

A WALK AROUND TODMORDEN WITH THE FIELDENS AUDIO E-TRAIL SCRIPT

Stop 1: St Marys Church.

Hello there. It's quite a nice church, isn't it? Oh, sorry – did I startle you? My name is Henry Hirst and it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm proud to have come from this town and love to meet new people to tell them about a wonderful family called the Fieldens who made some great contributions to make Todmorden what it is today.

Would you like me to tell you a little bit about what you can see? We could go for a walk if you like. Yes? Great!

Before we get going, you are looking at one of the oldest buildings in Todmorden. St Mary's Church was built hundreds of years ago by the Radcliffe family, probably between 1400-1476. That's even before I was born! I didn't attend this church when I was alive but I do know that it's very beautiful inside. There's a window on the east side commemorating John Fielden, one of the Fielden brothers. You will learn more about him a bit later on, but maybe you can spot the window?

Just to the left of the church as you look at it is a pub called the White Hart. We will walk past it shortly. The original pub was built in 1720 and was known as the New Inn – I suppose it was new in those days! It has seen a lot within the four walls – the first Todmorden market was held outside it in 1801, and when I was a lad in the 1820's until the 1850's the Petty Sessions, or local court sessions, were held in the rooms upstairs.

So, As we walk you will see lots of buildings and I will try my best to tell you what I know. Keep your eyes open for Dobroyd Castle up on the hill above the railway, and the big Stoodley Pike monument on the horizon. So come on, follow me!

Stop 2: The Rochdale Canal.

This is a good spot to tell you a little bit about the railway and the canal which are very important to the town.

On 4th April 1794 the Rochdale Canal Act of Parliament was passed, allowing work to begin building this transport link between Leeds and Rochdale. Work began immediately. By August 1798 the canal from Rochdale to Todmorden was finished. The whole canal was finally finished in 1802, and barges came daily with coal and raw cotton for the factories, taking away calico, fustian and velveteens – fabric that would be used up and down the land.

It wasn't long though before the canal was taken over by the introduction of the railway. George Stephenson was a very important engineer who would eventually build most of the railway network in the country, and in 1830 he found a route that would bring the railway to Todmorden. It was finished 11 years later.

I remember it well. When I was growing up the noise of the constant banging, demolition and building noises could be heard all the time. It was dirty and busy and muddy, and it felt like it would never be finished. The station building was finished in 1865 so there were temporary sheds up until then. It wasn't pretty or green like it is today. It's much nicer now. Let's keep going.

Stop 3: The Fielden Family.

I need to tell you about a very important family – the Fieldens. The story starts with John, who became known as Honest John Fielden. He was born in 1784, and at the age of 10 was working daily in his father's cotton factory.

Every Tuesday he would walk to Manchester and back which is about 40 miles, leaving in the early hours of the morning with finished cloth for the markets, and returning late at night with raw cotton ready to be spun into fabric. When he was just 17, he took over the running of his dad's factory along with his brother Joshua.



In 1811 at the age of 27, he married Ann Grindod in Rochdale, and moved into the big Georgian house you can see on your left. You will need to use your imaginations a lot here, because just 6 years later the Waterside factory that was just across the main road employed over 3000 handloom weavers and was one of the biggest factories in the whole of Europe. Think of the noise and how busy it was!

Honest John chose to live close to his workers in the dirty air rather than in a big house up on the hill where it was cleaner, and raise his 7 children here. He had 3 sons – Samuel, John and Joshua – we will come across them later on our wander. It was a very unhealthy environment; no running water, flushing toilets, or electricity. It was common for children to die young because of illnesses, so Honest John was very lucky to see his children grow up

Stop 4: The Golden Lion.

Do you know, I've never been into this building? It's a pub, like the White Hart, and I didn't drink alcohol. I do know that this building is very old though – I think you can just make out the date of 1789 on the top of one of the drainpipes. In my day, it was building for very important meetings as well as being a pub and coaching inn – a place where coaches on their way to Halifax would stop.

This little triangle area of land is known as Fielden Square, because for a long time there was a statue of Honest John here. It was just where the statue of the weir is now, across the road from the old Fielden Hotel and Coffee Tavern. Honest John's son, John, paid for this public building which was opened in 1880 because he didn't like people drinking alcohol and he wanted somewhere else for people to meet and socialise.

The statue of Honest John is now in the park where we will eventually end our walk, so you will see it a little while later. Let's just pop up the hill to our next stop.

Stop 5: The Unitarian Chapel.

It doesn't look like much, but this building is very important to me. The Fielden family were Quakers and then Unitarians, and when I was a lad this was the Unitarian church for Todmorden. It was opened for the first service in 1824, 4 years before I was born. My father told me that there was a huge debt of £500 and there was a lot of trouble raising the money to pay, so Honest John came to the rescue. He bought the building, appointed a minister and paid for his salary! Religion was very important to the Fielden family, as was education.

I don't know why he did this, but Honest John opened a Sunday school when he was just 17. Maybe he realised that learning to read and write was so very important, and he wanted to give everyone the opportunity to learn their abc's? It had to be on a Sunday because everyone was too busy working for the rest of the week, and it was their only day off! It was very very popular, and the official school report of 1818 says that 700 children were taught every Sunday – can you imagine how big the classes were? On top of the Sunday school, 10 years later he opened a day school with accommodation for 100 children between the ages of 4 and 10 – when they would have started working in the factories.

I came here as a boy, to learn to read and write. I wrote a letter to Honest John when I was 11, thanking him for the opportunity to change my future. I think there is a picture of the letter on that – hang on, what is that thing you're holding? Is it magic? How does it work? It seems scary to me.....anyway, there is a picture of my letter so you can read it for yourself.

Stop 6: 17th Century Quakers in Todmorden.

I come here a lot. That first grave you can see – that really simple rectangle in the ground? That's where Honest John is buried. He really did change my life by giving me an education, a job in his factory, and making sure that children had the best working conditions possible. He felt so strongly about it that he stood for election as a Member of Parliament to campaign to make life better for children across the whole country, and in 1847 managed to change the law so that women and children could only work for 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. It was known as the 10 Hours Act.



He died in 1849. Hundreds of people lined the street for his funeral, and hundreds more climbed the hills to see the procession. I remember my mother crying and my dad trying hard not to. There were lots of sad people in Todmorden that day.

I do wonder why he felt so strongly about things and wanted to change the world. Maybe it's because he remembered how hard it was to walk to Manchester every week, or how lucky he was that he did well for himself when he took over his dad's factory? Maybe he felt responsible for looking after all the people who worked for him, or maybe it was his faith that made him want to do the best for people? Whatever it is, he changed my life and I am very grateful indeed. It's nice to come and sit here of an evening when the bats are flying around, and watch the local cats try to catch them – they sit on the wall with me and just enjoy the peace and quiet.

Stop 7: The Unitarian Church.

Hello?? I'm over here – by the map? Can you see me? Turn your back to the main doors and it's right in front of you!

This is a lovely place to look at Todmorden. Can you make out some of the buildings? The map will be able to help you. You might also be able to spot Dobroyd Castle on the hill to your left?

So, after Honest John died, his sons took over – remember they were called John, Joshua and Samuel? They were good men who really did take after their father. They built this church in memory of Honest John. The whole town was delighted and I remember coming back up the hill to watch the people in all their best clothes come for the official opening in 1869. There must have been 800 people at least! Once this church was opened, the old Unitarian church where Honest John is buried became the Sunday school – much more room for more children to learn to read and write!

This church is magnificent. It's huge! The spire is 196 feet high with foundations going down 30 feet into the ground to make sure it doesn't fall over! I think that means 65 metres high with foundations of 10 metres in your modern way of measuring things, but you might want to ask an old grown up to help you with the sums.

While we are here, see if you can spot Dobroyd Castle up on the hill. That's the old home of John Fielden, Honest John's son. There is some local gossip that says he fell in love with a factory worker called Ruth, who said she would only marry him if he built her a castle – so he did! She didn't like it though because it was too grand, so he built a small cottage at the bottom of the hill for her instead. She lived there, and he lived in the castle! I'd much rather live in the castle if I could choose! It cost £100,000 pounds to build and took 4 years between 1865-1869, so it was built around the same time as this church. John Fielden took 300 of the workmen out for a big banquet when it was finished – they were very lucky!

I'll race you to the Town Hall – on the way through the grounds you might walk past the graves of Samuel and Joshua? They are at the back of the building. You should also spot Stoodley Pike on the hill to the left as you walk over the canal. Ready....steady.....go!

Stop 8: The Town Hall.

Isn't this building grand! This is another building that the Fielden family built in the town. They used the same designer for most of them – a famous man from London called John Gibson. I think it's good that they all look like they match each other because it makes the town look smart. Once all these grand buildings were finished, Todmorden was a much nicer place to be. This building was finished in 1875, and has some big statues right at the top on the front – can you see them? The motto for the town is 'By Industry we Prosper' which I always thought meant we had to work hard so that we could earn good money!

The Town Hall was an important boundary marker for Todmorden. For a long time the town was half in Yorkshire and half in Lancashire, and the boundary is the river that runs under the Town Hall. I'm glad to say that the boundary was moved in the late 1880s and Todmorden is very much in Yorkshire now. I'm proud to be a Yorkshireman.

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Did you spot the Pike? If you look down the main road, you'll probably be able to see it. That's not the first monument though. The original one was built in 1814 to commemorate the end of the Napoleonic wars, but it fell down 40 years later! Gosh – the noise! We heard it all the way here in Todmorden!

Can you guess who paid for a new one? Yes – that's right! The Fielden brothers. There was a meeting in the Golden Lion to work out what to do, and it only took 2 years to build a new one. The bill was over 1000 pounds which is a huge amount of money. A little bit more building work was done in 1889 to make it more stable. It is a lovely walk up to the Pike – but it's looooooong. There is an inscription on it which I will recite to you now to save you the walk:

"STOODLEY PIKE A PEACE MONUMENT

Erected by Public Subscription.

Commenced in 1814 to commemorate the Surrender of Paris to the Allies and finished after the Battle of Waterloo when peace was established in 1815. By a strange coincidence the Pike fell on the day the Russian Ambassador left London before the declaration of war with Russia in 1854 and it was rebuilt when peace was proclaimed in 1856. Repaired and lightning conductor fixed 1889."

Are you ready? Off we go again!

Stop 9: Todmorden Market.

Do you remember right back at the beginning of our walk I told you that the first market was held outside the White Hart pub? Well, there is still a market in Todmorden today! Some people from your time have started something called Incredible Edible Todmorden to encourage people to grow their own fruit and vegetables, and to buy local produce from farmers – and this is where the farmers come to market, just like they did when I was alive. You might even have spotted some Incredible Edible vegetable beds on our walk.

We're off to the park now – let's go!

Stop 10: The Statue of Honest John Fielden.

This is him. Honest John. He looks like he could just step down and shake your hand! He's holding the Ten Hours Act which shows how important it was to him and the people who made the statue.

My friend Moses Heap said "For a while we did not know how to pass our time away. Before, it had been all bed and work, now, in place of 70 hours a week we had 55 and a half. It became a practice, mostly on Saturdays to play football and cricket, which we had never done before . . ." – isn't it brilliant that Honest John is in the park where he can watch children play?

We've got so much to thank him for, and his sons. It was through his hard work that he built up a great business, became wealthy and then gave that money back to the town for education and learning. Even after he died, his sons spent a lot of their inheritance on public buildings in Todmorden – the Town Hall, Unitarian Church, Stoodley Pike, Fielden Hotel and Coffee Tavern – and others that are landmarks like Dobroyd Castle. I think we can say that Todmorden would not be the town it is today without the Fielden family.

I hope you've enjoyed your walk with me. I'm going to stay here for a while, so if you just follow this path it will take you back towards the town centre. Thank you for your company and for letting me tell you a little bit about my wonderful and important town. Bye now!