

# The Pigman at Tatton Park's Farm

The Farm at Tatton Park is a 40 acre working farm set in a corner of the park known as Tatton Dale and was, in its heyday, at the heart of the vast Egerton Estate feeding family, guests and staff at the Mansion. We've brought this story to life through our fascinating 'Field to Fork' project including real characters that have lived and worked at the Farm in the past.

**Step back in time with the Pigman and find out about life at the Farm in the early 1900's through a collection of oral histories and historical archives.**



Historically, Cheshire is known for dairy farming and particularly cheese. Pigs were reared on the skimmed milk left after the cream was separated from whole milk. Tatton Estate accounts from 1813-16 record pigs killed for both pork and bacon. Bacon (being dry cured, smoked or salted) was especially valued as it would keep without refrigeration for many months uncut.

## ISAAC DAVIES

Isaac Davies came to work as Pigman on the Tatton Estate with his family in 1906 from Sandbach, where he had worked with an uncle in his butchers shop.

He was given one of the cottages on the Estate which had been made by subdividing a former farmhouse called New Tatton, close to Mere Heath Lodge. The accommodation was rent free.

His granddaughter Rosemary was born in 1929 and lived next door with her parents. She recalls that life back then was primitive - *“those days there were no water taps... you had to go to the pump to draw any water needed. It was spring water, so cool, but so soft.”*

She remembered that, *“there was always a kettle on the hob of the large kitchen fire range. The kitchen range was black, which was always kept very clean and regularly rubbed down with traditional black polish.”*



Isaac can be seen on the right

*“It consisted of a large fire with an arm which extended over the fire, on which a pan or kettle could rest. Next to the fire was an oven, in which there were always a couple or more bricks, which in winter were used to heat our beds.”*

*“There were of course no washing machines like we have today and washing was an all day affair. This started off by carrying buckets of water from the pump and filling the ‘copper’. A copper was a round vessel surrounded by bricks and mortar, with a fire to heat the water underneath. The fire had to be lit and there was quite a wait for the water to heat to a temperature necessary for washing, but at least the fire helped to warm the kitchen in the winter. Eventually the clothes went into the copper with some soap flakes. Next to come out was a dolly tub and dolly peg where the washing was rinsed. The washing was then put through a mangle to squeeze the water out – and what a big thing that was!”*





*“At this time there was no electric or gas lighting in these cottages – oil lamps or candles were used.*

*Looking back I think the most primitive of all was the toilet situation. No flush toilets as of today. These were outside and from recollection quite a distance from the house – especially when one was in a hurry! This was a brick building which inside consisted of a long wide plank of wood with a round hole – at the bottom of this was a large bucket. There were no nice soft toilet rolls – squares of newspaper tied through with string were used.”*

You can see the original ‘privy’ at the Farm today. Look for it next to the Bothy and see how basic toilets used to be.

Rosemary continues, *“Bath time was also very different in those days. The bath was made of zinc. It was brought out and placed in front of the kitchen fire. Again back to the pump for water which had to be heated – quite time consuming.”*



*New Tatton (now demolished)*



*Isaac would help with the stock sales that were made in the yard*



*Isaac was also a member of the Tatton Fire Brigade*

The pigs were kept in the ‘messy’ west end of the Mansion Stableyard, near to the Head Gardener’s Cottage.

You can see where the pigs were kept by visiting the Stableyard today – look out for the entrance to the Gardener’s Cottage Tea Room and you can imagine Isaac looking after the pigs just outside.





## A CHANGE OF ROLE

As the table (*right*) shows, there was a sharp reduction in pigs on the Estate by the 1920s, which forced Isaac to take other employment within Tatton Park. He had a passion for gardening and his son was a foreman for the Estate's Gardens, so Isaac began working in the Gardens where he took responsibility for collecting gardening supplies by horse and cart.

## LIVESTOCK RETURNS

YEAR	PIGS
1883	66
1913	130
1918	1
1939	276
1945	140
1957	495



*The Garden team at Tatton Park in the 1920s in front of the glasshouse*



*Isaac with Robin the horse who helped him move gardening supplies with horse and cart*

## A NEW LAND AGENT

In 1933 when Mr Wiglesworth became the sub-agent, he had the former wheelwright's shop made into a piggery and Isaac became the Pigman again. The large white sows were kept in pig arcs in a field and brought in for farrowing. Mr Wiglesworth instigated incentive payments and Isaac was paid 6 pence bonus for every pig reared to 8 weeks in addition to his wage of 42 shillings 6 pence a week. With a gestation period of 3 months 3 weeks and 3 days, and around 10 piglets per litter, the pig herd expanded rapidly, and with 35 breeding sows, Mr Wiglesworth, now the agent, was able to report annual sales of 600 fat pigs. However, the limited feeding stuffs available in WWII reduced this considerably, with many being sold at 12 weeks as stores.







## MEETING THE NEW ARRIVALS

Isaac's granddaughter went to Rostherne school and would cycle from New Tatton and leave her bicycle near Tatton Dale, then walk through the fields to the school in Rostherne village, near Knutsford. She remembers Isaac, her grandfather, meeting her on the way back from school and showing her any new litters of piglets. One day she went to see him in the slaughterhouse where he was making blood pudding; she didn't like the look of that!

Find out more about how food gets to the table by visiting the original Farm slaughterhouse today. Listen to the soundscape of the slaughterman talking to the boy and his dog about how this building was used in the 1940's.

Rosemary remembers, *"Often in autumn my grandfather would give me a bucket to collect acorns which he said his pigs liked. I felt quite important being able to help. Also in the autumn I could collect sweet chestnuts which were roasted in the evening – they were good. It was a good way of learning about trees. I remember a lot of Beech trees and Horse Chestnut trees from which I collected conkers – I was told the cows liked these. Maybe this was all to keep me occupied and not what the pigs or cows liked to eat."*

Sadly Isaac died in summer 1944 aged 66, following a threshing accident. Helping with the annual harvest, his hand became trapped, and though he was taken to Salford Royal Infirmary immediately, he suffered a heart attack whilst he was in hospital. He was buried at Rostherne churchyard in a coffin made of Tatton oak by the Estate carpenters. His wife remained at Tatton until her death in 1956.

## PIGMEN AT TATTON

The following men have all worked as Pigmens at Tatton. They all had experience as butchers before or after working at Tatton and each lived at New Tatton.

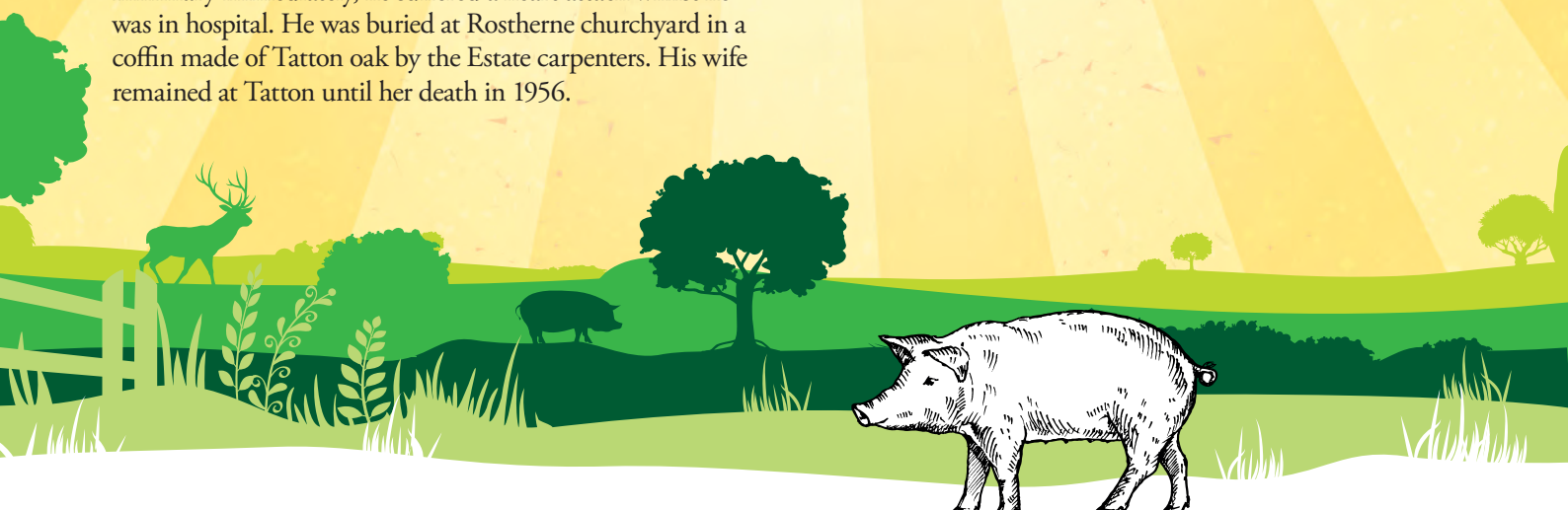
- Thomas Powell of Standhorn, Cheshire ..... 1800 – 1884
- H Cunningham ..... Abt 1888
- Thomas Holden of Tabley, Cheshire ..... 1848 – 1890
- Joseph Aspey of Bowdon, Cheshire ..... 1857 – 1914
- George Shephard of Walburton, Sussex ..... 1862 – 1906
- Isaac Davies of Sandbach, Cheshire ..... 1879 – 1945

One of the Pigmens at Tatton Park, named Thomas Holden, unfortunately experienced an early death that was reported in the Chester Observer on 3rd January 1891. The article reads as follows:

### *Shocking Fatality at Lord Egerton's Farmstead*

*On Wednesday Mr Yates held an inquest at Tabley on the body of Thomas Holden, pigman in the employ of Lord Egerton at the Dale Farm (Tatton Farm), Knutsford. Deceased on Saturday afternoon went to milk, being under the influence of drink. Shortly afterwards he was discovered lying beside one the cows. He was taken to the bin, where the head cowman saw him at eight o'clock covered in rugs. He was allowed to remain there through the night and early on Sunday morning he was driven home, but on arrival at Tabley, two and a half miles away, he was found to be dead. The verdict was that the deceased had met with his death by falling whilst in drink, and that the subsequent neglect contributed to bring about his death.*

[Chester Observer 3 Jan 1891 p4.]





## PIG BREEDS YOU CAN SEE AT TATTON PARK TODAY

Under the watchful eye of Isaac Davies the Pigman, pigs were the most profitable animal on the farm in the 1930s.

In January 2007, the Farm at Tatton Park was awarded Rare Breeds Accreditation by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) - the leading conservation charity working to restore Britain's native livestock breeds. It is one of only 17 farm parks in the UK to have received the award, which recognises commitment to the conservation, breeding and promotion of rare or endangered breeds of farm animals.

There have been five rare pig breeds on the RBST watch list at the Farm over the years. These include: the Tamworth (believed to be the purest of our native breeds and the closest living relative of the old English forest pig), Middle White, Berkshire (one of the oldest English breeds), Saddleback and Large Black.

Today, you can spot Berkshires and Middle Whites in the piggery and even try out a pig arc for size!



*Berkshire pigs*



*Molly our Middle White Pig with her piglets*

