



Phrases and Sayings

“Humble Pie”

Tatton has been a deer park since 1290. Humble pie was made from the umbles or numbles of deer - typically the liver, feet, brain and sweetbreads. It is often said that only servants would eat this and now, if we come down in the world we have to eat humble pie. However, it used to be the huntsman's privilege to eat these parts of the animal and as late as the 17th century there is recipes for humble pie that suggest the dish was a treat to look forward to.

“By Hook or by Crook”

Although the Lord of the Manor was required to grow trees for his and the sovereigns use, peasants were allowed to collect any small, fallen timber for firewood. They could also take dead wood from trees and to do this they used hooks tied to ropes or a crook attached to a long handle. They would therefore collect the firewood by 'hook or by crook'.

“Barmy”

In the past the Old Hall had its own brew house to make ale and small beer. Foam and fermentation is called the barm. If someone was not thinking or acting with lucidity they would be accused of having a head full of froth or barm - hence barmy.

“Upper Crust”

Yeast and barm would have been used for making bread and the Old Hall had its own bakehouse. Clay ovens would be heated with bundles of wood, the ash and embers raked out and dough placed on the oven floor where the underside would become dirty and burnt. The top of the bread would be quite clean and hopefully perfectly baked. It would be sliced horizontally (as we do a roll or barm cake) and the top table would have this upper crust. Nowadays if you are a member of the highest social class you would be known as a member of the 'upper crust'.



“To nock on and nock off”

This phrase is derived from shooting the longbow, a sport practised in Medieval and Tudor times for ‘the defence of the realm’. Football was banned. At both ends of the bow are grooves called nocks to take the bowstring. When it was time to start your practice or even a battle, the bow was strung by ‘nocking on’ and when finished, ‘nocking off’. Arrows also have a groove at the end that fits or ‘nocks on’ to the bowstring. We sometimes still use this saying when starting and finishing work.

And just to intrigue you a little more, we will let you into the secret of the Cheshire Cat...

“To Grin like a Cheshire Cat”

Or to use the full saying, ‘to grin like a Cheshire cat chewing gravel’. Lewis Carroll, who lived for a while in nearby Daresbury, made the Cheshire Cat famous. An explanation for this saying goes back to the early nineteenth century when it was said that a sign painter attempted to reproduce the Egerton crest of lion rampant for an inn sign board. His efforts caused the lion to look more like a grinning cat than a noble heraldic beast. There are many pubs named the Egerton Arms or Red Lion. Some were also nicknamed ‘The Romping Kitten’ because of their painted signs.

