

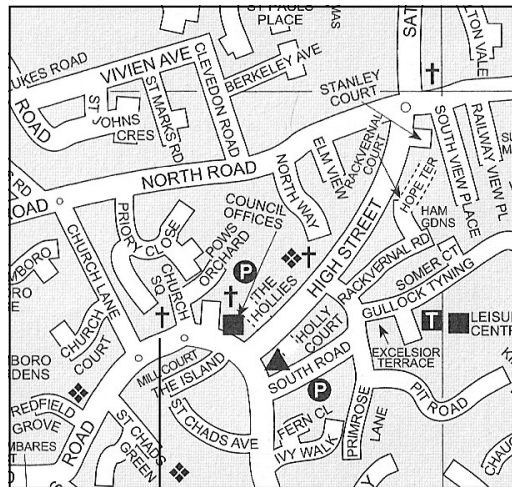
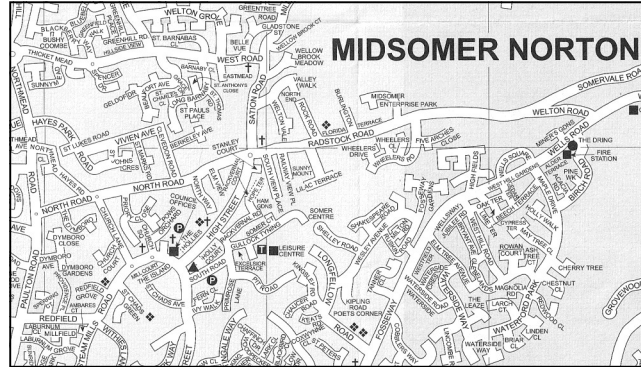
“The effigy at Midsomer Norton is the only wooden figure we possess in this series of chain-mail knights, and it is probable that it was made in the workshops in Bristol ... We can picture the medieval artist selecting a piece of oak, sound at the heart, in good condition, and sufficiently wide for him to carve the figure of a knight in armour lying on a board or bed. The portion of the board with the effigy on it, as well as the cushions on which the head rested, and the animal at the feet, were hollowed out and filled with charcoal to absorb the moisture. Having carved the figure and fastened with wooden pins such parts as lay beyond the size of the block it was ready for decoration. The effigy would then be sized and pieces of linen would be glued over the cracks and irregularities. The decorator would then give the figure a thin coat of so called gesso, with a still thicker coating for those portions he desired to be gilded or silvered. Before the gesso hardened, the decorator impressed it with various matrices or stamps of diverse patterns; some for mail of various sizes and others for decorative purposes. To give depth or richness to the gold or silver leaf, they were first treated with bole Armenian applied with white of egg, or left dead or burnished with an agate. All the painting of the effigy was done in distemper (tempera). Finally the figure was covered with a coat of tinted or oleaginous varnish, which was needful but alas! it did not prove to be a sufficient protection. The reason of the failure of the painting upon wooden effigies was the constant changes of temperature causing contraction and expansion of the wood, and the consequent fretting of the surface on which the colouring was laid.

This mutilated fragment of a wooden effigy at Midsomer Norton was once a beautiful work of art, for the Bristol imagers were skilled in the work they produced, and it is probable that our English effigies in wood are some of the finest existing in Europe.”

From the Somerset Archaeological Society (1916 vol. LXII)

The above may or may not have been how the Midsomer Knight came into being, but in principle the method would have been similar.

WHERE TO FIND ST. JOHN'S CHURCH AND THE KNIGHT



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

MIDSOMER NORTON KNIGHT



WHAT IS HE?

The Midsomer Knight is a very rare tomb effigy made in Bristol in the first half of the 14th Century. It is a wooden figure, made from oak and depicts a knight in armour lying on a board or a bed.

WHO MIGHT HE BE?

It is possible that the knight represents a member of the Gourney family or the Warknell family who held lands in Midsomer Norton after the Norman Conquest

WHERE IS HE?

The effigy lies in the South West corner of St. John the Baptist Church, Midsomer Norton.

THE KNIGHT'S HISTORY

At one time the effigy of the Knight stood at the corner of the South Aisle of St. John the Baptist Church. He is also reported originally to have lain under the singers' gallery on a raised stone tomb. This gallery was demolished in the 19th Century.

The effigy was then moved into the old Vicarage garden in North Road, Midsomer Norton.. In 1975 it was rediscovered, and moved to the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery in 1976 for conservation work..

Most recently the "Midsomer Norton Knight" project team with members drawn from St. John's Church and the Midsomer Norton Society secured a grant from Bath and North East Somerset Tourism Team to fund further emergency conservation work and the construction of a travelling case to enable the Knight to be returned to the Church.

On June 24th, 2011 a Civic Service welcomed the members of the newly created Midsomer Town Council including its Mayor, Mr Paul Myers, to St. John's, where the conserved medieval Midsomer Norton Knight was received into the Church.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

The Knight needs to have a more appropriate case in keeping with his illustrious past and his relatively poor condition. Further conservation work will need to be carried out on this extremely rare and hugely important historical artefact. Explanatory information accompanied with drawings to show what the Knight might have looked like and what other, similar effigies, though not wooden ones, are like.

The Midsomer Norton Society is raising money and applying to various organisations to fund this project.



WHAT MIGHT THE KNIGHT HAVE LOOKED LIKE?

Most medieval knights are sculpted in a full size, supine position. They are in full armour and chain mail, with their heads resting on a pillow and their feet on a cushion or a dog. Their right arm may either be holding a sword, or both arms are crossed across the chest, or hands are pressed together in prayer. The poet Philip Larkin wrote in the poem 'An Arundel Tomb' of a knight and his lady clasping hands in their effigy. The knight shown below has his right hand holding that of his lady, free of a gauntlet..



JACK O' LENT

At one time possibly in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, the Knight was depicted as Judas during the church's season of Lent. He became labelled as the Jack o' Lent and the children of Midsomer Norton threw eggs and rocks at him. Clearly this had the sad result of disfiguring him, partly resulting in his poor state of preservation today.

Jack o' Lent was an English tradition of the 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries. Then straw figures were dragged around the parishes on Ash Wednesday and later stoned. The figures were burnt on Palm Sunday . It was the parishioners' way of taking revenge on Judas Iscariot who had betrayed Christ.