

PROVISIONS AND FOOD

As far as meat went, pork was the mainstay of the cottagers diet in the county and was often referred to, in fun, by the poorer folk as 'pigsty beef'. Because it played such an important part in the diet of the area there was a wide range of names for the different portions and cuts of meat. Here are some of the different names used...

Chine - the flat section of the neck

Baldrib - the thick part of the loin

Chawl - the lower jaw

Eyepiece - the upper jaw

Sparrib - spare rib

Tom Hodge - the stomach

Melt - the spleen

Kell - the membranous skin from around the intestines

Pork and pig-meat were two entirely different things. Pork came from the small porklet pig and had the rind left on, while pig-meat was from the bacon hog and had the rind removed.

The pig was the prized possession of any family. Two were ideal, one to kill in the spring and the other to kill in the autumn. Some of the meat was eaten fresh, but most was cured and the hams would be hung around the kitchen throughout the year. Most people kept pigs whether their garden was big enough or not. When the pig was large enough they would get the pig man to come and kill it, cut it up and either salt it or hang it to dry on large hooks in the house. Mr Gill describes pig killing...

"The pig used to be tied with a string, it would go tight and the pig would be pushed till it was in the right position. Then you'd knife between the front legs and the blood would go everywhere. The small ones were burnt with straw, the very small ones were scalded, but only the very small ones. They'd set fire to the straw, move the pig around and that would singe the hairs off. Then they'd scrape him with hot water and a scraper till he was all clean. But when the pig was killed it was great jubilation because you hadn't had much to eat. You'd have liver, faggots, you used everything, every bit of the pig. Nothing was wasted."

Mrs Gill continues...

"You'd have the meat cut and salted. What wasn't salted was cut up and you'd give all your friends a piece of the meat. Then, when they killed their pig, they'd give you some back, so you were having fresh meat even when you hadn't got your pig killed."

Another meat used would have been chicken, but as Mrs Gill tells us...

"Chickens were more of a luxury. You always had chicken at Christmas or special times. Chicken's cheapest these days but we had a lot more meat than then."

Mr Gill remembers joints of beef being cooked in the village oven...

"The ovens were just like big pieces out of the wall and you used to put the wood inside and then take it out when the oven was hot enough. A lot of people in Napton didn't have these big ovens, so on Sundays they used to get their joints and put the batter in a jug and they would take them all to the local baker in Paddock Close. You always had batter pudding with beef, it wasn't right if you didn't. Then they used to cook it in the oven and charge you so much, sixpence I think it was. In those days they had meat that I couldn't afford today. At home we always had a huge joint of sirloin of beef every Sunday."

All of the villagers would grow their own vegetables as the French brothers remember...

"You never knew what it was to buy vegetables. It would've been a crime if we'd bought a cabbage off anyone."

Mr and Mrs Taylor, who lived by the canal, would sell any spare vegetables to the passing boat people...

"We used to sell the spare veg and eggs to the boat people. When we had anything to spare we'd put up a notice in the window. Course, these were the pleasure boats, anything fresh out of the garden they used to like."

In the early 1900's there were many more shops in Napton than there are today. A lot of them would have once been the front room in someone's home which they converted into a shop.

Mary Fell remembers her Grandmother's shop...

"My Grandmother kept a shop, on top of having twenty one children she kept a shop. I remember we used to go in and she had these bits of greaseproof paper cut into squares and she'd go like that, (demonstrates method of folding the paper) and wrap it all up with the sweets in. She just sold sweets and pop. We used to have lemonade there every day. If you went you used to have to pay like anyone else. Oh, what she gave away you could wrap in a piece of paper like that, (indicating a very small piece!!)"

Mrs Gwyther is another whose Grandmother kept a shop but she was a bit luckier than Mrs Fell...

"Grandmother had a shop, grocery and sweets. We used to like to fill up the jars and we could always get a free sample. We used to say that if we didn't sample them how could we recommend them! You could buy a quarter of sweets for about a halfpenny. You could get a farthings worth of this and a farthings worth of that to get a bigger choice. You could get great big gobstoppers, liquorish twists. We didn't have much chocolate because you had to eke out your penny and so you bought the things that lasted the longest."

Mr Gill remembers a woman making money by selling boiled cow's heels...

"A woman who lived on the other side of the hill, on The Poplars, when the war was on, she used to boil cow heels in her copper and then she used to sell them to those who could afford to buy them cooked. We used to go and buy two or three pennyworth of the fat when it was set after boiling had finished and gone cold. A layer of fat would be on the top of the water and this would be taken off in slices. She'd wrap it in newspaper and you'd have it on bread like dripping.

Of course, this was during the first war when you couldn't get butter at all. I remember I used to have toast with a drop of tea poured on it and then sprinkle sugar on it."

Mr Jones-Gill also remembers cow heel broth...

"You could buy cow heel ready cooked for fourpence a pound and the same for tripe. You would buy a gallon bucket of cow heel broth and in it you'd cook potatoes, parsnips, carrots, all the vegetables you grew yourself."

Mr Jones-Gill also had his own way of making some pocket money as a lad...

"An old lady who lived in the Poplars would drink a pint of beer a night, it cost about sixpence for each bottle, and I used to go down to the Crown and carry the bottles for her. They would put a label over the cork to make sure that neither I, nor anyone else, would steal any. I got paid sixpence a week for this errand."

In times when food was scarce the man of the house would have the lion's share. Mr Gill tells us...

"The man was the worker and if there was a bit of something going, the man got the first share. Meat was cheap then, the things that are dear now were cheap then. The children were only given what was left and I've heard say that the children used to look through a hole in the floor to see what was being eaten downstairs. The wife, the woman didn't count. She was only the servant in the house, the servant of the man. When he came home his meal should be waiting and the children should be out of the way."

Steamed food was very popular as Mrs Gill recalls...

"Lots of steamed food. Mother used to have a piece of calico cloth to cover the top and boil them in. My favourite dinner was a boiled meat pudding. She used to cut the meat up, put it in a crust and boil it. There was a lot of boiling, I don't remember many cakes."

As in the case of pigs, the idea of wasting nothing, or very little, was carried to rabbits as Mr Gill remembers...

"A load of you would go out rabbiting and when you'd skinned them you'd nail the skins to a board, stretched out and tacked down. Then you'd get saltpetre and rub it in and allum too to dry it. You'd do that for about three days, then eventually you'd wash it and then make gloves from it."

There are now less shops in the village although other types of trade are returning to the village. There is now an antiques business and a craft business making chess pieces within the village, while on the small industrial estate on the outskirts many small businesses, ranging from car spares to cab construction, are finding that working in the village environment is better, both socially and economically, than in towns.