10 October 2017.

A friendly society had 37 members in 1803.⁹⁷ In 1855 a friendly society met at the Ring of Bells inn, possibly the Norton Fitzwarren Friendly Society which in 1862 provided financial assistance to members and their wives in the case of sickness or death. Members had an annual church service and dinner at the Ring of Bells.⁹⁸ It had over 60 members in 1884.⁹⁹ A brass pole head used in processions survives.¹⁰⁰

The Norton Court Friendly Society for brewery employees had an annual dinner in 1877.¹⁰¹ The United Benefit friendly society met in 1893 and the Pride of Norton Fitzwarren society in 1910. The Norton Fitzwarren and Staplegrove lodge of the Bridgwater Equalised Independent Druids, which held its eighth annual fete in 1913, admitted women and juveniles.¹⁰² A branch of The United Patriots' Society was active between 1905 and 1966.¹⁰³

HEALTH

In 1609 Joan Shattock was an unlicensed midwife.¹⁰⁴ The overseers appointed a medical officer for the poor by 1831.¹⁰⁵ In 1891 one woman was a monthly nurse.¹⁰⁶ In 1896 an outbreak of measles closed the school for a month.¹⁰⁷

By 1906 the Norton Fitzwarren District Nursing Association had been established. The nurse received £95 a year, paid in 1915 by Mrs Sturdee of Norton Manor, with holiday cover and emergency nursing paid by the Association, which amalgamated with Hillfarrance

⁹⁷ *Abstract of Returns...of the poor* (Parl. Papers 1803-04 (175), xiii), pp. 442-3.

⁹⁸ *Western Flying Post*, 4 Dec. 1855; *Rules of the Norton Fitzwarren Friendly Society* (1862).

⁹⁹ *Devon and Som. News* 4 Aug. 1910; BNA accessed 10 Feb. 2026.

¹⁰⁰ M. Fuller, *West Country Friendly Societies* (Reading, 1964), 141, plate XLII.

¹⁰¹ *Somerset County Gaz.*, 27 Oct. 1877, 6.

¹⁰² *Taunton Courier*, 24 May 1893, 6 Aug. 1913; *Devon and Som. News* 4 Aug. 1910; BNA accessed 10 Feb. 2026.

¹⁰³ *Western Daily Press*, 14 Jan. 1905, 6; *Devon and Exeter Gaz.*, 4 Sept. 1929, 7; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1966).

¹⁰⁴ SHC, D/D/Ca/57, 160.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* D/P/n.fitz/9/1/1, 14 Apr. 1831.

¹⁰⁶ TNA, RG 12/1878.

¹⁰⁷ SHC, A/AUV/2.

before 1920 and with Bishops Hull in 1944.¹⁰⁸ Two nurse midwives were resident in 1911.¹⁰⁹ Mrs Sturdee (d.1928) desired her daughters to continue paying the district nurse's salary.¹¹⁰ Nursing care included midwifery and visits to state schools. Local residents could subscribe and pay reduced rates and fundraising contributed towards costs. In 1948 the Association affiliated with the Somerset County Nursing Association but was disbanded in November 1952 when the nurse was based in Bishop's Hull.¹¹¹

There was no doctor's surgery until 1978 when a temporary one was provided to ascertain need.¹¹² Recorded in 1980 it had closed by 1992 when a Taunton surgery proposed a Norton branch and in 2013 opened Orchard Medical Centre in the village shopping area.¹¹³

HOUSE OF ST MARTIN and MEADOW COURT

The Somerset Training Home for Young Wayfarers (or Vagrants) was established at Woodcroft House, Langford in 1932 to provide accommodation and training in agricultural, workshop and domestic work for disadvantaged young men.¹¹⁴ During the Second World War the house accommodated elderly female evacuees.¹¹⁵ It then reverted to its former function and had helped c.3,000 men by 1961.¹¹⁶ By 1968, as the House of St Martin run by the London-based St Martin in the Fields Social Services Unit, it provided training and support for homeless young men and ex-offenders.¹¹⁷ In 1973 the Langley House Trust, a Christian rehabilitation charity, took it over as a working community, offering horticultural and IT

¹⁰⁸ SHC, C/DN/BH/1, 7.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, RG 14/14259.

¹¹⁰ *Western Times*, 1 Mar. 1928, 12.

¹¹¹ SHC, C/DN/BH/1, 5-7; A/AGH/1/255.

¹¹² *Ibid.* A/AGH/1/255; D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/2, 24 Apr. 1978.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* D/PC/n.fitz/1/2/5, 3 Aug. 1992; cqc.org.uk/location/1-567780409: accessed 13 Feb. 2026.

¹¹⁴ SHC, A/DQE/1; *Taunton Courier*, 11 Jul. 1934, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Taunton Courier*, 1 Jan. 1944, 3.

¹¹⁶ *Taunton Courier*, 18 March 1961: accessed 13 Feb, 2026.

¹¹⁷ SHC, A/DQO/303/37.

training. In 2026 it was a 31-bed care home for men leaving prison or secure hospitals with multiple needs.¹¹⁸

Meadow Court is an early 21st-century assisted living complex for people with special needs. Its 27 flats occupy the former Courtlands on the Minehead Road.¹¹⁹

MILITARY

Three men from the parish were absent from home during the 1685 rebellion.¹²⁰ Men from the parish joined the army during the late 18th and 19th centuries.¹²¹ Eight young men served in the Royal Navy during the last half of the 19th century.¹²² In 1918 54 men of voting age were on active service.¹²³ Hugh Trenchard, later Viscount Trenchard, known as the ‘father’ of the Royal Air Force, lived as a child at Courtlands.¹²⁴

In 1939 the War Department acquired Norton Manor and its grounds for a militia camp. By September it was occupied by 22 Searchlight (SL) Militia Depot Royal Artillery (RA), renamed 222 SL Training Unit RA later that month. The camp was taken over by US V Corps Headquarters in 1943. In early 1944 the camp it was occupied by 101 US General Hospital to take casualties from the D-Day landings.¹²⁵

Land between the railway land the Taunton to Wiveliscombe road was levelled in 1940 to create a military supply depot.¹²⁶ As 3 Supply Reserve Depot it was under the control of British forces until 1942 when it became the US Army’s General Depot G 50. The extensive site included warehousing, cold storage and rail marshalling yards to receive

¹¹⁸ langleytrust.org/services/house-of-st-martin: accessed 13 Feb. 2026.

¹¹⁹ cqc.org.uk/location/1-435459391: accessed 13 Feb. 2026.

¹²⁰ W. M. Wigfield, *The Monmouth Rebels 1685*, 8, 190.

¹²¹ TNA, WO 97/564/142; WO 97/1094/240; WO 121/15/61; WO 69/13/38; SHC, A/DQO/303/30.

¹²² TNA, ADM 139/737/33603; ADM 188/9/42429; ADM 188/113/99040; ADM 188/141/113141; ADM 188/193/139423; ADM 188/196/140538; ADM 188/293/177605; ADM 188/365/209198; ADM 188/368/210507.

¹²³ SHC, Q/REr 15/2.

¹²⁴ R. Miller, *Trenchard: Father of the Royal Air Force* (2017), 10.

¹²⁵ Somerset HER, 43413.

¹²⁶ TNA, WO 227/51; victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/items/somerset-heritage-centre: accessed 16 Feb. 2018.

supplies coming by train. By 1943 the US Army had established a large depot at Burnshill south of Courtlands.¹²⁷ Later the US Cross Keys camp was established on part of that site for Italian and German prisoners of war.¹²⁸ Four German prisoners, still incarcerated in March 1946, escaped by taking the commanding officer's car, which was found abandoned near Taunton railway station. They were recaptured a few days later near Basingstoke.¹²⁹ The G 50 depot returned to British military control in 1945 as 3 SRD RASC. By 1963 it was the only Supply Reserve Depot in the UK providing ration packs to British troops until it closed in 1966.¹³⁰

Norton Manor also returned to British military control. After occupation by various units it was taken over in 1983 by 40 Commando Royal Marines.¹³¹ In 2003 the unit was awarded the freedom of the borough of Taunton Deane.¹³² There were 710 marines in 2016 when the camp was threatened with closure but a successful campaign was mounted to keep it open.¹³³

A war memorial comprising three stone plaques, for both world wars and the Korean war, was placed on the gate piers to the Village Club and there is a Second World war memorial in the parish church.¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Somerset HER, 44543.

¹²⁸ R. J. C. Thomas, *Prisoner of War Camps (1939-1945)* (English Heritage, Swindon, 2003), 47; Somerset HER, 44543.

¹²⁹ SHC, DD/ASC/1/5/2; D/PC/n.fitz/4/1/11, 17 Sept. 1945; *Western Gaz.*, 15 Mar. 1946, 8; *Som. Co. Herald*, 16 Mar. 1946, 8.

¹³⁰ Somerset HER, 44543; victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/items/somerset-heritage-centre: accessed 16 Feb. 2018; above, econ. hist.

¹³¹ Somerset HER, 43413.

¹³² *Somerset County Gaz.* (Wellington edn), 5 Sept. 2003, 3.

¹³³ *Somerset County Gaz.*, 10 Nov. 2016, 2-3.

¹³⁴ SHC, DD/X/MDT/390.