

Leave the church yard by the school entrance

- 6** Following the unsurfaced road beside the school and graveyard wall, there is a metal five-bar gate beyond the last building (wooden church hall). Passing through the gate and diagonally across the small paddock leads to a wooden pedestrian gate. This leads to the river, which was dammed to form an open-air swimming pool, now largely overgrown.

Re-trace your steps back to the road, and back along Church Street to the space known as Victoria Square.

- 7** Victoria Square is also known as Railway Square. Fortescue House, the older part of the current Post Office Sorting Centre, originally housed a college run by the Deelley's as a learning facility for young gentlemen, later incorporating Young Ladies. The present Victoria Hall was built with assistance from the Waldegrave family in 1897. An extension was added to the left-hand side of the building for Radstock Town Council in 1902. Before the construction of Victoria Hall, one of the first recreational and reading rooms bought with help from Countess Waldegrave for the use of Radstock miners stood on this site.

The cenotaph commemorates the fallen of Radstock in two world wars.

Leave the square by the footpath beside the cenotaph which enters a long narrow subway, beneath the former GWR railway lines. This must once have been an exciting walkway with goods trains passing above!

Emerging from the subway, cross the Frome Road taking great care of the traffic.

- 8** In this area the original Working Men's club and pound were located. This site was later used for Radstock's first mortuary; the same building (with the blocked entrance archway) being later converted to house the town's first motorized fire engine. The Fosseyway Press Offices opposite were originally built for the Radstock Co-operative society to house their drapery and shoe

departments. Long gone now but adjacent to this building was the bakery retail shop, incorporating public tea-rooms. This was a two storey building; the top storey being used as a meeting room for the Radstock Labour Party.

Pass over Sheepwash Bridge, so called because this was where sheep were driven through the river to wash them, before they were presented at the market for sale.

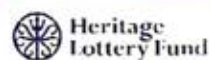
- 9** The imposing red brick Radco Furnishing Centre was constructed around 1915, and was originally the Radstock Co-operative Bakery. The car park was where the railway serviced the back of the bakery, supplying flour mainly from Bristol. The flour was loaded onto the raised platform and hoisted to the upper floors.

The brown tiled telephone exchange building on Waterloo Road stands on the former market yard. The yard was used for a weekly cattle market, and also occasionally housed fairground attractions such as a boxing ring for prize-fights. This area is also locally known as Bloodfields, a name which comes from the bare-knuckle fights which reputedly took place here amongst miners settling disputes.

The red brick building next door to the museum was the office of the local brewers Coombs & Co, constructed in 1898.



Norton Radstock
Town Council



Radstock
Museum



Radstock Town Centre Walk



A circular walk of
approximately half a mile
taking around 40 minutes

One of four walks exploring the built
and natural heritage of Radstock

1 The Pit Wheel, Waterloo Road

The pit wheel is one of the two identical sheaves which were situated at Kilmersdon Colliery. It was salvaged from the pit, one of the last to close, in 1973.

The Museum is housed in the former Market Hall, built in 1897-98 for £2,500 for Messrs Coombs, the local brewers. Used as a covered market on Saturdays, it was said that anything from a parsnip to a piano could be purchased there.

Looking east, the grass strip (soon to be transformed into a Memorial Park during 2003) running alongside Waterloo Road is the route of the former Somerset Coal Canal. The canal was opened in the late 1790's to transport coal from Radstock to the Midford locks area (and then onto Bath). Due to water supply problems and leakages the canal was only used briefly and fell into disuse around 1815. The towpath was later used for horse powered coal dillies. In 1873 the Somerset and Dorset Railway connected Radstock to Bath, and later became the LMS railway. The railway ran on the same route here as the in-filled canal, and the station was on the grassed area opposite the Radstock Appliances electrical shop, with a footbridge connecting the platforms.

Across the river and beyond Frome Road the Great Western Railway also served Radstock and had its own station and signal box. Both railways crossed the Bath Road with level crossing gates which caused severe traffic disruption up until the early 1970's. Individual collieries also had branch tramways connecting them to the main line, and Radstock was a real spaghetti junction of railway lines.

A subway ran beneath the LMS railway and emerged adjacent to the Market Hall where it had a low perimeter wall. Every Saturday evening the Bath Herald paper 'The Green Un' was published containing all the days sports results, and Radstock inhabitants would sit here waiting for the delivery van. The van had a tight schedule and would not stop. The paper parcels for Mr Wyatt's shop would be thrown from the back of the van and the small crowd competed to pick up the parcels and take them to the shop, where the prize was a free paper.

Over the Bath road by the Waldegrave forecourt, Mr Coombs the Brewery owner supplied a wrought iron water trough. This was the filling station of its day, horses stopping here for water before pulling heavy loads up the Bath Hill.

Cross the bridge over the river and cross Frome Road and Fortescue Road.

2 The Radco superstore building stands on the site of the Radstock Rectory, demolished in 1984. The many mature trees standing in the large grounds contained a large rookery which was very noisy in the spring time. Radco is an independent supermarket run by the Radstock Co-operative Society, which has a proud history of serving the town. During the miners strikes of the early twentieth century goods were reduced to cost to help the workers families.

The shops in The Street and Fortescue Road area were mostly constructed in the nineteenth century and served all the needs of the community. Shops and businesses included Purnells Printing Company, Clement's Chemist's, Milsom's Drapery outfitters, Lane's Jeweller and clockmaker, several banks and Parsons's general grocery store. On County Bridge were Case & son Cheese and Meat purveyors, Chiver's hairdressers and tobacconists, and Caswell's ironmongers. Caswell's sales included carbide lamps for mining use and loose carbide refills, plus tin baths for bathing in front of the fire at the end of the shift.

An interesting feature of the shops are the original built in roller shutters still visible at the top of some of the old shop windows, which suggests occasional rough and unruly behaviour by some of towns former inhabitants.

Continue around the corner into The Street and cross over the road.

3 The Radstock Working Mens club, is a listed building with a late eighteenth century Georgian façade probably incorporating an older structure. Mr Coombs, the Radstock Brewery owner once lived here.

Further south along Church Street is the library which stands on the site of the GWR station master's house.

Part of the current Youth Centre was the original Radstock police station. Beyond this is Radstock Infants school, built for the education of Miners children and working families. Other than Dame schools, of which there were several in Radstock, the first education for miners children was started by Rev. Boodle, on 5 form seats under Radstock Church bell tower, around 1835. By 1840 a little cottage in the church grounds almost opposite the porch entrance was being used by the Rev. and Mrs Boodle for teaching. This continued until the 1850's when Countess Waldegrave donated land for a school and contributed towards its construction. The school was open by 1857; the first headmaster being William Joseph Peach, who received a yearly salary of £70.

Continue South along Church Street and enter through the Church yard gate.

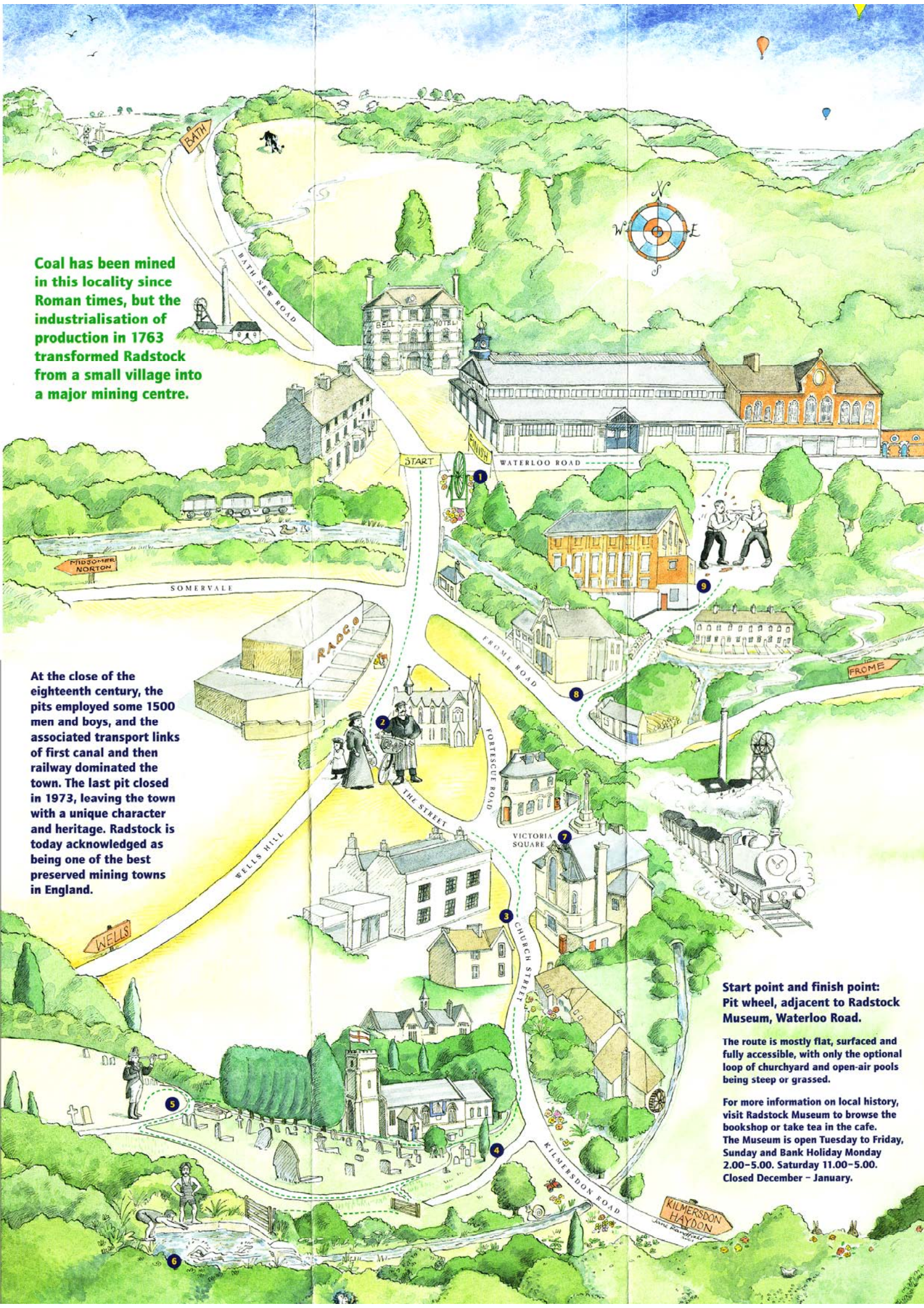
On the left is the old farm, (Manor Farm) now converted into two houses. The old water wheel that powered farm machinery is still fixed to the far wall

4 Inside the church are many interesting reminders of Radstock's history. Outside, on the south wall, notice the large sundial. This was designed around 1924 by Clementine Bax, daughter of the vicar the Rev. Bax. The inscription is detailed with gold leaf brass taken from the original village brass cross. For those wishing to make the climb, the top right hand corner (as you are going up) of the Church yard offers good views across the town and the tree covered spoil heaps, locally known as batches. Wheel chair accessibility is difficult beyond the lower church yard.

5 In the middle tier of the church yard below the concrete path near the stone hut are some yew trees, which surround the twin graves of Reverend Horatio Nelson Ward and his son. Rev. Nelson Ward was the grandson of Admiral Lord Nelson and Radstock vicar from the 1850's until his death in 1888.

Coal has been mined in this locality since Roman times, but the industrialisation of production in 1763 transformed Radstock from a small village into a major mining centre.

At the close of the eighteenth century, the pits employed some 1500 men and boys, and the associated transport links of first canal and then railway dominated the town. The last pit closed in 1973, leaving the town with a unique character and heritage. Radstock is today acknowledged as being one of the best preserved mining towns in England.



Start point and finish point:
Pit wheel, adjacent to Radstock Museum, Waterloo Road.

The route is mostly flat, surfaced and fully accessible, with only the optional loop of churchyard and open-air pools being steep or grassed.

For more information on local history, visit Radstock Museum to browse the bookshop or take tea in the cafe. The Museum is open Tuesday to Friday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday 2.00-5.00. Saturday 11.00-5.00. Closed December - January.