

WELCOME TO

Heritage Trail Guide

# CENTRE VALE PARK



**Uncover hidden histories, stunning landscapes, and timeless tales on the Todmorden Park Heritage Trail.**

This immersive journey blends nature with rich local heritage – perfect for curious minds, history lovers, and families alike. Discover what makes Todmorden truly unique.



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# WELCOME TO THE CENTRE VALE PARK HERITAGE TRAIL!

Todmorden and Centre Vale Park have a long and varied history, with periods of change shaping both the town and park.

This history has left a legacy of landscape and architectural features that chart the evolution of the area – particularly over the last 500 years. However, most of these features are now hidden in undergrowth or have deteriorated. Visitors may be unaware of their existence, and the story they tell of the history of the landscape. The Friends of Centre Vale Park have worked in partnership with Todmorden Town Council to secure funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund to construct a heritage trail that is intended to highlight these features.

The trail includes **17 features** of interest that help reveal the history of the park and how it has evolved over time. The Centre Vale Estate was created from farmland during the first half of the 19th century, and this Trail will show you some of the hidden history of these lost farms together with the wildlife that can be seen here.

## SUPPORT THE FRIENDS OF CENTRE VALE PARK

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FRIENDS OF CENTRE VALE PARK

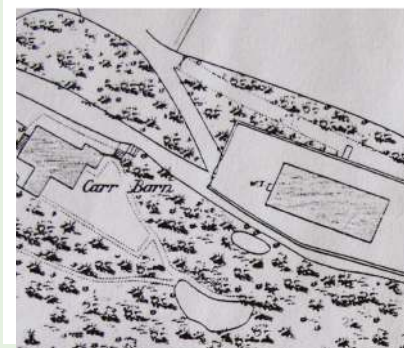
Sort Code: 05-09-59 | Account No: 39367310

Reference: Heritage Trail



### 1 - COACH HOUSE

We recommend beginning your journey at the Coach Yard, located behind the site of the Centre Vale Mansion and the iconic 'Lucky Dog' statue. All that survives of Centre Vale House is the Coach House and yard. From here the Trail leads up the steep hill behind the coachyard to the site of the old farm at Carr Laithe.

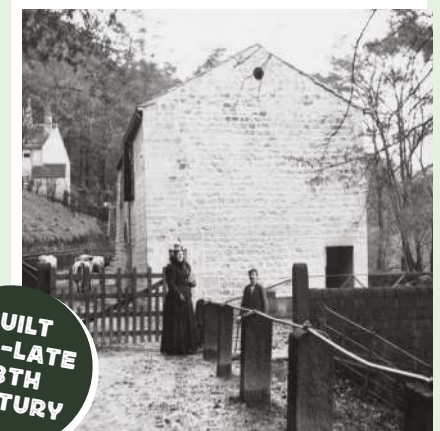


### 2 - THE ARCHES

Follow the path towards the arches, which once supported a large barn known as Carr Lathe. Now a wildlife area, this meadow was once part of a working landscape. The path linked the Coach Yard to Carr Farm, used to carry milk and produce to Centre Vale. The track, visible 30 years ago, is now almost lost to the grass.

### 3 - CARR LAITHE

The Trail takes you up the steps to the platform on which Carr Laithe used to stand. A late 18th century stone barn stood here supported on a large stone-vaulted terrace. There was probably a dairy at the far end. This terrace now provides a viewpoint overlooking the park.



### 4 - CARR FARM

With the view behind you, take the path to your right. Disregard the old steps on your left and continue a little further, then turn left up the hill to the site of Carr Farm. Demolished in the 1930s, only faint traces remain – look for a wall on the hillside. The stone steps and old roadway are still in use. In 1857, a young weaver named Ruth lived here. She later became the first wife of John Fielden, one of Todmorden's wealthy mill owners. The farm was active until the 1930s, ending with an auction of its last livestock.

BUILT  
MID-LATE  
18TH  
CENTURY

## 5 - FARM POND

A little way past the ruin there is Carr pond that held the spring water for the farm.

A small dam was created to collect water issuing from one of the many springs that emerge from the hillside. It was constructed to supply fresh water to the farm.



## 6 - CHARCOAL HEARTH

You're now entering a beautiful woodland walk.

On the left is a flat circular platform once used for making charcoal – a skilled process of slow-burning timber to remove water, tar, and creosote.

Continue uphill through the woods and take the left fork as the path slopes gently downhill.



## CHARCOAL BURNING

Charcoal has been an important commodity for thousands of years. It is created by burning timber in controlled conditions to remove impurities. This involves controlling the amount of air available to the fire. The process requires a considerable amount of skill both to construct the fire and to monitor its progress. A brief description of the process is outlined below.

1

A 22-foot-wide flat hearth was essential, which is why raised platforms were used in the park. Vegetation and turf were cleared to make space.

2

A central stake was placed in the hearth to serve as a guide. Around it, small timber pieces were carefully stacked to form a chimney, sloping inward to help support the dome.

3

Wood of increasing size was stacked around the chimney to form a dome. This shape allowed for even, controlled burning.

4

Hot coals were dropped into the chimney to start the burn. The fire was managed with turf and soil, and the charcoal bagged for use.

## INDUSTRIAL TODMORDEN

Before 1800, Todmorden was mainly a market town, with farming and textiles driving its economy. Between 1800 and 1845, better transport and communication sparked rapid industrial growth, with textile mills built along the valley floor. This brought wealth – but also heavy smoke, which blackened the town.

To reduce pollution, tall chimneys were built to carry smoke away. However, the steep valleys made this expensive, so some mills built remote chimneys on valley sides, connected by flues. The chimney that gave this area its name once stood about 20 metres east of here, though little of it remains today.

## 7 - STEEP COBBLED PATH

At the top, where the path meets the tarmac road, cross the old cobbled track. Built around 1800, this path once carried wool and goods to Todmorden's mills. Though still intact, the missing handrail and moss make it slippery – especially when wet. For safety, use the new crushed stone path across Chimney Field when wet.



## 8 & 9 - CHIMNEY FIELD

Head down through the woods to Chimney Field. Look for seats near where the chimney once stood. Follow the track downhill, and at the junction turn right on to the cobbled path with the iron railings. Also known as 'The Ridge', is the site of a former 19th century chimney and flue. The chimney has since been removed. This area of the park comprised open fields used for grazing sheep. It is only in the last seventy years that the existing woodland was allowed to regenerate. Turn the page to see Chimney Field Wildlife!





## CHIMNEY FIELD WILDLIFE

### BIRDS

Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Magpie, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Robin, Wren, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff.

### MAMMALS

Roe Deer, Badger and Grey Squirrel, (Bank Vole and Wood Mouse if you are lucky).

### BUTTERFLIES

Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Small Tortoise-Shell and Red Admiral.

### HOVERFLIES

Various species including the Drone Fly (mostly visiting bramble flowers). Several of these mimic bees or wasps.



## 10 - WELL LANE

This leads to the lower park near the church, it's a key entry point, offering easy access to Todmorden town centre via Well Lane and Pleasant View.

## 11 - HOLY WELL

Turn left at the bottom into the woods, with the church on your right. At the junction, take the left-hand path – you'll soon come to the Holy Well. Big stone flagstones cover a stone-lined well for spring water. It was in place before the nearby houses and the church were built so its purpose is not yet understood. The well's age is unknown but likely pre-dates Centre Vale House and Park.

## 12 - STREAM AREA

Go down the steps and join the main path again. Follow this until you reach a stream coming down the hillside. Alongside the stream that comes down the hillside from Platts, the undergrowth of brambles and small trees have been removed. This gives new woodland plants such as Blue Bells and Hazel a chance to thrive as the open areas receive more light. Butterflies, insects and birds will begin to fill the woods with again as the biodiversity increases.

## 13 - RUINS OF PLATTS HOUSE

A little further along the main path, steps on your left lead up to the ruins of 17th-century Platts Farm – but they are steep and uneven, so you may prefer to stay on the main path downhill. Platts House stood here until the 1930s. Built in the 1600s, it was first recorded as the home of James Stansfield, who died in 1669. By 1821, it became part of the Centre Vale Estate and was later divided into servant housing. In 1841, Abraham Stansfield lived here while working as the estate gardener. He became a national expert in fern cultivation.



The photograph to the left shows the milk cart on Lovers Walk just above Platts House in approximately 1900. It is probably returning to Carr Farm loaded with the milk churns after making deliveries. The roof of the house can be seen below the track on the left.

## 14 - SPRING/WELL

At the ruin, turn right. This spring-fed trough dates to the time of Platts House and was likely its original water source. Grooves in the stone show where a metal gate once sat.



Before piped water, communities relied on rivers, streams, and springs. Rainwater from farmland above the park filters through soil and rock, emerging as springs below the escarpment. Stone troughs or small ponds, like at Carr Farm, helped collect this water. In wet weather, temporary springs appear, making the hillside boggy.

## 15. LOVERS WALK RAILINGS

This main path, once known as Lovers Walk, was a popular Sunday stroll. The railings have been replaced, but the stone pillars are original. Go up the steps to reach the tarmac path. Turn right to find the old well set into the stone wall. Continue along Lovers Walk to see the historic stone and iron railing between Platts House and Carr Barn. Turn right again to follow the path down to the Fielden Statue. As you descend through the lower woodland, look for stone troughs and gateposts – reminders of the hillside's farming past, when meadows, not trees, covered the slope to the river.

## 16. STATUE OF JOHN FIELDEN MP

At the bottom, you return to the junction near the Coach Yard. Here stands the statue of John Fielden MP, celebrating the 1847 Ten Hours Act. Designed by J.H. Foley in 1863 and cast in 1869, it was moved from Fielden Square to Centre Vale Park in 1939. **The trail continues west to the site of Centre Vale House.**

### JOHN FIELDEN'S LIFE AS A REFORMER

John had worked 10 hours a day from the age of 10 years old and he was aware of the severe hardships suffered by workers, even small children who worked for 12 hours a day or even more. This early experience shaped his determination to achieve the factory reforms for which he became nationally renowned. He was respected for his blunt speaking and became known as "Honest John".



### THE TEN HOURS CAMPAIGN

Workers at Fielden's Waterside Mill petitioned for a 10-hour workday and 8 hours on Saturdays. John Fielden became a national leader of the Ten Hours campaign, part of the wider Factory Movement pushing for better conditions in northern mills. Reform meetings were held at Centre Vale House, and after years of effort, the 1844 Factories Act was passed. In 1847, Fielden introduced the Ten Hours Act, which became law in 1848 – marked by a commemorative medal. Fielden continued fighting for workers' rights until shortly before his death in 1849.



### RIOTS, UNREST AND REFORM

From 1834 to 1839 John Fielden supported and encouraged local residents who were opposed to the new Poor Law Amendment Act. He organised petitions, boycotts, protest meetings and rate strikes. In 1838 there were several violent riots in Todmorden. John Fielden closed his mills for nine days in protest against the new Law. After the riots John Fielden stepped back from the more extreme radicals, but he supported the Chartist Movement with petitions, and in the 1840s he became the leader of a national campaign for Factory Reform.

## 17. CENTRE VALE HOUSE

Your Trail ends in the front of where the Fielden's Centre Vale Mansion used to stand overlooking the park. The footprint of the original house is marked out with stone blocks to give an impression of the scale and position of the original structure and how it related to the park.

### CENTRE VALE MANSION

This site marks where Centre Vale Mansion stood from 1826 until its demolition in the 1950s due to dry rot. It served as a family home—most notably for the Fieldens from 1842 – a hospital during WWI, and a museum from 1924.

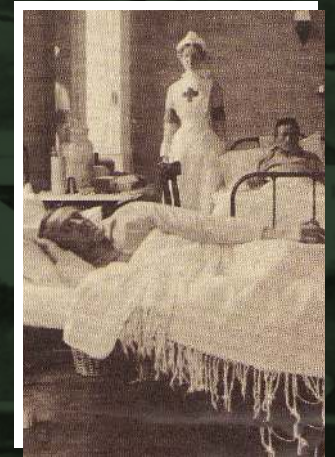
Todmorden Borough Council bought the house and 75-acre estate from the Fieldens for £10,547, opening Centre Vale Park in March 1912.

The footprint seen here was built using original plans and sits over the house's actual foundations. However, it doesn't reflect the full scale – the mansion was nearly 25 metres wide and over 30 metres deep.



## MILITARY HOSPITAL

On the 2nd November 1914 permission was granted by the town council for the mansion to be used as a hospital with the first batch of patients arriving on the 17th of that month. During its first year in operation as a hospital it treated 224 patients from many different regiments from all over the world.







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# CENTRE VALE PARK HERITAGE TRAIL MAP







VISIT OUR WEBSITE!

[www.friendsofcentrevalepark.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcentrevalepark.org.uk)



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