# Tiverton Market in the 1920s

*Wendy Buckingham-Arnold*

## Preface

Growing up in Tiverton in the 1960s and 1970s, I remember there was always an enormous buzz in the town on a Tuesday – market day. The booming babble, loud guffaws and thick tobacco smoke drifting from the numerous public houses made my long walk home from school most exciting. Of course, it was usually the men doing 'business' over a pint while putting the world to rights. The women were busy with the weekly shop, getting their hair done and meeting friends for a chat. Fond memories.

I was thrilled to be given the opportunity by Dr Julia Neville to research Tiverton Market as part of this wonderful 'Devon in the 1920s' project. This has been such an exciting project to be involved with. After four decades rarely visiting Tiverton, I could spend time examining the market both as it is now and as it was a century ago.

I could not find any mention of the market during this specific decade from published books. Mike Sampson's *A History of Tiverton* helped with the background[1] and the Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter had some market trust records from the 1920s which were invaluable. Volunteer researchers, Bernard and Pam from Tiverton Museum, were also supportive in my quest for data.

But to get a feel for the day-to-day life of the market, I ended up simply scanning the local newspapers page by page – or as it had to be in Tiverton Library, microfiche by microfiche! The *Devon and Somerset News*, the *Tiverton Gazette* and the *Western Morning News* were my reading matter for almost a year. Most of the main stories were written up in at least two of the newspapers. I have tended to refer to the account in the *Devon and Somerset News* only because the editions are still in the paper original so are gentler on weary eyes and easier to photograph.

Some of the photographs have been taken by me or are from family albums, and many of the people mentioned in the text are family members! It is a sadness to me that my aunt and father, pictured in this paper as very young children, are now both dead. They often talked about their market adventures and I still have the butter scales my grandmother used at the market. I wish I had recorded their tales and undertaken this project a decade earlier.

I only hope I have gleaned as much relevant information as possible and have produced an interesting harvest.

[1] Mike Sampson, *A History of Tiverton* (Tiverton War Memorial Trust, 2004).

## If the Farmers Have a Good Tuesday, the Traders Do Too

In the centre of the mid-Devon town of Tiverton is a Grade II-listed Victorian pannier market. It sits comfortably with its tall wooden arches rising the height of two storeys, supporting the glass and slate roof. A central tower holds a clock. The building is surrounded by both open and closed wooden units and pop-up stalls. Beyond them is a car park.

The market building is open most days of the week. On Mondays there is a popular second-hand sale and various community events are held there. Tuesdays and Saturdays are still the days the traditional market is held… there has been no change for the past 368 years. On market days, fresh fruit and vegetables, eggs, dairy produce, fish, meat, hardware, clothes and haberdashery items are on sale as they have been for centuries. These days, shoppers also come to pick up mobile phone accessories, have new keys cut, buy car parts, vinyl records, CDs and familiar items from the past, now described as 'antiques'.

The stallholders are probably just as eager for a sale as they ever have been. But today's pannier market – named after the baskets that would be slung across the backs of ponies and donkeys – is a mere shadow of the market of the past. It is no longer the bustling trading place that dictated the town's economy, making fortunes for some and presiding over disaster for others. The Tiverton saying, 'If the farmers have a good Tuesday, the traders have a good Tuesday too' no longer applies.

Once, a thriving livestock market ran alongside the pannier market. That was when Tiverton was transformed. Cattle and sheep were driven through the town to the market; wagons and carts brought goods from all over the district; the streets were crammed with both town and country folk, eager to pick up a bargain or sell at a profit. The local publicans knew they were in for a roaring trade as farmers made deals, settled accounts and chewed the fat with their friends who they probably had not seen for, well, at least a week. Even the local newspaper, *The Tiverton Gazette*, was published on a Tuesday to make the most of its weekly sales.

As the 1920s began, Tiverton market still operated very much as it had for hundreds of years: a place where people living within a day's journey could sell both their animals and produce. They walked, or rode in carts, wagons, on horseback – and, as the decade wore on, by motorised vehicles – to join the throng in the mid-Devon town.

The market was at the heart of the town and its commercial centre. Regular trading and socialising were part of the normalcy of life in the town. Prices were agreed with a handshake, payment was often delayed without question and double-dealing was almost unheard of – I mean, these were your friends and neighbours who you saw each week; how could you possible cheat them?

The Great War had had an influence on the way of life throughout Devon, and during the 1920s Tiverton Market was to continue to change – probably more than it had during any previous period. Labour shortages followed by depression, a general strike, rises in food prices and then a slump, along with changes in transport and technology, all had their impact.

*The outside of Tiverton Pannier Market today. It still functions as a market with stalls both inside and out attracting a wide range of goods for sale, including foodstuffs, second-hand furniture, local crafts and books. There has also been a café and various community events held in the building. It can even be hired out for wedding receptions! Photo WBA*

*Inside today's pannier market. Local growers and farmers still bring their produce for sale. Photo WBA*

## The Beginnings

Tiverton is well known as one of Devon's 'market' towns. It is mentioned in Saxon and even Roman times as a great place to trade, partly because it is where the River Exe and the River Loman cross (often referred to as Twyford, meaning fording two rivers) and it is in the centre of the county. The town fathers reckon markets have been held here for at least 1,280 years. The first recorded mention of a specific market is in AD740.

Tiverton was made a borough in 1224, allowing it to hold weekly markets. King Henry III granted the first market charter to Tiverton on 28 December 1257. This gave Tiverton the legal right to hold a weekly market on a Monday and Saturday, four Great Markets a year, as well as annual fairs.

For hundreds of years Tiverton held a series of markets across the town, each for a specific product. For instance, from 1257 there is mention of a sheep market in Newport Street ('port' in this case meaning market) with pens in front of St Peter's Church. The statue of a lamb remains from The Lamb Inn on the street corner. A 'flesh shambles' was held in Fore Street.

Angel Hill was where dairy products, eggs, fish, poultry and vegetables changed hands. Oats were also sold there. The Boar's Head public house in Bampton Street was where pig deals were made. And the Corn Market (rebuilt after burning down in 1731) can still be seen, also in Bampton Street.

Oliver Cromwell issued a second market charter for Tiverton on 16 November 1655, which changed market day from Mondays to Tuesdays 'to avoid the profanation of the Sabbath by traders preparing their wares which had provoked God's wrath, which manifested in the two Great Fires of 1598 and 1612'.[2]

Tiverton was busy and thriving. The cloth industry increased prosperity in the 1400s and to help the movement of trade, a bridge was built across the River Exe. A Mr Tyrrell donated property in the town for the maintenance of the bridge and the Exe-bridge Trust was set up, which eventually also included the market. The trust bought property, including the Corn Market, and used the rents and tolls to run Tiverton Market, maintain the bridge and pay a weekly sum to the poor of the town.

Over the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Tiverton was one of the most important towns in the south west for its woollen cloth, and among the thirty largest towns in England. The decline in the cloth industry began in the eighteenth century. John Heathcoat brought workers down from Loughborough in 1816 and so began the Heathcoat lace factory, which became a major employer and changed Tiverton from a totally agricultural-based community.

With animals and wares being sold in numerous mini-markets across the town, improvements were required. This came in 1825 with the passing of the Market Act. The bill regulated trading and cleared all the specialised markets. Goods could no longer be auctioned in the streets on market days. Instead, the town would have a single market site for both stock and all kinds of produce and goods. The market would operate as the charter demanded: on Tuesdays, Saturdays, with four Great Markets a year, and with various fairs included.

[2] *Tiverton* Museum, Second market charter for Tiverton, 16 November 1655.

Tiverton, Devon.

GREAT MARKETS.

By Order of the Truſtees and Owners of the Fairs and Markets of Tiverton, in the County of Devon,

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN,

That henceforth there will be held annually,

Within the Town and Borough of Tiverton aforeſaid,

FOUR GREAT MARKETS,

FOR THE SALE OF

*All Manner of Cattle and Sheep,*

ON THE SEVERAL DAYS FOLLOWING:

The SECOND TUESDAY in MARCH;

TUESDAY before the 25th of APRIL;

TUESDAY after the 26th of AUGUST;

*But if that Day happen on a Tueſday, then to be kept;*

AND

TUESDAY after the 14th of DECEMBER;

*But if that Day happen on a Tueſday, then to be kept.*

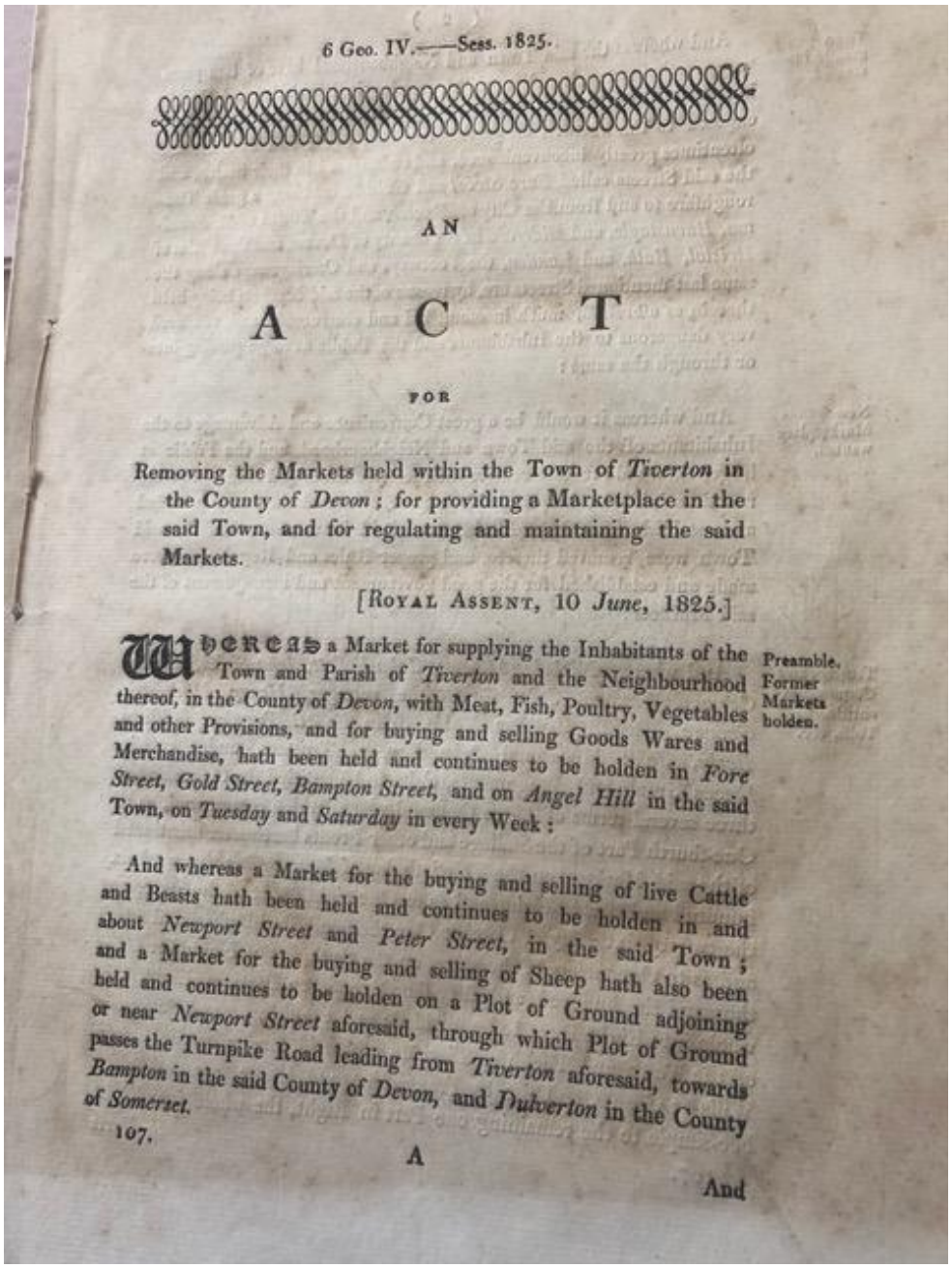
TIVERTON, 26th November, 1793.

TIVERTON: PRINTED BY H. PARKHOUSE.

*A notice from 1793 about the Four Great Markets which were allowed under the charter. The livestock markets had been an important part of Tiverton trading. The last was held in 1971. Tiverton Museum Collection*

The bill also gave the trust the power to buy houses and clear land to build the official marketplace. It would then receive rents, tolls and stallage. £10,400 could be borrowed to make this happen. Tiverton's existing pannier market building was opened on 8 June 1830, at a cost of £9,000.

In October 1859, a cattle shed and stock pens were added to Tiverton Market (where the market car park is now). Up until the 1950s, stock was still driven by drovers through the streets to the market, although most came by cattle lorry. After 1971 Tiverton cattle market closed. So all we have left now is the Grade II-listed Victorian pannier market. And a pay-and-display car park. Times change.



6 Geo. IV.——Sess. 1825.

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FOR

Removing the Markets held within the Town of *Tiverton* in the County of *Devon*; for providing a Marketplace in the said Town, and for regulating and maintaining the said Markets.

[ROYAL ASSENT, 10 *June*, 1825.]

Preamble. Former Markets holden.

WHEREAS a Market for supplying the Inhabitants of the Town and Parish of *Tiverton* and the Neighbourhood thereof, in the County of *Devon*, with Meat, Fish, Poultry, Vegetables and other Provisions, and for buying and selling Goods Wares and Merchandise, hath been held and continues to be holden in *Fore Street*, *Gold Street*, *Bampton Street*, and on *Angel Hill* in the said Town, on *Tuesday* and *Saturday* in every Week:

And whereas a Market for the buying and selling of live Cattle and Beasts hath been held and continues to be holden in and about *Newport Street* and *Peter Street*, in the said Town; and a Market for the buying and selling of Sheep hath also been held and continues to be holden on a Plot of Ground adjoining or near *Newport Street* aforesaid, through which Plot of Ground passes the Turnpike Road leading from *Tiverton* aforesaid, towards *Bampton* in the said County of *Devon*, and *Dulverton* in the County of *Somerset*.

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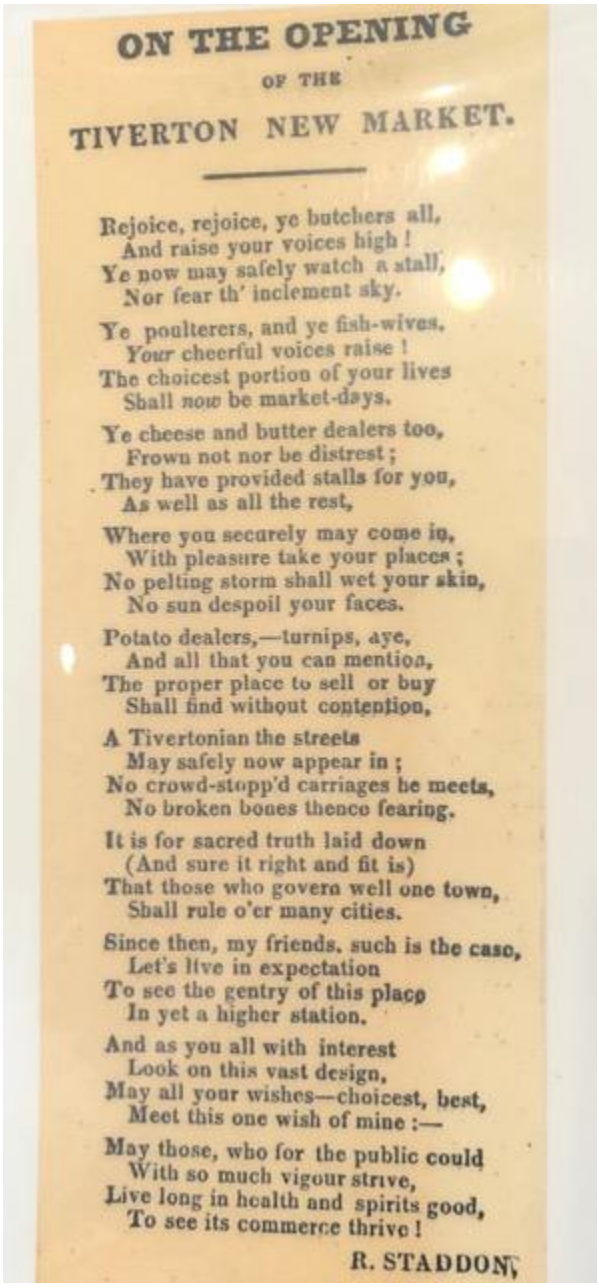
And

*The first page of the 1825 Tiverton Markets Act which ended the practice of holding individual markets in various sites across the town. It cleared up the streets by having one central marketplace.*

*An engraving of the newly built pannier market in 1830. It brought all the individual markets held across the town on to one site in the heart of the town. Forty-five families lost their homes when the project got underway. Tiverton Museum Collection*



ON THE OPENING

OF THE

TIVERTON NEW MARKET.

Rejoice, rejoice, ye butchers all,
And raise your voices high!
Ye now may safely watch a stall,
Nor fear th' inclement sky.

Ye poulterers, and ye fish-wives,
*Your* cheerful voices raise!
The choicest portion of your lives
Shall *now* be market-days.

Ye cheese and butter dealers too,
Frown not nor be distrest;
They have provided stalls for you,
As well as all the rest,

Where you securely may come in,
With pleasure take your places;
No pelting storm shall wet your skin,
No sun despoil your faces.

Potato dealers,—turnips, aye,
And all that you can mention,
The proper place to sell or buy
Shall find without contention,

A Tivertonian the streets
May safely now appear in;
No crowd-stopp'd carriages he meets,
No broken bones thence fearing.

It is for sacred truth laid down
(And sure it right and fit is)
That those who govern well one town,
Shall rule o'er many cities.

Since then, my friends, such is the case,
Let's live in expectation
To see the gentry of this place
In yet a higher station.

And as you all with interest
Look on this vast design,
May all your wishes—choicest, best,
Meet this one wish of mine:—

May those, who for the public could
With so much vigour strive,
Live long in health and spirits good,
To see its commerce thrive!

R. STADDON,

A glowing tribute to the newly built market by poet R. Staddon. He tells sellers that they can trade in comfort from now on and not worry about weather conditions or getting run down in the road. He expects trade will be boosted and everyone will live healthy and happy lives! *Tiverton Museum Collection.*

## Back to the 1920s

We can get an idea of the market site from an insurance policy document written by the Commercial Union Assurance Co. Ltd, dated 27 May 1920. For an annual premium of £3 6s 3d, the company providing building insurance for:

> The general market, a brick and stone building with slated and glass roof of one and two storeys in height, valued at £2,700.

> Stalls used by butchers and others of stone and slated, valued at £600.
> Another similar building used by traders, valued at £600.
> An open shed of brick and stone with a slated roof used as pig and sheep pens and a dog kennel valued £112 10s.
> Brick and stone buildings with slated roofs used as an office, weigh room, stall for agricultural machinery and lavatories worth £150.
> Brick and stone buildings with cattle pens worth £37 10s.
> Sum insured: a total of £4,410.[3]

The pannier market was open twice weekly (Tuesdays and Saturdays) and the cattle market was held fortnightly. Livestock and a variety of goods including agricultural equipment, sheep dogs, ponies, carts and wagons, fruit trees and even ladders were auctioned. Regular annual sales included: the live poultry market, Devon longhorn rams sale, down rams sale, the Christmas market, Christmas fat stock show, the poultry and pigeon show, breeding ewe market and annual dead poultry, butter, eggs and Christmas cake sale. They all attracted interest from across the district.

Everyone who did business in the market had to pay. In the 1950s, the toll charges for the cattle market were the same as they had been at the turn of the century. This was confirmed in a letter from the Market Trust to the Charity Commission dated 6 September 1954. In it, Mr A.R. Penny, clerk to the trustees, pleaded for a rise in the tolls because the Ministry of Food was requiring 'unaffordable improvements' to the cattle market.

The trustees said the tolls had remained the same since 1904:

> Cattle 2d a head including a bull, ox, cow, steer or heifer offered or shown for sale
> Horse, gelding or mare offered or shown for sale 1s
> Colt, filly, foal or mule offered or shown for sale 6d
> Sheep ½ d a head or a score of sheep and lambs 10d
> Swine 1d a head and suckling pigs ½ d
> Calves ½ d.[4]

The Charity Commission replied on 21 September 1954, that they had been asked to reassess the tolls 'quite recently' (in 1923!) and there was no need to change them either then or now. Undaunted, Mr Penny wrote to the markets in South Molton, Torrington, Bridgewater, Exeter, Barnstaple and Taunton, asking each of them for their charge lists. There are no replies included in the documents, but we do have evidence that the trustees must have thought they had a fair case for a charge increase because the clerk also appealed to Ministry of Housing and Local Government in Whitehall on 27 September 1954, asking for the tolls to be raised.

[3] Devon Heritage Centre, Tiverton Market and Exe-bridge Trust 7235E1.
[4] Devon Heritage Centre 7325, Tiverton Market and Exe-bridge Trust

A curt reply from the Ministry came on 15 October 1954, saying the trustees had already asked this in 1921 – only thirty-four years previously! The answer was the same: there was no provision in the Tiverton Market Act of 1825 to raise the tolls then and the situation had not changed.[5] The trustees could, however, raise money by charging a licence fee to the auctioneers.

Throughout the 1920s, adverts for upcoming sales were placed in newspapers by the auctioneers: Mr N. Cook of Tiverton; Cockram, Dobbs and Stagg based in Tiverton and South Molton; and Knowlman and Son of Tiverton and Culmstock. These appear to be the only auctioneer houses operating at the market. There is no record of the auctioneer fee until 1929. More on that later.

An insurance document, the Commercial Union Assurance Co Ltd. Employers Indemnity Policy, for 26 April 1920, recorded an annual wage bill of £148, triggering a premium of £1 9s. The Commercial Union's building insurance for 27 May 1920, put the rent and tolls from the various market buildings at £210 annually.

The pannier market provided a steady and lucrative income for the Market Trust. The Tiverton Market Act 1825 laid down the stall charges. These were reprinted in copy of charges dated 21 Oct 1924:

> Unenclosed covered stall for butchers/fish merchants 7 ft x 3 ft cost 2s for Tuesday and Saturday markets.
> Enclosed for the same size 4s.
> For every 2 ft in length selling poultry, butter, eggs, fruit and seeds 2d.
> For every additional foot 1d.
> For every 3 ft of vegetables 2d.
> For every hand basket, not using a stall or standing, containing poultry, pork, butter, eggs, vegetables, fruit, seeds or common items 2d.
> For every sack or bag of potatoes, carrots, turnips, peas, vegetables or fruit not weighing more than 168 pounds 1d.
> Cabbage, plants, trees, shrubs per foot of uncovered ground ½ d.
> The same but covered 1d.
> For each foot of stall selling manufactured good 1 ½ d.
>
> There was also a charge for weighing and measuring goods.
> Meat not exceeding 20 lbs ½ d.
> Meat between 60-100 lbs 2½ d.
> Goods sold in bushels 1/2d per bushel.[6]

Some of the stalls were more or less permanently occupied and seemed to be in great demand. Tenancy agreements for the decade include one from 12 April 1920, between the New Market Trustees and Mr Samuel Webber. The farmer from Hill Top, Tiverton, was

[5] Devon Heritage Centre 7325, Market Trust
[6] Devon Heritage Centre, Tiverton Market and Exe-bridge Trust 7235E8.

taking over two stalls; one previously occupied by the Pearl Assurance Company Ltd and the other from Harris' Calne Bacon Co. – rent 2s 6d a week.

In the 17 July 1920, tenancy agreement, Tremletts Tannery of Exeter took over one stall previously occupied by Strong, Rawle and Strong at 3s a week. Strong, Rawle and Strong collected hides, calfskins and sheepskins from butchers and abattoirs and prepared them for tanneries.[7] On 20 August 1920, Charles Biddlecombe Ewens of Park Street, Taunton, renewed his tenancy agreement for a stall in the market, again for 3s a week. He was also a hide and skins merchant.[8]

The Trust also had income from the rent of eight shops in Bampton Street. In 1910, the tolls were worth £400 a year. But the Market Trust still owed £1,499 4s 5d to creditors which they maintained would be paid off in eighteen years.[9] By May 1920, the rents and tolls produced an income of £210 [10]

## In a Position of Trust

The Market Trustees were entrusted to guard the rights and privileges that went with the charter. Being made a trustee was a privileged position and the names of trustees in the 1920s are often the 'great and the good' of the town. The local gentry, councillors, farmers, merchants and magistrates are included in the list. The trustees were expected to run the market efficiently and play a key charitable role in the town with the income from the stallage, tolls, auctioneer fees and rents.

The Tiverton Market Act 1825 decreed that the market income should be used to buy four gowns for the poor each year at Michaelmas; four husbandmen must receive £1 each annually; and there must be a weekly distribution of bread to the 'deserving poor' with names supplied by each trustee. The remainder should be distributed in pensions. In 1909, we find £13 annual pensions were given to ten people.[11]

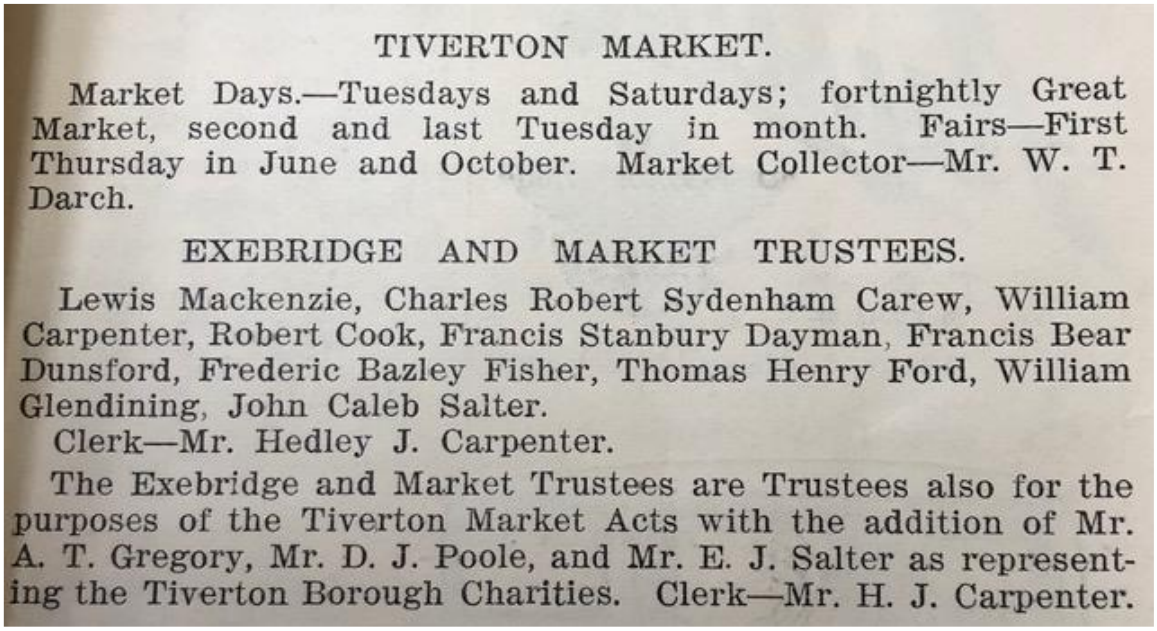
By 1924, the clerk to the trustees, Mr Hedley Carpenter, revealed the trust had a gross annual rental of £750. Sixteen poor people from Tiverton received 5s a week. It was a commitment that would last until they qualified for the old-age pension.[12] A notice was put in the *Tiverton Gazette* on 23 March 1926, calling for new applications for the market trust pensions from the 'needy of the borough'. The notice read that £13 a year, paid as a weekly income, had

[7] Devon Heritage Centre, Tiverton Market and Exe-bridge Trust 7235C6.
[8] Devon Heritage Centre, Tiverton Market and Exe-bridge Trust 7235C6.
[9] *Tiverton Digest*, 1910.
[10] Devon Heritage Centre, Tiverton Market and Exe-bridge Trust 7235E8
[11] Ibid.
[12] *Devon and Somerset News*, 8 May 1924.

been given to persons in need for several years but the list was being revised. Applications would be received by the clerk on Wednesday and Thursday between 11am and noon and again the following week. Occasionally, a notice was printed to the press to remind marketeers that the trustees were running a business!

Upholding the by-laws was taken very seriously. According to the 1825 Act, no one was allowed to sell meat, fish, poultry, vegetables, fruit or other provisions in the street on a market day. This was fully enforced by the Market Trustees. It led to Leonard Elston, a farmer from Silverton; John Punchard, another Silverton farmer; and Mrs Dallyn of Stourbridge Farm Tiverton appearing before the borough police court for selling eggs. They had taken their eggs to Mr S. Webber who had a packing depot in Phoenix Lane, Tiverton. The farmers had been warned on 10 February that it was an offence to sell their eggs to the depot but they did the same the following week. The farmers argued they had done this for years and had paid the tolls when they had been asked to. They were each fined 5s.[13]

Stock owners also had to be occasionally reminded to furnish their drovers and servants with the cash for the tolls. It must have been hard work for the toll collector to keep track of who had or had not paid while the animals continued to stream onto the site! When the mayhem could no longer be endured, an 'Importance Notice' warning farmers they had to pay fees as soon as their livestock entered the marketplace, 'by order of the trustees', would appear on the front pages of the local newspapers.[14]



TIVERTON MARKET.

Market Days.—Tuesdays and Saturdays; fortnightly Great Market, second and last Tuesday in month. Fairs—First Thursday in June and October. Market Collector—Mr. W. T. Darch.

EXEBRIDGE AND MARKET TRUSTEES.

Lewis Mackenzie, Charles Robert Sydenham Carew, William Carpenter, Robert Cook, Francis Stanbury Dayman, Francis Bear Dunsford, Frederic Bazley Fisher, Thomas Henry Ford, William Glendining, John Caleb Salter.

Clerk—Mr. Hedley J. Carpenter.

The Exebridge and Market Trustees are Trustees also for the purposes of the Tiverton Market Acts with the addition of Mr. A. T. Gregory, Mr. D. J. Poole, and Mr. E. J. Salter as representing the Tiverton Borough Charities. Clerk—Mr. H. J. Carpenter.

*The market was under the guidance of the Exe-bridge and Market Trustees. Their names were published annually in the Tiverton Year Book. Surprisingly, there was no representative from Heathcoat factory owners in this list from 1922. Usually, a Heathcoat-Amory, or Amory family member would be included.*

[13] Ibid., 20 May 1920.

[14] Ibid., 27 January 1926.

NOTICES.

TIVERTON MARKET.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

WHEREAS it has been reported to the Trustees that hawkers and other persons are accustomed to bring Fish, Fruit, Vegetables, Poultry, Butter, Rabbits, and other Marketable Commodities into the Town on Market days, and sell the same in places outside the Market Place. NOW the attention of such persons is called to Section 25 of the Tiverton Market Act, 1825, whereby persons who on any Market Day sell or expose for sale within the Town of Tiverton, except in the Market Place, any Meat, Fish, Poultry, Vegetables, Fruit, or other Provisions, or any Goods, Wares, or Merchandise, except as mentioned in the Act (e.g., sales by a tradsman in his shop), are liable to pay a fine of not exceeding 40s. for every such offence.

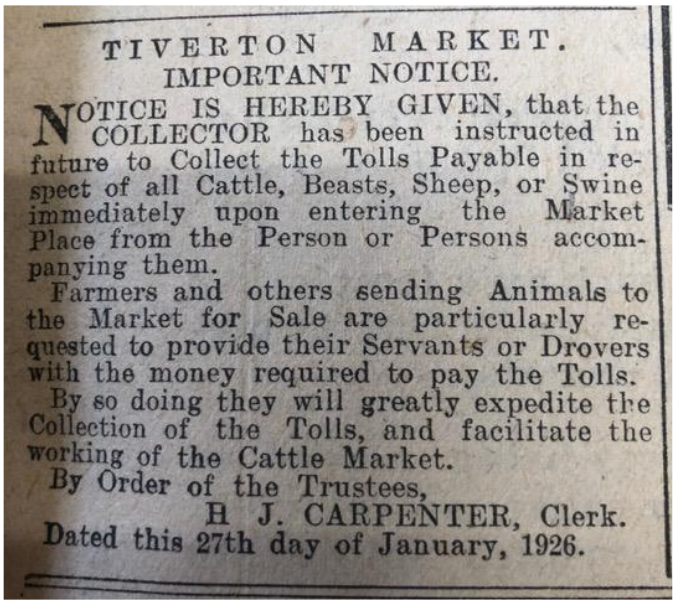
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Trustees propose in future to take proceedings against such persons as aforesaid and also against persons who bringing articles into the Market Place for sale, neglect to pay the Tolls payable in respect to such articles.

By Order,

H. J. CARPENTER,
Clerk.

Dated this 9th day of July, 1928.

*It was the duty of the Market Trustees to ensure the market rules were adhered to. Hawkers and cheap-jacks who took advantage of the Tuesday crowds to sell their goods outside the marketplace thereby avoiding tolls could be prosecuted. I found a few 'warning' notices in newspapers during the 20s*[15].



TIVERTON MARKET.
IMPORTANT NOTICE.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the COLLECTOR has been instructed in future to Collect the Tolls Payable in respect of all Cattle, Beasts, Sheep, or Swine immediately upon entering the Market Place from the Person or Persons accompanying them.

Farmers and others sending Animals to the Market for Sale are particularly requested to provide their Servants or Drovers with the money required to pay the Tolls.

By so doing they will greatly expedite the Collection of the Tolls, and facilitate the working of the Cattle Market.

By Order of the Trustees,

H J. CARPENTER, Clerk.

Dated this 27th day of January, 1926.

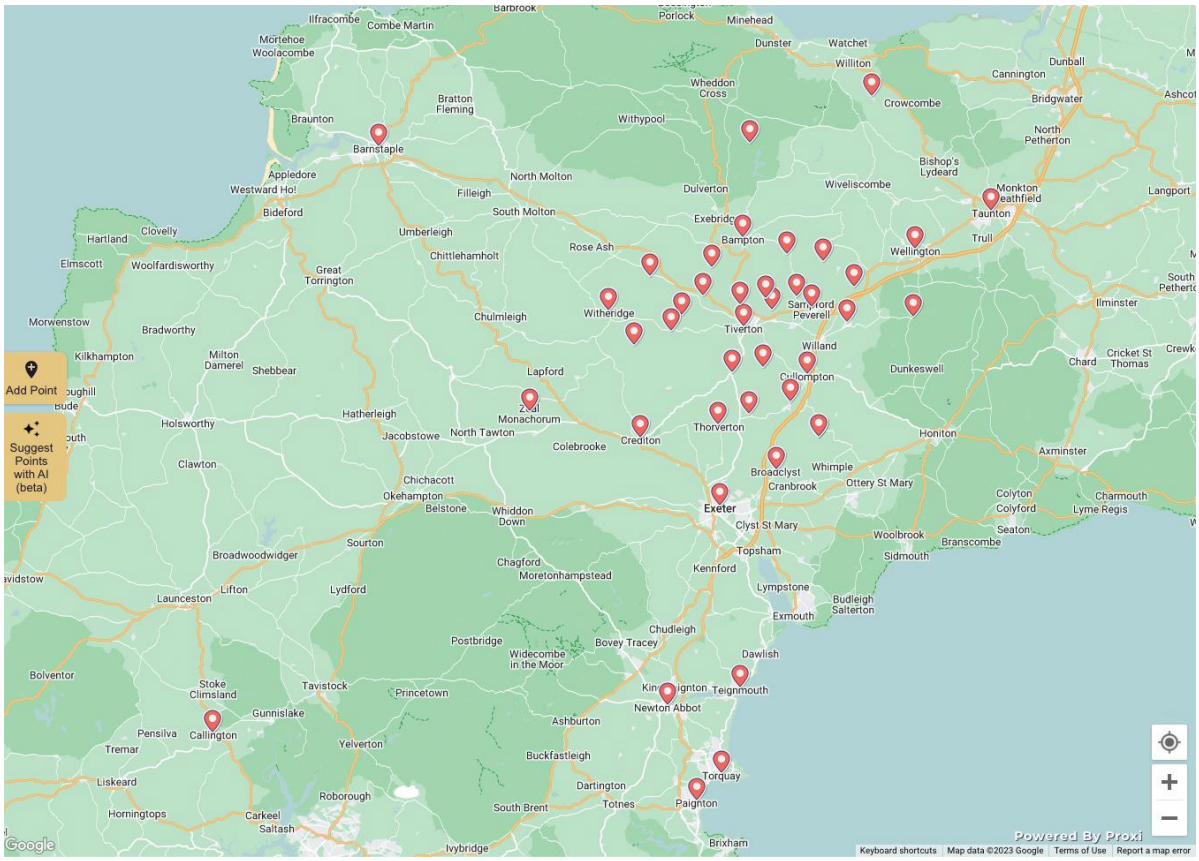
*Another notice which appeared in the Devon and Somerset News, dated January 1926, warning sellers to pay the tolls as they entered the marketplace. Pig 'hucksters' avoided payment by keeping their animals in carts outside the site, which added to traffic jams. Drovers often left the fee-paying to their 'masters' which made more difficulties for the toll collector.*

[15] *Devon and Somerset News,* 9 July 1928.

## They Came From Miles Around

The market was the main ‘shopping centre’ for anyone living within walking distance (walking distance was then considered to be around 7–9 miles). Every homestead in Devon was supposed to be within reach of a market. Around Tiverton, many villages such as Bickleigh, Cullompton and Willand had their own markets, too. A drover was expected to move cattle or sheep between 5 and 10 miles a day; they estimated it would take a third of the day to get to market, a third of the day at the market and a third of the day to get home. [16]

We can get an idea where marketeers came from by newspaper reports on sales, stall agreements, court cases and family histories. For instance, I know my grandmother sold butter, eggs and cheese each week in the pannier market. She rode in a pony and trap from Templeton with her young children. It was a journey of about five miles each way and too tough to walk carrying heavy baskets, especially with those steep hills!




*This map of Devon and Somerset pinpoints places specifically mentioned in court cases, adverts and newspaper articles, as the homes of marketeers. Many would undertake the trip twice weekly. The reputation of Tiverton’s specialist annual markets, Great Markets and fairs attracted buyers and sellers from a much wider area. Auction advertisements show dealers from as far Callington, Cornwall, Paignton, South Devon, Barnstaple, North Devon, Taunton, Somerset and even Reading in Berkshire!*

[16] K.J. Bonser, *The Drovers: Who They Were and Where They Went* (Macmillan, 1970).

The distances travelled for the specialised livestock Great Markets and fairs were much farther. There is evidence that they attracted farmers from as far away as Cornwall and Berkshire as some of the county's best breeding stock were offered for sale. These shows were carefully scheduled not to clash with others, particularly Exeter and Barnstaple.

*Market days were often the highlight of the week for isolated families working on the land. It was a time to dress up. This photo from 1924 shows Ruby Una Buckingham (born November 1918) and her brother Archibald Ray Buckingham (born December 1919) in their best clothes about to board the trap for their five-mile trip to market from their farm Starraton near Templeton. Their mother Mina sold eggs, butter and cheese from baskets. Photo Buckingham family collection*

## Basket Cases

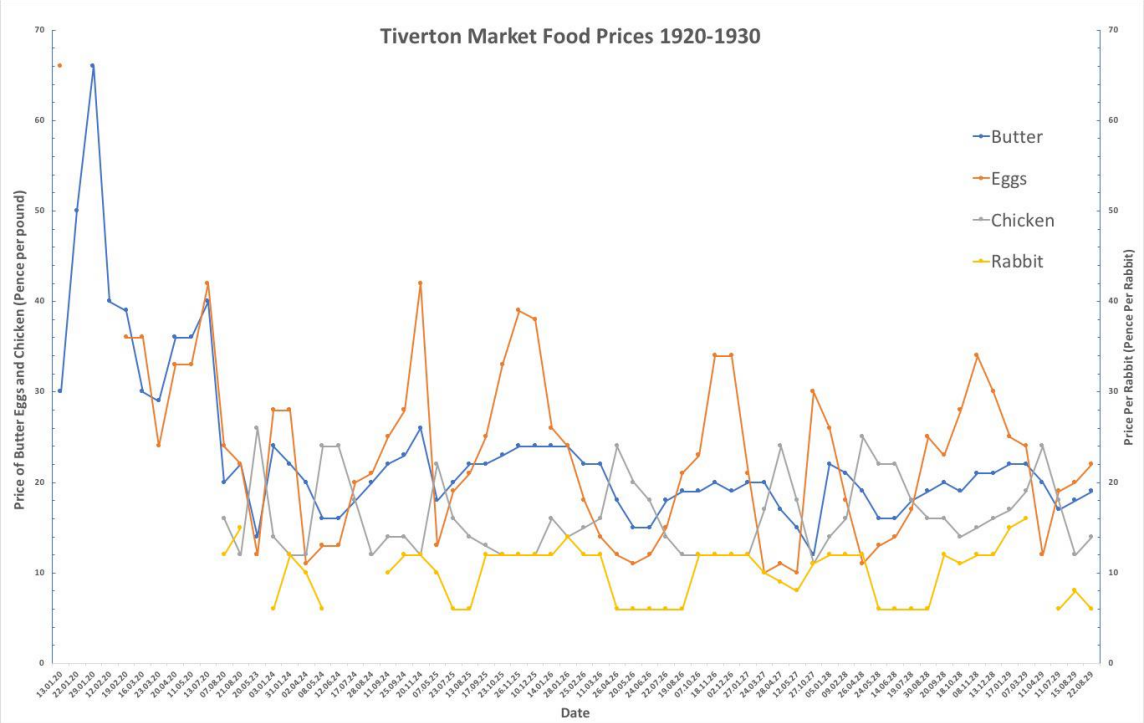
The weekly editions of the *Devon and Somerset News* and *Tiverton Gazette* both recorded a limited amount of pannier market prices. These figures were poured over almost as much as the 'hatches, matches and dispatches' (births, marriages and deaths) column.

Routinely, the wholesale price of the main commodities like butter per pound, eggs per dozen, chicken and fowls (older chickens) per pound, ducks, rabbits and other game were recorded by dealer Mr S. Durbin, who also summed up trade using words like brisk, dull, low demand, high demand. Occasionally he would advise sellers of a potential glut and warn them not to bother to bring produce unless it was in tip-top shape. He would send his purchases to London on the train.

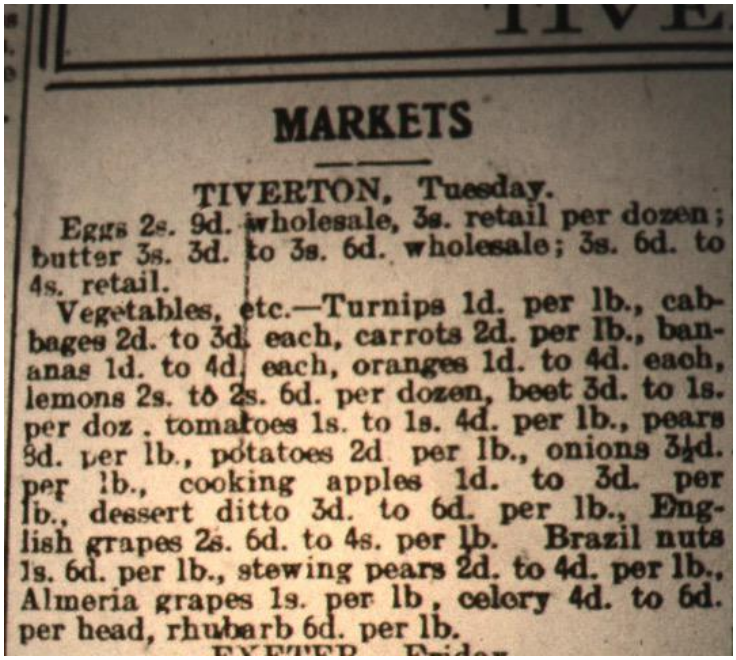
Obviously, the homegrown produce was seasonal, and I am sure many more varieties were on offer at different times of the year. When the food controls relaxed, local sellers' garden-grown produce and home-reared birds would sometimes compete with imports from overseas. At the Annual Christmas Market of 1920, Irish and French turkeys had been sold alongside local turkeys. They were reported to be not as good as local ones but still reached 3s+ lb. Local geese sold for 2s+ lb, ducks 2s 6d lb, and chickens – of which there was a glut – made 1s 10d lb.[17] But little did traders know that five years later, Christmas poultry prices would be still going down. Local turkeys were expected to reach 1s 6d lb, French imports around 3d lower in price, geese less than a shilling, ducks 1s 2d lb and chickens just 1s 4d lb.

With both prices and wages falling, local people were always looking for new ways of making money. Local newspapers often offered money-making ideas and tips on how to preserve fruits and vegetables so sellers could avoid gluts and demand higher prices. One unusual idea in the *Devon and Somerset News* for making extra cash was to sell the flight feathers from geese, turkeys and ducks for quills. The newspaper reported that the importation of swan quills had been banned by the government in 1921 and demand had outstripped supply ever since. Readers were told the Ministry of Agriculture had a list of merchants who needed the feathers and would pay for quantities not less than a hundredweight (cwt).[18]

[17] *Devon and Somerset News*, 23 December 1920.
[18] Ibid., 10 December 1925.




*Selling homemade produce at the weekly market was a key income stream for many land-based wives. Jams, chutneys and pies were often included in their baskets. But the mainstays were eggs, fowls, butter, various game and cheese. This graph gives the price of butter per pound, eggs per dozen, chicken per pound and rabbits during the 20s. As you can see butter prices rocketed briefly after food controls were abolished early in the decade but then declined. It must have been hard to budget when the price of, say, eggs was so unpredictable. They were also, obviously, at the mercy of the seasons and weather.*



**MARKETS**

**TIVERTON, Tuesday.**

Eggs 2s. 9d. wholesale, 3s. retail per dozen; butter 3s. 3d. to 3s. 6d. wholesale; 3s. 6d. to 4s. retail.

Vegetables, etc.—Turnips 1d. per lb., cabbages 2d. to 3d. each, carrots 2d. per lb., bananas 1d. to 4d. each, oranges 1d. to 4d. each, lemons 2s. to 2s. 6d. per dozen, beet 3d. to 1s. per doz., tomatoes 1s. to 1s. 4d. per lb., pears 3d. per lb., potatoes 2d. per lb., onions 3½d. per lb., cooking apples 1d. to 3d. per lb., dessert ditto 3d. to 6d. per lb., English grapes 2s. 6d. to 4s. per lb. Brazil nuts 1s. 6d. per lb., stewing pears 2d. to 4d. per lb., Almeria grapes 1s. per lb., celery 4d. to 6d. per head, rhubarb 6d. per lb.

*Taking a snapshot of the market in January 1920 we can see a wide range of vegetables on offer including turnips, cabbages, beets, potatoes, carrots, onions, radishes, leaks, broad beans, lettuces, celery and peas. Fruits included tomatoes, pears, cooking and eating apples, stewing pears, rhubarb, cucumbers, gooseberries, plums, apricots, greengages and melon, as well as the more exotic oranges, lemons, bananas, both black and green grapes, Brazil nuts, peanuts and walnuts.*

## Victory and Betrayal

In the beginning of the new decade after the gruelling Great War, many foodstuffs were still under the controls imposed by the government to keep Britain fed.

The country had gone into the war relying on imports for 60% of its food. Valuable commodities like fuel and fertiliser were also being imported. The industrial revolution had brought both refrigeration and the steam engine, which allowed easy trading across the world. The British government had operated a 'free trade' policy, which saw the markets being flooded by cheap imports. Farmers here could not produce foodstuffs like wheat as cheaply.

Many other countries, like Germany, had a protectionist policy. Germany used our reliance on merchant shipping to their advantage, and during the war their U boats took a heavy toll on shipping.

Until the disruption of the food imports, our farmers had been left alone to harvest their acres as they saw fit. In Devon, most farms were small and mixed, run by families and, perhaps, a couple of farmworkers. As the war dragged on, the government realised the absolute necessity for the country to feed itself.

The government guaranteed arable prices for farmers in 1917 and promised to give a minimum four years' warning before price guarantees ended. That would give farmers enough time to diversify and introduce new, more lucrative crops within their four- or five-year crop rotations. The government also introduced rationing for bread, meat, butter, sugar, cheese, jam and bacon.

In 1918, government controls were placed on all aspects of farming. Land – even cemeteries – were ploughed up for food. Councils were encouraged to find spaces for allotments. At least 2.5 million acres were ploughed up to produce wheat, oats and potatoes. And this was despite shortages of machinery, horses and labour – a third of the agricultural workers had gone to war.

During the war there was regulated and subsidised agriculture through the Agriculture Act, which guaranteed minimum wages and minimum product prices. The farmer workers got better pay and productivity and profits were up. But by 1920, with the war over, prices fell. Instead of giving farmers the promised four years' notice, the government under Lloyd George repealed the Agriculture Act in 1921. The National Farmers Union called this government action 'The Great Betrayal'. As well as no longer guaranteeing prices, the government also allowed cheap imports from countries like Canada and the expanding USA. Wages fell by 40% in a year and arable farmers who had bought their farms in the years before, banking on future profits to cover mortgages, fell into debt. Nearly 25% of

agricultural land had been sold by the end of 1922. The situation was not to recover until the Second World War.[19]

Picture Tiverton Market in 1920. The town had lost 276 men in the Great War (not including the 180 pupils and former pupils from Blundells School). The names of the fallen had yet to be inscribed on memorials. Farmers had been working flat out to produce the food needed to keep the war effort afloat, with fewer hands and fewer horses. The prices they had been getting for their produce – including corn, milk, cattle, sheep and pigs – were starting to fall as the subsidies and restrictions were abandoned. The farms were still mostly mixed, with the farmers wives adding to the household income by selling eggs, butter and poultry each week at the pannier market. Lower wages for farm workers and higher prices began to bite.

In January 1920, Mr C.H. Roberts, the food controller, announced that the Ministry of Food, set up to ensure adequate food supplies during the war, would come to an end by August. The de-control of dairy would be even sooner, by the end of the month. He said during the winter of 1919, milk was scare (which is hardly surprising if you know anything about milk production!) but he hoped the price of milk would show a reduction when controls were removed. He also said that the government was trying to buy more butter from abroad, which he maintained would be cheaper than home-produced butter.[20] Farmers were reported to be 'sore' at the drop from 3s 3d to 2s a gallon for milk from the dairy combines. They predicted local butter would have to cost more than the control price of 2s 8d. There were 'heated debates'.[21]

## Butter-spreading Revolt

Tiverton was considered an easy-going sort of place; in fact, one reason why John Heathcoat moved his lacemaking concern from Leicestershire was because, as well as having a good water supply, the town had a reputation for locals putting up with just about anything and rubbing along well with outsiders. Local court proceedings for the decade reveal that the town's municipal police force of eleven men spent much of their time coming down hard on swearing in the street, drunkenness and booking drivers who failed to light rear lamps on wagons. So imagine the stir when Tiverton Market was the scene of what the newspapers headlines called 'A Revolt'.[22] And the trigger was the cost of butter.

Dairy controls had been relaxed and farmers were complaining that they were being paid only 2s a gallon for their milk – a fall of 60%. It took two and a half gallons of milk to make a

[19] Edith H. Whethan, 'The Agricultural Act 1920 and Its Repeal—The "Great Betrayal"', *The Agricultural History Review*, vol.22, no. 1 (1974), pp. 36–49.
[20] *Devon and Somerset News*, 22 January 1920.
[21] Ibid., 22 January 1920.
[22] Ibid., 5 February 1920.

pound of butter. (There was the leftover 'scald' milk, which was normally given to the calves or pigs. That was selling at about 4d or 5d a quart.) Dairy farmers warned butter prices would find a level at about 4s 6d a pound.[23]

In the first Tiverton market following the control abolition, there are reports of 'angry scenes' at dairy stalls. There was plenty of butter for sale, but prices had gone up to 4s or 5s, and one seller was asking 6s per pound. Farmers' wives' baskets were full of butter but some of the crowd gave a 'roar of hoots and dissatisfaction' when asked to pay the higher prices. One farmer was advised by the police to make a 'speedy exit' after shoppers became 'hostile'. He sold all his supplies to the wholesaler. Many would-be purchasers went home butter-less, railing against the 'shameful' and 'unreasonable' prices asked. [24]

The *Tiverton Gazette* reported a farmer selling butter at 6s had been 'besieged'. He told the paper: 'I have worked hard all my life – at 6d a week as a boy – and now that I have a farm why shouldn't I make what I can?'[25]

The *Devon and Somerset News* declared 'exorbitant prices' were being asked for throughout the Westcountry. Prices in Exeter were up to 4s 6d per pound; many shoppers went without. In Tavistock, butter was up to 5s per pound but prices came down to 3s 6d by the end of the day. In Totnes, the average supply was still being sold at 4s 4d, but many shoppers were buying margarine instead.

In Cornwall, farmers were being called a 'hated class' because of the rise in dairy products. In St Just, 800 miners were joined by 200 other workers to protest outside a dairy factory. They went as far as overturning milk churns. Plymouth Dockers Union voiced its anger and there were moves to stop the railways taking milk to London.

Torquay customers were paying 5s per pound, but many shoppers were having to go without. In Crediton, farmers were charging between 4s and 3s. At a meeting of Tiverton and District Trades and Labour Council, a resolution of protest was passed against farmers raising the price of butter 'so exorbitantly'. The meeting agreed to ask consumers not to buy butter until the price came down.[26] An editorial in the *Western Morning News* warned farmers and retailers that they were 'exploiting the public in a scandalous manner' by charging up to 5s per pound.

As a result of the hostile scenes in Tiverton the previous week, many retailers sold direct to the dealers, completely bypassing shoppers. One or two farmers 'braved the storm', before

[23] Ibid., 22 January 1920.
[24] Ibid., 5 February 1920.
[25] *Tiverton Gazette*, 3 February 1920.
[26] *Devon and Somerset News*, 5 February 1920.

beating a hasty retreat and selling to the wholesalers. One dealer bought 144 lbs of butter by the early morning. It would be sent by rail to London, leaving the town virtually butter-less.

In its 19 February edition, the *Devon and Somerset News* was reporting that prices had come down a little because the market was 'slack' and butter was not selling. Teignmouth Food Committee admitted butter prices would probably never drop as low as they had been when prices were controlled. Railway workers were asked not to handle butter that was being sent to London. The Dockers Union held a demonstration in Devon against the high prices and letters were sent to MPs.

In an editorial in the *Western Morning News*, the farmers and dairy producers were blamed for the 'exorbitant' price of butter. At Tiverton market on 18 February, butter prices had slipped to between 3s and 3s 8d and marketeers were described as 'quite calm'. The fall in the cost of butter continued at Tiverton Market as the weeks progressed. By the end of 1922, the wholesale price was down to 2s 2d per pound. By May 1923, butter was one of the few household commodities that was at its pre-war value of around 1s 2d per pound.

The government's flood of cheap butter from overseas – especially from Denmark, New Zealand and Australia – and the succulent new grass on Devon farms causing a flush of milk, was considered the reason for an increase in cheaper butter in the system.

We can follow the fortunes of wholesale prices at Tiverton Market thanks to dealer Mr Durbin who often had a slot in the local newspaper giving the prices of commodities like butter, eggs and chickens he sent to London on the GWR railway. The Pannier Market prices from Mr Durbin show that in March 1924, butter had fallen to just 1s 10d per pound. By April it had slipped further to £1s 8d, although it was making 2s per pound at Crediton market. By May, another 4d a pound had been lost on wholesale prices – just £1s 4d per pound of butter. Mr Durbin was now reporting that butter was in short supply. No doubt the farmers were using the summer milk to make cheese instead. Wholesale prices started to rise by about a penny a week, and by November 1924 butter was costing 2s per pound. All through 1925, the price butter makers could get was around 2s per pound.

In May 1926, the hard-working farm wives saw their meagre profits tumble. The Great Strike meant that Mr Durbin was buying butter at just 1s 4d a pound. He hired a van to take the produce up to London. It fell another penny a pound the following week. Prices bounced along at rock bottom until the end of the year; even at the Christmas, butter prices only got up to 1s 9d.

1927 saw little improvement for butter makers. By May, butter was down to 1s 3d, although by October it had risen to 1s 8d per pound. The following May 1928, butter was only making 1s 4d per pound.

And right to end the end of the decade, butter producers were still getting nowhere near 2s per pound for hand-churned butter. Tiverton customers would pay no more.

## On The Hoof

In the 1920s, most farmers and drovers still walked cattle to market. The unpredictable pigs came in carts! There was expected to be a Devon market within a days' walk from any farm or smallholding. On the other hand, no market was supposed to be within seven miles of another. So it was inevitable that the livestock would have been herded relatively long distances. And when they reached Tiverton, it was no mean feat to chivvy livestock through a crowded town. Cows can run surprisingly fast and are liable to stampede if spooked. It must have been hard work getting even a single bullock to market! It is hardly surprising that in the 1920s there were many complaints recorded about cattle running amok.

The local newspaper reports for Christmas Day 1924 how two bullocks ran off as they were being driven through Westexe. When they reached the Seven Stars Inn, one went into the inn yard and the other through the doorway of Mr Major's drapery shop. As the beast turned, it broke a pane of plate glass. In Gold Street, the bullocks ran into Boots the chemists but were driven out without breaking anything. Whether they were about to be auctioned or slaughtered by the local butcher is not recorded.

There was more trouble for the drovers when a herd of bullocks was being driven from the market in the early evening. They had reached Newport Street when several of them rushed on to the pavement by Howes Garage. Two or three tried to pass between a shop front and parked car. They became wedged and one broke a large pane of plate glass with its horn. The shop had only been completed a few days before.[27]

The roads around the market were narrow, winding and crammed with stock, wagons, trucks and carts all trying to get to and from the town centre site.

Court cases in this decade reveal horses were still being widely used to carry produce and marketeers. Sometimes there was a clash between riders and drivers over rights of way and rules of the road.

The market day bustle could make ponies – more used to the countryside – particularly skittish. And it was not uncommon for accidents to happen on a Tuesday. They were frequently reported in detail in the local newspapers. There is the report of Mr A. Hunt of

[27] *Tiverton Gazette*, 25 May 1926.

Higher Furze, Thorverton, who was driving his pony and trap to Tiverton market when the animal bolted near the Wheat Sheaf Inn in Leat Street. Mr Hunt managed to jump out of the trap in Westexe North and the pony galloped on down Westexe South when it collided with a pony and trap coming from Cadbury. Mrs F. G. Toogood of Chapel Town, her two children and Miss Hart escaped without injury, but Mr Hunt's pony broke its neck and was hauled off to the kennels at Stoodleigh as meat for the hounds.[28]

The *Tiverton Gazette* also tells us of an accident that reads like a modern-day pile-up. On 3 April 1924, Mr A. Ayre, a farmer from Stoodleigh, was riding along Leat Street when he was thrown from his slipping horse. Mr F. Johnston of Melbourne Street took the injured rider to Dr Seymour's surgery. While they were there, a car ran backwards down Angel Hill and broke the shafts of a cart belonging to Mr B. Raymond of Washfield. The cart was stopped by the car crashing into the Labour Exchange 'in which there was a good many people'.[29]

It was likely that the so-called boy racers of the day would be on horseback rather than behind the wheel. A young army officer serving in India, Lt William Laurence Norton Padfield, was riding a horse 'as one should not do on a market day' when he knocked down and seriously injured 35-year-old Henrietta Arscott from East Nutcott Farm, Rackenford. Padfield had hired a hunter from the Half Moon and galloped down St Peter's Street at such a pace the horse could not be turned, and crashed by the war memorial. As the horse fell, he landed on Mrs Arscott. The horse had to be killed on the spot. The hounds were well fed that day. At the Devon Assizes, Padfield was ordered to pay Mrs Arscott £250 damages and Mr Arscott received £100 – not sure why the husband was awarded compensation![30]

The rules of the road had to be strictly imposed on busy market days. Sidney Manning, a trapper from Canal Cottage, found that out to his cost. He appeared before the Tiverton Police Court for not keeping his horse and cart on the left-hand side of Gold Street on his way up to Bampton Street and into the market. PC Land was on duty, keeping the cars and carts on the correct side, but Mr Manning ignored him and drove the police officer onto the pavement. The trapper was fined 7s 6d.[31]

Police officers on duty on market days really did take their lives into their hands. On 21 September 1920, Miss Gladys Mabel Evans of Butterleigh House, Cullompton, was driving up Gold Street and signalled to the police officers on traffic duty she was going up Bampton Street to the market entrance. She took the corner too fast and narrowly missed knocking over two women. She ended up in Tiverton Police Court, where witnesses, including the police officers, said her driving was dangerous and of excessive speed – at least 20 mph! Farmer Percy Dorman from Uplowman said her speed was 'terrific' and caused pedestrians to scatter

[28] *Devon and Somerset News*, 2 December 1920.
[29] *Tiverton Gazette*, 3 April 1924.
[30] *Devon and Somerset News*, 8 November 1928.
[31] Ibid., 15 July 1920.

in all directions. Miss Evans said she had sounded her hooter and thought it was alright. She said she had driven for three years during the war and was no novice. She was fined £1.[32]

Newspapers articles reveal transport mayhem on market days. The *Devon and Somerset News* reported that there might still be 'tragic consequences' for Mr J.B. Smith of Oakford, one of the Tiverton Board of Guardians. He was driving his pony and trap past the market entrance at 11am on a busy Tuesday when someone ran across the road. He pulled up quickly, snapping the shaft. The trap tilted forward, throwing Mr Smith into the street on his head. The pony galloped towards Angel Yard, colliding with the recently erected War Memorial and hitting another horse pulling a corn wagon. The second horse then charged on up St Peter's Street and collided with a parked car before being stopped. Mr Smith, at 56 years of age, was taken to Tiverton Hospital still unconscious; 'a serious view is being taken of his injuries'.[33]

As the decade rolled on, horses and ponies became even more vulnerable as they shared the road with a growing number of motor cars. It was not usually the vehicle that was a danger but the unruly driver behind the wheel. And when four legs and four wheels collided, it was the poor horse which invariably came off worse.

Robert Chown, who farmed at Temple Cross, Templeton, was travelling back from Tiverton Market in his horse and trap with his wife Bertha and Mrs Sharland. They had just reached the Rose and Crown Inn when a car approached at what Mr Chown described as a 'terrific pace, 35–40 mph, the fastest I have ever seen in my life'. The driver, farmer Willian Down of West Sidborough, braked but began to skid and the front of the car struck the trap. The shafts broke, the horse bolted and the three people in the trap were thrown into the road. Witnesses to the accident described the car as speeding 'like the wind'. Mr Down says he was going about 15 mph. He was convicted of driving a motor car in danger to the public and was fined £1.[34]

Feel sorry for the horses; there's a report in the *Devon and Somerset News* for 8 May 1924 of another horse coming off worse on market day. This horse was pulling a pig cart when a petrol lorry smashed into it near the Prince Regent Inn. The cart overturned. Sidney Stone of Cullompton was pinned beneath the horse but was not hurt – the horse, however, was severely injured. More food for the hounds.

By 1925, the chief constable of Tiverton, Mr Mercer, was so exasperated by local farmers on market days persistently leaving carts and wagons blocking highways that he brought a case to the borough magistrates: Farmer William Hill of Cove Tenement had left two carts and

[32] Ibid., 14 October 1920.

[33] *Devon and Somerset News*, 27 November 1924.

[34] Ibid., 31 December 1925.

two horses in Gold Street on market day, with just a young boy on the second cart. The road was only 16 feet wide. Mr Mercer told the bench:

> Farmers in particular I warn as they seem to think that when driving through the town, they are in a forty-acre field. It's getting a regular nuisance and the streets today are totally different than they were a few years ago. Farmers seem to think they can stop where they like. I have to speak to them repeatedly.[35]

The defendant was fined 10s and the mayor, Mr W Loosemore, said future cases would be dealt with more severely.

In an opinion piece entitled 'Still Room for the Horse' the editor wrote that mechanical engineers had been saying since the war that the horse should be removed from the roads. But, he maintained, the 'Mechanical Traction millennium' had not yet arrived and, for the moment, the horse was still more economical.[36] But owners were steadily auctioning off their horses and equipment at Tiverton market throughout the decade. In August 1920, a 6-year-old, 15.2 hand bay, along with his saddle and harness, was to be sold. Other lots included a brake to seat six for a single or pair of horses, a set of carriage harnesses, lamps and whips. And consecutive auctions included an 8-year-old, 16 hands chestnut mare; a quiet in harness 5-year-old cart horse and a cart mare who 'is good anywhere'.

Various carts, traps, riding paraphernalia, horses and ponies were offered for sale in virtually every fortnightly livestock market, but it was not until 28 April 1925, that we see the auctioning of a motor vehicle: a four-year-old 'Ford Car' with detachable wheels, self-starter, electric light and in first class order. There is no record of its sale price.

[35] Ibid., 14 May 1925.

[36] *Devon Somerset News*, 3 April 1924.

*Spectators look at the aftermath of a crash on Angel Hill in the1920s. If a horse was involved, it invariably came off worse. The carcass was usually fed to Sir Ian Amory's hounds! Tiverton Museum Collection*

*Angel Hill today, with the Memorial Hall and Town Hall on the left. The road becomes Fore Street. The hill was a steep climb for horses after crossing the river at Exe Bridge. Numerous accidents were recorded between carts and cars as they travelled downhill. Photo WBA*

## Up to No Good

Cheating and pilfering appeared to be relatively rare at Tiverton Market. But, still, a close eye was kept on stallholders to ensure they were trading legally. When rules appeared to be broken and a case was brought to court, detailed reports were printed in the newspapers.

One headline maker was the story about a suspicious Ministry of Food inspector. He had felt uneasy about a butcher selling pork from his market stall. The inspector asked for a portion of the pork to be tested. The travelling butcher, who would have brought his meat already cut up for sale, refused and 'became abusive'. The inspector said the stallholder had been passing off 'fat-back' for the more expensive pork and had overcharged his customer by 3½ d.[37]

Police took even more seriously incidents that might have ruined Tiverton Market's reputation with wholesalers, many of whom supplied Smithfield in London via the railway. Dealers had complained of stale eggs and 'adulterated' butter in August 1926. They accepted the bad eggs were probably as a result of 'unsystematic' collections from the nests, but the wholesalers reckoned the butter could have been blended with margarine. The police warned that culprits would be fined £10 in the first instance and £50 for subsequent offences.[38]

It was reported in the *Western Morning News* that police were investigating an allegation of fraud at the market: the fraud of the 'stuffed chickens'![39] A well-known poultry dealer had bought a large quantity of poultry from different breeders. He was, however, surprised to discover barleymeal in some of the fowls. It had been mixed with water and stuffed inside. The only reason could have been, he said, was to make the birds heavy and so to command a higher price.

Dealers' complaints were guaranteed to be taken very seriously because so much depended on them continuing to support Tiverton Market. Especially as by 1928 there was even more competition from overseas imports including meat, butter and eggs – some of the pannier market's mainstays.

Again, in September of that year, wholesalers claimed a large number of small and stale eggs were being sold to them. Now they also had access to a free-flowing source of eggs from overseas and they maintained the newly laid imported eggs were better. One cannot help wondering, though, if a downturn in demand for local eggs (due to the cheaper imports and summer rise in laying) was to blame for farmers not selling eggs in previous weeks and

[37] Ibid., 19 February 1920.

[38] *Tiverton Gazette*, 7 October 1926.

[39] Western Morning News, 21 December 1929

having to hang on to them for longer. Eggs were reaching only 1s 5d per dozen in July of that year and had fallen to 11d per dozen the previous April.[40]

Bakers were kept under scrutiny at the market, too. This led to Frederick Authers appearing before the Tiverton Borough Police Court for selling underweight bread. There had been an order in 1918 known as a New Bread Order, which meant bread had to be 12 hours old before it could be sold. The reason was that the bread lost several ounces in weight through evaporation as it cooled. Most bakers added a couple of ounces of dough to each loaf to allow for the subsequent loss in weight. In this case, enthusiastic inspector Herbert Geo from the Ministry of Food weighed fifteen loaves. At least four of them were underweight, but a few were slightly overweight. After much to-ing and fro-ing the magistrates dismissed the case.[41]

Inspectors were determined to keep standards as high as possible at the pannier market. Frequent checks were made on butter. In November 1925, three separate defendants appeared before Tiverton Borough Police Court for selling butter 'adulterated with excess water'. The legal limit of water in butter was 16%. Former chief constable and now inspector under the Food and Drugs Act, Mr T. Mercer told the court he had bought butter at the Tuesday market from Frederick William Greenslade of Bradnage Farm, Poughill, and when tested it contained 5.25% more water than legally allowed. The smallholder said his wife made about 12 lbs of butter each week. She did her best to extract the water, but the weather was 'muggy' and the butter was soft. She made the butter by hand, and it must have been good because some of the dealers liked it so much, they kept some back for themselves. Fined £1.

Louise Arscott of Cotton Heath Farm, Cruwys Morchard, was similarly summoned with 5.22% too much water. She said she did her best but could not get more liquid out with her hands. She was fined £1. Bessie Holmes of Middle North Combe, Templeton, had 6.72% excess water and was fined £1 10s. Mr Mercer told the court the other samples taken on the market day in October all passed scrutiny with the legal limit of 16% water or less. The court suggested defendants use rollers to squeeze out excess water.[42]

Inevitably some market goers got up to mischief and ended up before the courts, like cattle drover Arthur Bale from Bradnich who got chatting with James Disney from Uffculme at Tiverton Market in November 1922. Farmer Disney said he needed a new sheepdog. Bale told him he could get a collie from Thomas Hitt from Cullompton. Mr Hitt agreed Bale could sell the dog to Mr Disney for half-a-crown (2s 6d). Bale pick up the dog but on the way to Mr Disney he stopped for a drink at the Market House Inn in Cullompton. There, the landlord, Arthur Denner, told Bale he would give him 10s for the dog to 'make a rug out of it'. The deal was done. The sneaky landlord then sold the dog on to Mr Disney for £2 10s through another person, Mr Elworthy, and split the profit with him. It was only the cattle drover, Mr

[40] Ibid., 12 September 1928.
[41] *Devon and Somerset News*, 4 March 1920.
[42] Ibid., 12 November 1925.

Bale, who was prosecuted because he had not sold the dog to Mr Disney as agreed, but to the landlord Mr Denner. Mr Bale was sentenced to three months' hard labour. We do not know if the sheepdog was ever suitable for Farmer Disney. [43]

It was not only foodstuffs being regularly inspected. On 9 March 1920, a trader from Halberton was knicked for having twenty-one cans of petrol on his stall. Mr E.V. Twose had a wooden stall with a stone floor, which he had operated for several years. He supplied petrol to the farmers and had a licence for selling. But under the Petroleum Act for Tiverton, he could not store more than 3 gallons of petrol without a special licence. He did not have the additional licence. He appeared before the Tiverton Borough Police Court a couple of weeks later, where he pleaded guilty. The four men who sat in judgement (including the mayor, William Barrons) were told by the Chief Constable Mr Mercer that 'elaborate precautions' were taken against the risk of fire through the ignition of petrol. 'A leaky tin and carelessly discarded cigarette end could cause a conflagration that the fire brigades would be unable to cope with,' he said. Mr Twose asked if he could sell petrol from his horse and cart instead, but that, too, was apparently an infringement of the act. The unhappy merchant then suggested he could put it in a wagon and take it to Hemyock market for the farmers there instead, but the Chief Constable said Mr Twose would still be breaking the law. The petrol had to be kept in iron boxes to meet the legal requirements. Mr Twose was fined £2. He then applied for a petrol storage licence.[44]

But forget puppy or petrol selling, light loaves and watery butter because on 19 January 1928, the *Devon and Somerset News* devoted many column inches to the Tiverton Market thefts; 'Stalls Opened And Articles Taken' screamed the headlines. Chief Constable Benyon was to get his day in court. Up before Tiverton Borough Police Court was hawker Rodger McDonough of Zetland Court Tiverton. He had been held in remand on five charges of theft and his wife was being prosecuted for receiving stolen goods. The court heard McDonough was seen leaving Tiverton Market by the Bampton Street exit at about 1.30pm by PC Chidgey, carrying a parcel that 'appeared bulky about the body'. He was taken to the police station, and items – later identified by a stallholder – were found on him. He also had a pair of pliers and a set of keys that would unlock most of the stalls and hampers in the market. When the Chief Constable interviewed stallholders, he found at least ten definite cases where stalls or hampers had been interfered with and items had gone missing. 'I am perfectly satisfied,' said Mr Benyon, 'that there has been a systematic method of pilfering from the market.' He told the court: 'Number 5 Zetland Court, the residence of the prisoner, appears to have been a dumping ground for articles stolen from the market for subsequent disposal.'[45]

[43] Ibid., 5 April 1923.

[44] Ibid., 1 April 1920.
[45] Ibid., 19 January 1928.

Items stolen included two ladies' vests, a camisole, one pair of combinations, three babies' dresses, one child's apron, one child's petticoat and one pair of ladies' knickers valued at 18s 11d, belonging to draper Solomon Glynn of St Sidwell's Street, Exeter. McDonough admitted taking these items, but he denied also stealing a gent's shirt and two pairs of ladies' combinations on another occasion. These had been recovered from a woman in Chapel Street, Tiverton, who claimed to have bought them from the defendant for 6d. Mr Glynn said he had had a stall in the market for twenty-six years and nothing had ever been taken until now.

McDonough also admitted stealing a pair of riding breeches, valued at 16s 6d, from George Phillips, another Exeter trader. A pair of black leather leggings and officer's corded riding breeches had also been recovered from a farmer at Westcott Farm, Oakford, to whom the items had been sold through another woman that the defendant's wife had met in the Prince Regent pub. But his wife Ellen McDonough told the court she had found the keys on the ground and market cleaner Jack Maddocks had given some of the items for her to sell in the Phoenix pub. The court sentenced McDonough to four months in goal. The charge against his wife was left on the books for further investigation.

*Tiverton still has its Corn Market in Bampton Street. It was burnt down and rebuilt in 1731. It now houses various shops. Photo WBA*

*Angel Hill, Tiverton. This was the site for selling eggs, fish, poultry, vegetables and oats before the market was opened. It is situated between St Peter's Street and Fore Street. Photo WBA*

*This is the site of the sheep market before 1830. The building was the old Lamb Inn with its beautifully preserved sign of a lamb. In the 1920s butchers would often pay farmers for their animals a few weeks in arrears - after they had sold the meat to customers. A pub was a favourite place for doing business! Photo WBA*

## Cheers M'Dears!

Market day was a great way for farmers to get together socially. And right up until the cattle market closed in 1971, the Boars Head in Bampton Street was crammed with drinkers on a Tuesday, as were the Four in Hand, White Ball, the Crossed Keys, the Barley Mow, Half Moon and all the other locals.

On 14 February 1924, it was reported that Mr Woolridge Lister, proprietor of the Palmerston Hotel, had applied on behalf of all the town's licence holders for renewal of the market day extensions on a Tuesday from 10am until 10pm. He said it would benefit the large number of people who visited the town on Tuesdays – and the pubs too! It was also agreed the pubs could stay open on the afternoons of the town's agricultural show in July.[46]

Tiverton had its own police force, headed by its chief constable. Chief constables in the past had been fairly relaxed about the public houses in the town, as long as they obeyed the licensing laws and did not encourage drunkenness. But by March 1927, Chief Constable Beynon, who had been in the job fifteen months at this point, decided there were more pubs than needed in a town the size of Tiverton. He set out to get rid of at least two of them.

At the Annual Licensing Sessions of 1927, he proposed that the Phoenix in Phoenix Lane and the New Inn in New Inn Court should both close down. In front of the magistrates, who included the town mayor, William Loosemore, and representatives from the Wesleyan, Baptist, Congregational and Roman Catholic Churches, Mr Benyon argued that the town's population had fallen by 11,177 in thirty-six years to 9,715. There were twenty-eight fully licensed pubs, two beer houses and ten miscellaneous licences, a ratio of 242 people to each licence. He reckoned there were six public houses within 100 yards or less of the Phoenix, all with superior accommodation, stabling and garaging. The more salubrious and law-abiding pubs included the Half Moon, Four in Hand and Palmerston.

The main problem with the Phoenix was that it was around a corner off Fore Street, so was 'totally obscured from view'. There had also been two fines against the licensee for allowing drunkenness and supplying wounded soldiers. The New Inn, Mr Benynon complained, was dark and dirty and was surrounded by the Boars Head, the Crossed Keys, the White Horse, the Barrington Bell and Palmerston – all within the town centre. But it had adequate stabling and on market days the licensed kitchen had to be pressed into use. The magistrates could not see a problem, but to keep their chief constable happy they referred the New Inn licence to Exeter and agreed to refer the Phoenix for closure and compensation.[47] We know the police

[46] Ibid., 14 February 1924.
[47] Ibid., 17 March 1927.

chief did not get the Phoenix closed, despite his efforts, because it still had its licence in January 1928 when it is mentioned in a court case as a place for dividing the spoils of theft!

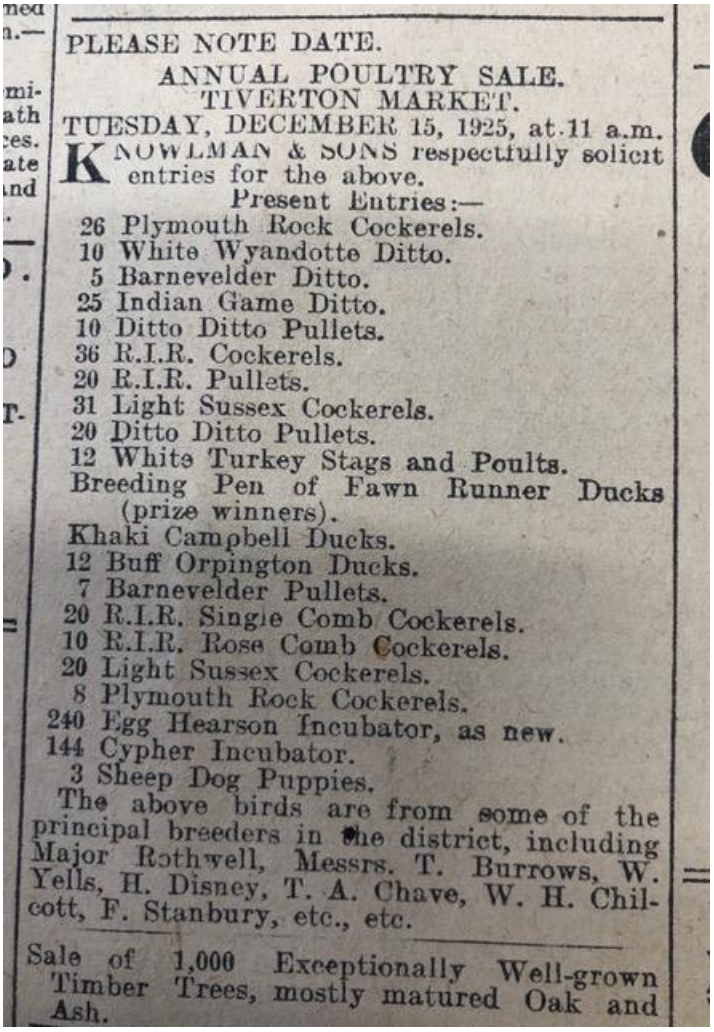
The pubs were not just venues for socialising on market days, they were also used for business deals. It was usual for butchers in the town to take their fat stock on credit and pay the farmer a few weeks later in an inn after they had sold off the carcass to their customers.

Drinking a cider or two when the day's dealing was done was a highlight for the thirsty farmers, drovers, workers and auctioneers. Drunkenness was certainly frowned upon. The police were fairly laid back about this, but sometimes the drinking went a bit too far and ended up in a court case. For example, 66-year-old James Lee was charged with being drunk and disorderly in Chapel Street after a Tuesday market binge. He was charged with breaking three panes of glass in a lodging house, causing 7s 3d damage. He admitted the charge and told the Tiverton Police Court 'I am up the pole like a good many more. I had too much cider.' He was sentenced to 7 days in gaol.[48]

The licence holders also got into trouble for not providing less profitable refreshment on a Tuesday. At the Tiverton District Sessions, the Bench received a complaint from police superintendent Joslin that a woman cyclist had asked for tea at 5pm and the licence-victualler had told her to find somewhere else. The chairman agreed not to name the establishment on the understanding that the landlord would think twice before refusing tea a second time. He said if the lady came forward again, they would have no hesitation in instituting proceedings.[49]

At the Tiverton Borough Brewster Sessions for 1928, Chief Constable Benyon was proud of what he described as the 'greater sobriety' of the town. His report in the *Devon and Somerset News* revealed that over the past five years there had been thirty prosecutions for drunkenness compared with 145 over a similar period twenty years before. In the past twelve months there had only been one case. There were now 374 people to each fully licensed house and 231 persons to every licence. Market day extensions in hours were allowed.[50]

[48] Ibid., 5 April 1923.
[49] Ibid., 20 May 1920.
[50] Ibid., 14 February 1928.



PLEASE NOTE DATE.

ANNUAL POULTRY SALE.
TIVERTON MARKET.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1925, at 11 a.m.

KNOWLMAN & SONS respectfully solicit entries for the above.

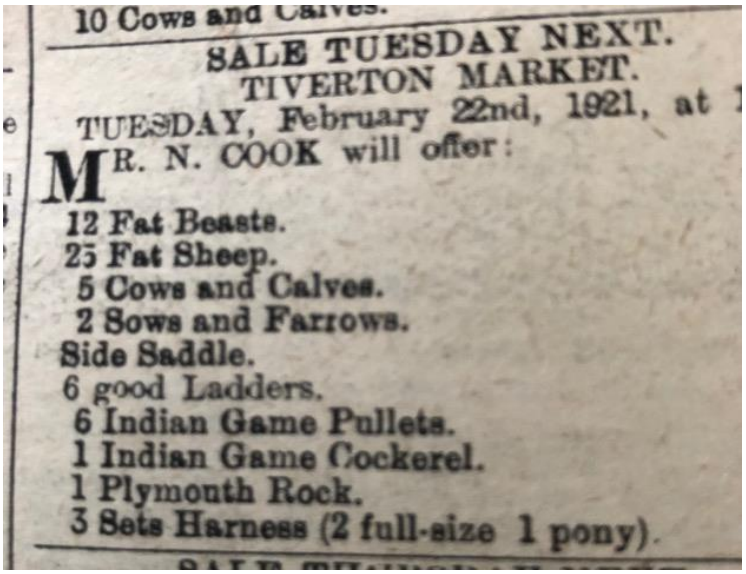
Present Entries:—

26 Plymouth Rock Cockerels.
10 White Wyandotte Ditto.
5 Barnevelder Ditto.
25 Indian Game Ditto.
10 Ditto Ditto Pullets.
36 R.I.R. Cockerels.
20 R.I.R. Pullets.
31 Light Sussex Cockerels.
20 Ditto Ditto Pullets.
12 White Turkey Stags and Poults.
Breeding Pen of Fawn Runner Ducks (prize winners).
Khaki Campbell Ducks.
12 Buff Orpington Ducks.
7 Barnevelder Pullets.
20 R.I.R. Single Comb Cockerels.
10 R.I.R. Rose Comb Cockerels.
20 Light Sussex Cockerels.
8 Plymouth Rock Cockerels.
240 Egg Hearson Incubator, as new.
144 Cypher Incubator.
3 Sheep Dog Puppies.

The above birds are from some of the principal breeders in the district, including Major Rothwell, Messrs. T. Burrows, W. Yells, H. Disney, T. A. Chave, W. H. Chilcott, F. Stanbury, etc., etc.

Sale of 1,000 Exceptionally Well-grown Timber Trees, mostly matured Oak and Ash.

*Advertisements were placed in the Tiverton Gazette and Devon and Somerset News to ensure a good turn-out. The annual sales were particularly popular. This is a notice for a pre-Christmas poultry sale in 1925. The variety of poultry is impressive and a list of the major breeders given shows how important an auction it was.*



10 Cows and Calves.

SALE TUESDAY NEXT.
TIVERTON MARKET.

TUESDAY, February 22nd, 1921, at

MR. N. COOK will offer:

12 Fat Beasts.
25 Fat Sheep.
5 Cows and Calves.
2 Sows and Farrows.
Side Saddle.
6 good Ladders.
6 Indian Game Pullets.
1 Indian Game Cockerel.
1 Plymouth Rock.
3 Sets Harness (2 full-size 1 pony).

*Auctions would often be held by more than one auction house on a Tuesday. Mr N. Cook regularly advertised in the Tiverton Gazette the week before the sale. More lots were included on market day. A wide variety of farm paraphernalia went under the hammer, as well as animals.*

## Wages and Wanting

Tiverton Market reflected the ebbs and flows of the whole of Devon's economy – if not Great Britain's. Wealthy landowners sold cattle there, as did local farmers and tenant farmers. In the pannier market, farmers' wives, smallholders and farm workers sold their garden produce. And traders came from further afield, including Exeter, Bampton and Barnstaple for their regular Tuesday or Saturday stalls selling products like fish, hardware, clothes and meats. Prices often reflected what locals could pay for the goods. Tiverton's economy was mainly based around agriculture, but there was also Heathtcoat lace factory, the major factory employer, which tended to pay its workers more than farm labourers.

In the Great War, 276 young men from Tiverton fell. That number did not include 180 Blundell's school boys, who would have been in the officer classes. Across the whole of Devon about 10,000 men died.[51]Almost 300 working-age men lost from the town's shrinking population would have had an impact on employment. We also read about farmers re-employing returning soldiers who were no longer able to work as ably as they previously had – whether because of physical or mental problems.

The *Tiverton Gazette* on 3 February 1920, had an article about farmer John Brewer of Bramford Speke who was summoned to Wonford Sessions in Exeter for failing to pay a full wage to farm worker and ex-soldier, Mr Wright. After just a week, the farmer realised the troubled veteran was no longer able to milk or plough and was no use on the farm. Mr Wright could not find alternative work and pleaded to return on the understanding it was a stopgap until he was employed elsewhere. The court heard an exemption permit could have been issued if the Board found veterans mentally or physically unable to work but there was none in this case. The farmer was fined £2, ordered to pay £5 12s 6d arrears and 11s costs.

In January 1920 the National Farmers Union had begun fighting the 48-Hour Labour Bill, claiming that agriculture should be exempt. There was no clock-watching on a farm! The farmers were also against the part of the Education Act of 1918 that would ban the employment of children under 12. On a farm even the very young were expected to do their bit. Mr W.R. James, speaking at the Devon Farmers Union, was outraged children would not be able to work, even in the holidays. He said they were 'good milkers' and were needed. The NFU agreed to fight against the proposal.[52]

The issue was considered of such importance that a special meeting of Tiverton Town Council was held in April 1920, which included the Alderman Sir Ian Amory and the Chief Constable Mr Mercer. For 90 minutes they considered, along with the Education Committee, by-laws proposed to be made under the 1903 Children's Act and 1918 Education Act. The

[51] Ibid., 17June 1920.
[52] Ibid., 22 January 1920.

council threw out the recommendation that no child between 12 and 14 should be employed on school days, including market Tuesdays, except between 5pm and 7pm. Instead, the council agreed children could work between 7am and 9am for milking, deliveries and working on a stall, shop, farm or garden.[53]

Low wages and the rising cost of food, especially butter, was causing friction. A member of the Workers' Union wrote a scathing letter, which was published in the *Devon and Somerset News* on 5 February 1920. He complained about Mr C. Carew MP's recent claims that the farm worker was in a 'better position' now. The union member maintained the farm worker had not been as badly off since the hungry '40s and the 'worst scavenger' in Tiverton was getting 10s 6d a week more than the best-paid farm worker. The union member warned profiteers were benefitting with 'the people's food', which was 'a menace and bound to upset the social order of the country if not stopped'.[54]

At the same time the National Agricultural Association, which had been set up in Exeter the year before, was calling for unity between farmers, labourers and commercial enterprises to strengthen the industry. The main problem was, though, that farm labourers could never get the time off work to attend the meetings without being docked pay. At the time, not a single farm worker had managed to attend a meeting.[55]

Farm workers' wages were set by the Agricultural Wages Board. Most workers lived in housing provided by the landowner, who was limited to charging 2s 6d a week rent. Farmers were now asking government for a free hand in deciding rental charges.[56]

The plight of the Devon farm worker was brought into sharp focus in February 1920 when an inquest was held into the death of a three-week-old baby boy from starvation. His mother, Mrs Frank Tapp, who had nine other children, had given birth to twins. The first twin had died within a few days of birth. The doctor described a family living on the edge of poverty. The cottage they rented was not fit to 'farrow a sow in', he said. It had a hole in the roof and had not been whitewashed for eleven years. The family had to live on Mr Tapp's earnings of only 20 shillings a week for a six-day week. The coroner recorded death from natural causes and completely exonerated the mother.[57] Two weeks later, we read that after an account of the inquest appeared in newspapers published throughout Britain, the coroner received protests about the treatment of farm labourers from all over the country – even as far away as Belfast. Money was sent to the family from well-wishers.

[53] Ibid., 1 April 1920.
[54] Ibid., 5 February 1920.
[55] Ibid., 22 January 1920.
[56] *Western Morning News*, 19 February 20
[57] *Tiverton Gazette*, 24 February 1920.

An inspector from the Agricultural Wages Board went to investigate the Tapp family's living conditions. Using Mr Tapp's own figures, the inspector discovered the farm worker was paid, not a pound a week as Mrs Tapp had claimed, but the equivalent of 45s a week. Mr Tapp said he had no complaints and was paid more than other farm workers he knew. He had all his meals at the farmhouse; the farmer had given him a cow, forty fowls and two pigs. All his grazing and winter seed was supplied for his stock. The farmer also gave him milk and butter when the cow was dry and he had 40 yards of potato ground on the farmland. He had all his cider, fruit and vegetables, and use of all the farmer's tools and horses. Mr Tapp also had a large garden with his rented cottage and took home 33s 6d each week. The inspector said Mr Tapp was certainly not being underpaid – although he was by no means rich. And, the inspector added, if people wanted to show 'financial sympathy' it would not be 'misunderstood or misapplied'. The inspector added that the farmer and his wife, Mr and Mrs Buckingham, had employed Mr Tapp for twenty years and were a 'comfortable and easy-going couple' who were very distressed by the wife's tale.[58] Little did they know then that farm workers' wages were to plummet within a year.

The Devon Wages Committee rejected a proposal for a flat rate minimum weekly wage across the South West for agricultural workers. Instead, the committee agreed to the Wages Board's Order fixing the minimum wage from 37s 6d to 42s and under, according to age, from 8 April 1920. This would be raised for females at the same ratio. Overtime for hay and corn harvest should be fixed at 1s 7d an hour (less according to age), the same as the previous year.[59]

Wages went up again in August 1920. The Agricultural Wages Board ordered the minimum paid to men over 21 be 46s a week in Devon. The wage was for a 50-hour week in the summer and a 48-hour week in the winter. Overtime rates were now fixed at 1s 2d on weekdays and 1s 5d on Sundays.[60]

Other trades were unhappy with levels of pay in Tiverton. Early in 1920, around sixty men involved in the building trade, including carpenters, masons, painters and labourers had come out on strike. They had been calling for 1s 7d an hour for a 48-hour week, but by the time the 'masters' had agreed, the national scale had risen to 1s 8d an hour for a 44-hour week. There are no further reports in the newspapers, which suggests the dispute was settled.[61]

By 1921, unemployment in Tiverton was on the rise with a fifth of the workforce reportedly jobless. The guardians of the poor suggested that the borough council should provide work or relief for those without jobs. Within a year, local farmers were feeling the pinch and asked for labourers' wages to be reduced from 38s a week to 34s.

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[58] Ibid., 9 March 1920.
[59] *Devon and Somerset News*, 12 August 1920.
[60] Ibid., 12 August 1920.
[61] *Tiverton Gazette*, 3 May 1920.

The economic hard times were affecting other areas of Tiverton life, too. The major employer of Heathcoat was experiencing a decline in orders for lace. It led to the factory being shut down completely for three weeks. An editorial summing up 1924 commented that the lace industry, so important to Tiverton, remained under a cloud.

Agriculture, too, so 'intimately associated with the prosperity of the town' had also had a 'trying year' with abnormal rains ruining many crops.[62] Farm workers' wages fell, but the National Farmers Union was still complaining the cost of employees was too high.

The Agricultural Wages Board fixed the rates for male workers aged 21 and over in March 1925 at 32s 6d for a 50-hour week. Overtime was paid at 8½d an hour on weekdays and 10d an hour on Sundays. Under 21s would earn just 5d an hour. This was fixed for three months.[63]

In May, the Agricultural Wages Board decided these rates should be kept until March the following year – except that the 'week' should be extended to 52 hours between June and September, effectively resulting in another pay cut: 20–21 year old males were down to 29s 7½d per week; 19–20 year olds: 26s 7d per week; 18–19 year olds: 23s 6d per week; 17–18 year olds: 20s 5½d per week; 16–17 year olds: 17s 4½d per week; 15–16 year olds: 14s 4d per week; 14–15 year olds: 11s 3½d per week.

Women could expect much less, although they probably worked just as hard (if my farming cousins are anything to go by). Twenty years old and over would be paid only 5d an hour, and the rate fell steadily until 14-year-old girls could earn just 2d an hour. Cottage rents went up to 3s a week, and lodging for teenagers ranged from 15s to 7s, depending on their age.[64]

Pay was still low by February 1927, when it was reported that lace workers in Heathcoat factory were still only working alternate weeks as orders had failed to buck up. The georgette and crepe de chine departments were not affected.[65]

The Agricultural Wages Board affected a further slight cut in pay rates for farm workers by ruling that over 21s should be paid the same (32s 6d) for a longer working week. They were now expected to work for 52 hours a week from May to September and 50 hours for the rest of the year. Women over 21 would still be paid at the rate of 5d an hour. The rate would be paid until March 1928.[66] Remember, farm workers were earning 46s for a 48-hour week in 1920. Wages had fallen dramatically.

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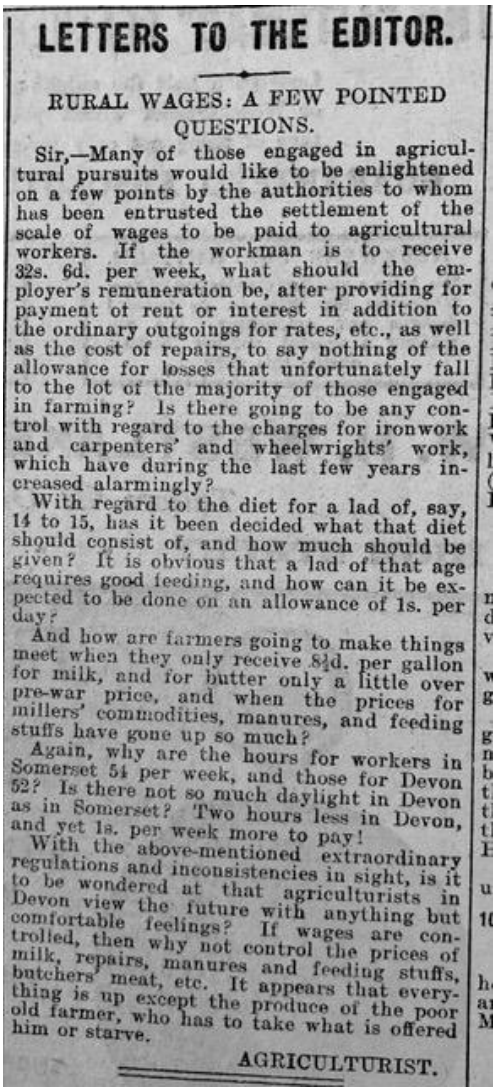
[62] *Devon and Somerset News*, 27 November 1924.
[63] Ibid., 19 March 1925.
[64] Ibid., 21 May 1925.
[65] Ibid., 17 February 1927.
[66] Ibid., 31 March 1927.

In the *Tiverton Gazette* of 19 February 1929, magistrates warned farmers across the district they faced prosecution if they failed to pay the official minimum wage. Employers could not get away with paying their workers less simply because they were ignorant of their rights. John Stone and his son Reginald were each fined £2 10s for not settling arrears after underpaying four workers. One of the labourers was underpaid by a staggering £34 7s 9d. Two others more than £32.

In 1929, the Agricultural Wages Board ordered rates of pay should remain the same until March 1930. But with one concession: over Christmas and Easter, the farm workers were allowed to have their working week shortened by a total of nine hours. So, for two weeks each year the farm labourers had to work 41 hours over six days, not 50 hours.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

RURAL WAGES: A FEW POINTED QUESTIONS.

Sir,—Many of those engaged in agricultural pursuits would like to be enlightened on a few points by the authorities to whom has been entrusted the settlement of the scale of wages to be paid to agricultural workers. If the workman is to receive 32s. 6d. per week, what should the employer's remuneration be, after providing for payment of rent or interest in addition to the ordinary outgoings for rates, etc., as well as the cost of repairs, to say nothing of the allowance for losses that unfortunately fall to the lot of the majority of those engaged in farming? Is there going to be any control with regard to the charges for ironwork and carpenters' and wheelwrights' work, which have during the last few years increased alarmingly?

With regard to the diet for a lad of, say, 14 to 15, has it been decided what that diet should consist of, and how much should be given? It is obvious that a lad of that age requires good feeding, and how can it be expected to be done on an allowance of 1s. per day?

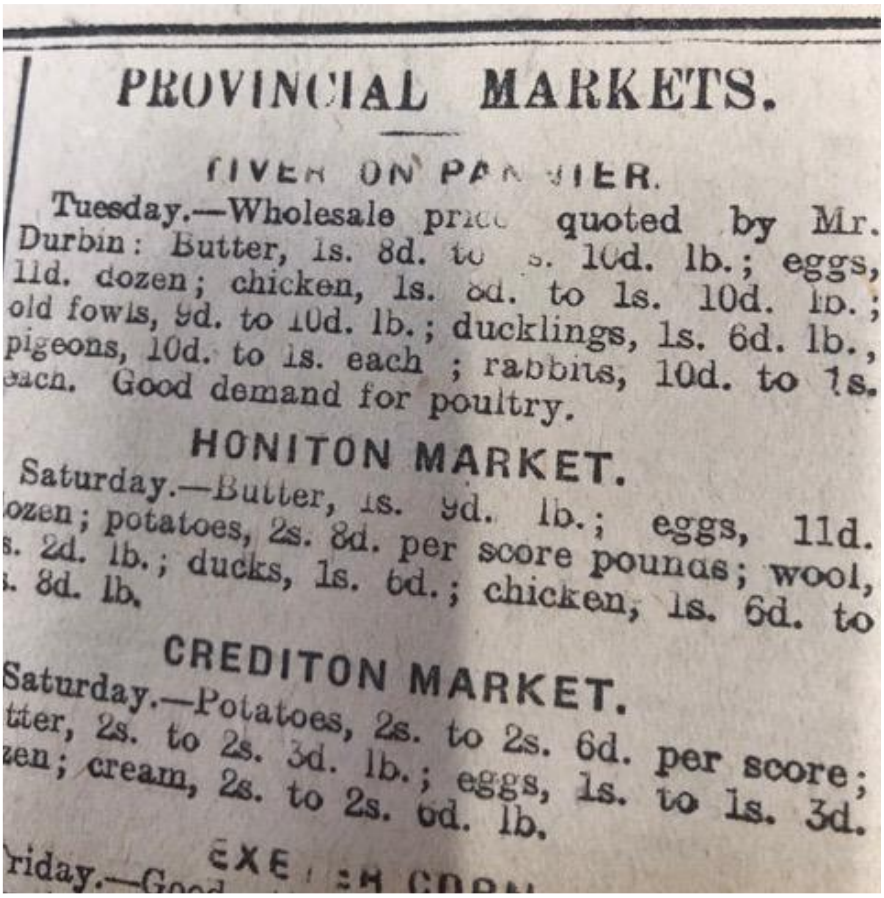
And how are farmers going to make things meet when they only receive 8½d. per gallon for milk, and for butter only a little over pre-war price, and when the prices for millers' commodities, manures, and feeding stuffs have gone up so much?

Again, why are the hours for workers in Somerset 54 per week, and those for Devon 52? Is there not so much daylight in Devon as in Somerset? Two hours less in Devon, and yet 1s. per week more to pay!

With the above-mentioned extraordinary regulations and inconsistencies in sight, is it to be wondered at that agriculturists in Devon view the future with anything but comfortable feelings? If wages are controlled, then why not control the prices of milk, repairs, manures and feeding stuffs, butchers' meat, etc. It appears that everything is up except the produce of the poor old farmer, who has to take what is offered him or starve.

AGRICULTURIST.

*This letter appeared in the Devon and Somerset News on following the Agricultural Wages Board ruling. Farmers were feeling betrayed by the Lloyd George government after the Agricultural Act 1920, guaranteeing the price of wheat and oats, was repealed without honouring the commitment to give four years' notice.*



PROVINCIAL MARKETS.

TIVERTON PANNIER.

Tuesday.—Wholesale price quoted by Mr. Durbin: Butter, 1s. 8d. to s. 10d. lb.; eggs, 11d. dozen; chicken, 1s. 8d. to 1s. 10d. lb.; old fowls, 9d. to 10d. lb.; ducklings, 1s. 6d. lb., pigeons, 10d. to 1s. each; rabbits, 10d. to 1s. each. Good demand for poultry.

HONITON MARKET.

Saturday.—Butter, 1s. 9d. lb.; eggs, 11d. ozen; potatoes, 2s. 8d. per score pounds; wool, s. 2d. lb.; ducks, 1s. 6d.; chicken, 1s. 6d. to s. 8d. lb.

CREDITON MARKET.

Saturday.—Potatoes, 2s. to 2s. 6d. per score; tter, 2s. to 2s. 3d. lb.; eggs, 1s. to 1s. 3d. zen; cream, 2s. to 2s. 6d. lb.

EXE[illegible]H CORN

riday.—Good

*The Devon and Somerset News reported wholesale prices for a number of items each week. Prices were compared against other nearby markets. Dealer Mr S Durbin sent stock straight from Tiverton to London by rail.*

## Selling For a Song

Being of Devon farming heritage, I assumed that the same land was farmed by the same families for generation after generation. But the Great War and economic downturn in agriculture, due partly to The Great Betrayal, saw many farms changing hands. Farmers had invested on the understanding that they would have a guaranteed product price. The government's policy change left many of them in financial difficulties.

By 1922, a quarter of agricultural land had been sold. Throughout the decade, adverts for land and farm sales appear in the Devon newspapers. No doubt the newspaper proprietors enjoyed the advertising revenue from the auction houses!

But the market was uncertain: In August 1925 the situation made headlines: 'PROPERTY AUCTION IN TIVERTON, ALL LOTS WITHDRAWN'. Farms and fields in the parishes of Cruwys Morchard, Rackenford, Witheridge and Halberton were all withdrawn by the

auctioneer houses of Knowlman and Son and Cockram, Dobbs, and Stagg. In all, six lots went unsold.[67]

Other reports appeared around unsold properties. Four farms failed to attract bids and were withdrawn from sale in July 1926.[68]

The agricultural property market seemed not to settle. Buying and selling continued at a pace. In the *Devon and Somerset News* of 16 August 1928, Cockram, Dobbs and Stagg reported record sales for one auction of £19,430, but the record amount taken was for an unusually large number of properties. The hammer had come down on eight farms, a garage business and various cottages.

SALE TUESDAY NEXT.

TIVERTON MARKET.

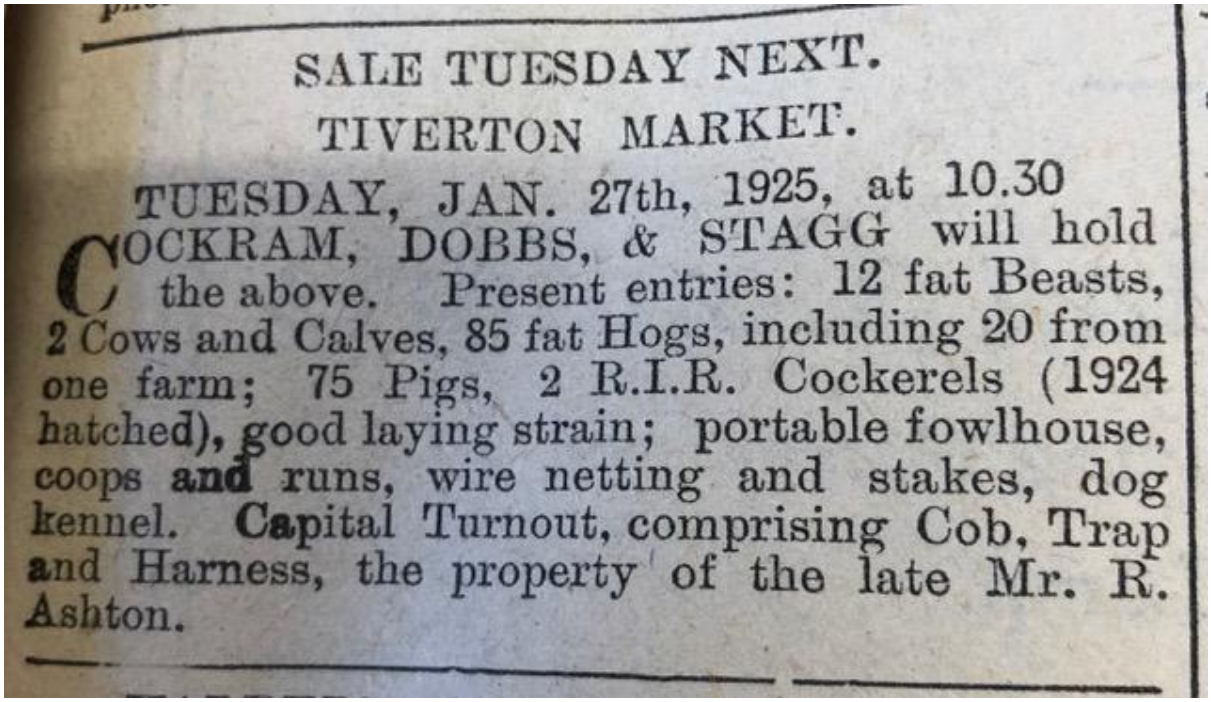
TUESDAY, MARCH 9th, 1926, at 11.

COCKRAM, DOBBS, & STAGG will condnct the above. Present Entries:—10 Cattle, 35 Sheep, 25 Rare Couples, 65 Pigs; very smart Bay Gelding, 7 years, about 16 h.h., good and quiet in all harness, pass all traffic, make good vanner; Light 4-Wheel Spring Waggon, Rubber Tyred Ralli Car (new tyres), with cushions and lamps, in excellent condition; large-size end-over-end Churn, in perfect condition; 50-chick Fostermother, in perfect working order, by Syndham Hannaford; Bone Crusher by South-well.

*The advertised lots give an insight into the workings of a farm in the 20s. It is estimated that a quarter of farms changed hands over the decade. In those cases, the livestock, machinery and implements were sold at the farm site at dedicated auctions.*

[67] Ibid., 27 August 1925.

[68] *Tiverton Gazette*, 23 July 1926.



SALE TUESDAY NEXT.

TIVERTON MARKET.

TUESDAY, JAN. 27th, 1925, at 10.30 COCKRAM, DOBBS, & STAGG will hold the above. Present entries: 12 fat Beasts, 2 Cows and Calves, 85 fat Hogs, including 20 from one farm; 75 Pigs, 2 R.I.R. Cockerels (1924 hatched), good laying strain; portable fowlhouse, coops and runs, wire netting and stakes, dog kennel. Capital Turnout, comprising Cob, Trap and Harness, the property of the late Mr. R. Ashton.

*A week before the livestock market auctioneers would advertise the early entry lots. There was often farm implements up for sale as well as trees, horses and riding equipment. The auction houses included Cockram, Dobbs and Stagg and Knowlman and Sons.*

## The General Strike

In May 1926, a general strike was looming that could have had a serious impact on produce being sent by rail from Tiverton Market. On 4 May, the *Tiverton Gazette* was reporting the likely effects of a strike while assuring readers that production of the newspaper would not be interrupted. The nation's watchwords would be adhered to, 'Keep Steady and Carry On!'[69]

An emergency meeting of the Town Council was told what was happening:

> The major employer of Heathcoat and Co would continue to produce lace while exercising "utmost care in the economy of fuel and power". Tiverton Town Clerk, J F Pugsley had been appointed Food Emergency Officer for the town and rural districts. There was confidence that staff at the Tiverton Corporation gas and electricity works would turn up for work.
>
> Prayers for a 'happy issue out of the trouble' were being said in all places of worship on Sunday.
>
> The council heard foodstuff would probably be taken as normal by the railway, but with no guarantees.

[69] Ibid., 4 May 1926.

> There was little choice but to carry on with the market and hope the strike would not have too great an impact.[70]

The following week, the *Gazette* reported the market provided a 'striking instance of the manner in which the Westcountry carried on despite the inconvenience of the strike':

> Attendance was almost normal, and farmers and workers had shared lifts with those who ran a car in "neighbourly actions".
>
> Prices in a cattle market were slightly up on the previous week with only a small supply of beef and fat cattle making about £21. Slip pigs 85s each, fat lambs 56s 6d and a sow and thirteen piglets made £25 5s.
>
> Dealers had made special provision to get their animals to London. Mr Durbin from Honiton hired a 4-ton lorry from Ealing and dispatched large quantities of poultry, eggs and butter for himself and others. Other produce was still moved by rail.
>
> There was also good business in the pannier market.
>
> The report concluded that dealers had shown 'commendable enterprise' by getting their goods to London by road…and, the newspaper reported, at least one driver had experienced the 'thrill of driving through the metropolis'![71]

*The pannier market interior today. To have goods on sale undercover and out of the way of the crowded streets was considered a huge boon to the town. Stalls were set up both inside and under cover outside. Other sellers sold their produce from baskets. Many had regular customers. Tolls receipts reveal that in the 20s the pannier market grew, as did the sale of pigs, but livestock sales fell. Photo WBA*

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 18 May 1926.

## Backstreet Butchering

Throughout the decade, Tiverton council was vexed by a question that also taxed the town, traders and the trust: Where should butchers kill the beasts they bought at the market?

It was a problem that had arisen before the Great War but was largely put on hold during the war years as government imposed strict food controls. By 1920, the public slaughterhouse debate was back on the agenda. At times, a solution was tantalisingly close, only to prove more elusive than councillors ever thought possible.

This was the problem: Most of Tiverton's fourteen butchers in the 1920s tended to slaughter and butcher their market-purchased animals at the back of their shop premises, as had been the practise for many generations. They would buy 'fat' cattle, pigs and lambs ('fat' meant that they were ready for slaughter) at the market and usually pay the farmer in the pub two or three weeks later, after they had sold the jointed carcass. The butchers could only kill animals under licence from the town council.

During the war, the Great Western Railway had operated a central slaughterhouse in the town with government approval, dispatching about 500 animals a week by rail to London. These animals were not traded through the market. Inspectors could more easily control the amount of meat leaving the depot and reject meat considered unfit for human consumption. Though, during the war years, it is reported only fourteen beasts and 300 lbs of mutton had been condemned. Was the unexpectedly low number as a result of the government suspending the order relating to tubercular cattle and suspect animals were allowed to be absorbed into the food chain?[72]

Food controls had now ended, and in July 1920 the council's Streets Committee narrowly voted in favour of a public abattoir to control the spread of disease, especially tuberculosis, which was a recurring problem for farmers. The only way they could compel local butchers to use the proposed public slaughterhouse would be to refuse or rescind licences – and the committee knew that would not go down well. Nor would the estimated 1d or 2d increase in the rates go down well with ratepayers.

The next year we find the Streets Committee trying to buy a slaughterhouse in Barrington Street, a busy thoroughfare near the centre of the town. Having ownership of the premises would have been the easiest way to close it down. The price was £200, a hefty sum for a 24 × 21 feet building. It had been used as a slaughterhouse for thirty years by butcher Mr

[72] *Devon and Somerset News*, 15 July 1920.

Goodland who was a councillor on the Committee. His brother now rented the site from Mr W Gater for £14 a year.

The committee said the Barrington Street abattoir was a public nuisance. A petition of 105 signatures had been presented by people living in the area, who argued that it impacted on their lives and they wanted it gone. Mr Goodland hotly denied it was ever a nuisance and vowed to build his own slaughterhouse if his brother was kicked out. The committee referred the matter back. No conflict of interest was ever mentioned during the meetings![73]

By February 1925, there was still no sign of a public abattoir, although the borough surveyor had been asked to draw up plans. Licences were still being granted. A licence was issued for Butcher E.C. Penny in Horsdon and another in Wellbrook Street for E. Burt, both in heavily populated areas and surrounded by terraced housing. The chairman said he hoped the butchers were using humane killers. He assured the committee it would be the final time members would need to consider licences because soon there would be a public slaughterhouse.

By May 1925, the new mayor, William Loosemore, told town councillors that five years was long enough for debate, and he wanted a definite yes or no as soon as possible. The matter was referred to the Public Health Committee, which now wanted the butchers to make the proposed abattoir self-supporting. The committee came up with a novel answer at last – they would set up a new subcommittee that could decide what would happen. The new subcommittee's first task would be to arrange another meeting with Tiverton's butchers.

Building costs were now estimated to be £4,500. Councillor Goodland, the brother of the Barrington Street butcher, warned the committee that half the town's butchers would boycott the new abattoir. They agreed to make a definite decision at the next meeting.[74]

Obviously, a definite decision was not made. And at the full town council meeting in February 1926, Councillor Sir Ian Amory, who owned and rented out a backstreet abattoir, told members they were all becoming a 'laughingstock' in the town because they still had not agreed whether to build an abattoir, after, what he claimed, was a total of nineteen years of debate. He was assured by the town clerk the matter was 'in hand' and the district valuer would be coming the very next day.[75]

Eight months later, in October 1926, GWR agreed to sell a piece of land for the planned public abattoir at a cost of £50 and the Public Health Committee recommend purchase. This was at Horsdon with a frontage onto the Blundell's Road. A larger part of the proposed site belonging to Sir Ian Amory was being sold to them for £184.

[73] Ibid., 13 March 1924.
[74] Ibid., 14 May 1925.
[75] Ibid., 11 February 1926.

The first problem was that the district valuer said the GWR land was only worth £30. An obviously frustrated Councillor Amory offered to charge the council £10 less for his plot to meet the difference. In the end, it was agreed to go ahead with the buying of the two land parcels. There appeared to be little to stop the new public abattoir now. At last, the butchers buying their beasts from Tiverton market should have a sanitary and humane place to dispatch them.[76]

By May 1926, plans were really taking shape. GWR had agreed to take £10 less for the land. The Public Health Committee had submitted plans and the Ministry had been asked to sanction the borrowing of £4,500 to cover the entire cost of the scheme. The majority of butchers appeared to be supportive, and it was hoped the project would be ready by the following winter.[77]

Meanwhile, in November, the tenancies and licences of the backstreet abattoirs were now determined each quarter, rather than annually. It meant more work for officers, but councillors believed it was necessary because the public service would soon be materialising. The slaughterhouse in Barrington Street was allowed to operate for another three months.

His Worshipful the Mayor, in his re-election speech that month, appealed to the townsfolk to refuse to buy meat from any butcher not using the public facility to ensure the success and derive benefit from the scheme. This prompted an angry letter, published in the *Tiverton Gazette*, from 'one in the trade' who said butchers needed their 'workshops' behind their shops to sort out their products, just as the bakers needed a bakehouse or any other business needed space to produce their wares. And he doubted the public abattoir would ever cover its costs.

In December 1926 a public enquiry began at Tiverton Town Hall. The government inspector, Mr J.C. Dawes, was presiding on behalf of the Ministry of Health. He had to decide whether the council could borrow the £4,500 needed for the scheme. The aim, he said, was to do away with the overcrowded and insanitary conditions in the present slaughterhouses.

The inspector heard Tiverton had a slightly declining population of 9,637. The council had outstanding loans of £99,119, due mostly because of a big housebuilding programme and the expense of bringing electricity to the town. A penny rate produced £191 8s 1d. The estimated income of the slaughterhouse was £232 14s a year. Butchers would be charged 3s to kill a beast, 9d a sheep and 1s for both calves and pigs.

[76] Ibid., 15 April 1926.
[77] Ibid., 13 May 1926.

There were now fifteen butchers in the town and all but three had agreed to use the new abattoir when it was eventually up and running. Almost all the meat consumed by townsfolk had been locally raised and killed. Demand was expected to be eleven cattle, thirty-eight sheep, ten pigs and three calves each week. Condemned meat was sent to the hounds and thoroughly boiled before being eaten.

In January, the government inspector agreed to permit the scheme but with some key revisions, which he believed would add to its smooth running and hygiene. Tenders went out for the building of Tiverton's new public abattoir. The end was, at last, in sight. No longer would animals be driven from the marketplace to small backstreets and slaughtered. No longer would Tiverton residents have to endure the sights, sounds and smells of the unpleasant business. Or so it seemed.

Four months later, in May 1927, Tiverton Town Council spent over an hour talking about the planned new slaughterhouse. There was a hitch. The government inspector's revisions had added nearly 25% to the bill. Members feared that if they borrowed more than £5,000 they would be putting future generations under the heavy burden of paying back a hefty loan. A possible solution to the problem could be to ask the Tiverton Butchers Association to help them foot the extra costs. They even suggested naming and shaming the three butchers who had vowed to boycott the planned abattoir.

The press coverage of the council meeting prompted an angry letter in the *Devon and Somerset News* from F. Cook, S.O. Horn and E. Madge, the three butchers who were so nearly 'named and shamed'. They argued that they had always made it clear they would not agree to use a public abattoir because they had invested heavily in their own slaughterhouses. They maintained a council-run abattoir was not only unnecessary but was also unviable.

Within weeks, opposition from the butchers' quarter began to grow. The Tiverton Town Council meeting on 15 June 1927, was told that at a Butchers Association meeting four members now said they would not use the public abattoir. They feared there would be a rise in fees to cover the extra facilities demanded by the government inspector. Others were apparently 'wobbling'. Councillor T. Gregory was vocal. He was annoyed the butchers had not voiced their unhappiness at the scheme much earlier and saved the Public Health Committee and the council both time and money. Committee chairman, G. Physick admitted the 'once certain' project had to be shelved.

Councillors' condemnation of the meat men was heartfelt. They argued that just a handful of butchers had sabotaged a service that would have meant hygiene and meat safety was more easily controlled, animals treated more humanely, and the distress of backstreet butchering eliminated, thereby benefitting the whole town. Councillor Gregory warned the town's butchers they would end up spending a great deal of money bringing their own slaughterhouses up to scratch. He predicted that in a few years' time the government would

insist on sanitary public abattoirs in towns and by then costs to local butchers would be much higher.

Although the land had been bought and the plans passed, the council agreed to hold fire on the project for another month to gauge opinion in the town. It looked as though a public place to kill cattle, sheep and pigs from the market was, once again, very much on the back burner.

Anger about the treatment of animals and sanitation of the butchers' so-called workshops came into focus again in December 1927 when Alderman Sir Ian Amory complained about the 'nasty' state of the slaughterhouse in Barrington Street. It was one of two bought by the council in readiness for closure when the, now delayed, public service became operational. Sir Ian said he saw 'dumpings' – the unsaleable parts of an animal – lying in the street as he walked pass, which should never be allowed. His comments prompted the council to order a review of all the slaughterhouses in the borough. Unfortunately, the review does not appear to have been made public, if, indeed it was ever completed, but evidently the butchers of Tiverton were continuing to operate as they had done for hundreds of years because there was still no alternative. They would choose a beast or two, kill them (usually at the back of their shops or nearby), sell the meat to their customers and settle up with the farmer a few weeks later. Both residents living near meat operations and the condemned animals continued to suffer probably avoidable distress.

In July 1928, the Town Council was sent a letter by Mr F.H. Rooks, pleading with them to honour its commitment to build a public slaughterhouse away from housing. Mr Rooks lived in Wellbrook Terrace in West Exe, close to a butcher's abattoir. His son was seriously ill and was very distressed by 'what goes on'. Sir Ian Amory admitted this particular slaughterhouse belonged to him and was just 50 yards from houses. Others were as close as five yards to houses, he added. The council once again decided the matter was urgent. Members reckoned £600 could be trimmed from the costs if the plans were modified for a second time. The government inspector had to agree, but perhaps there was life in the slaughterhouse plans yet! By April 1929, a government minister was in Tiverton to check over the plans. He agreed to the revisions, which would save £800.[78]

A footnote in a report to the council in July 1929 tells us the town was down to seven registered slaughterhouses and two licensed ones. Some were 'primitive', and only two came 'within measurable distance of model bye-laws'. It concluded: 'A public abattoir (which is contemplated) would be a boon for both butchers and public'.[79]

On 17 October 1929, by a large majority – thirteen votes to three – the council agreed to go ahead with the new public slaughterhouse and put the project out to tender. The council had

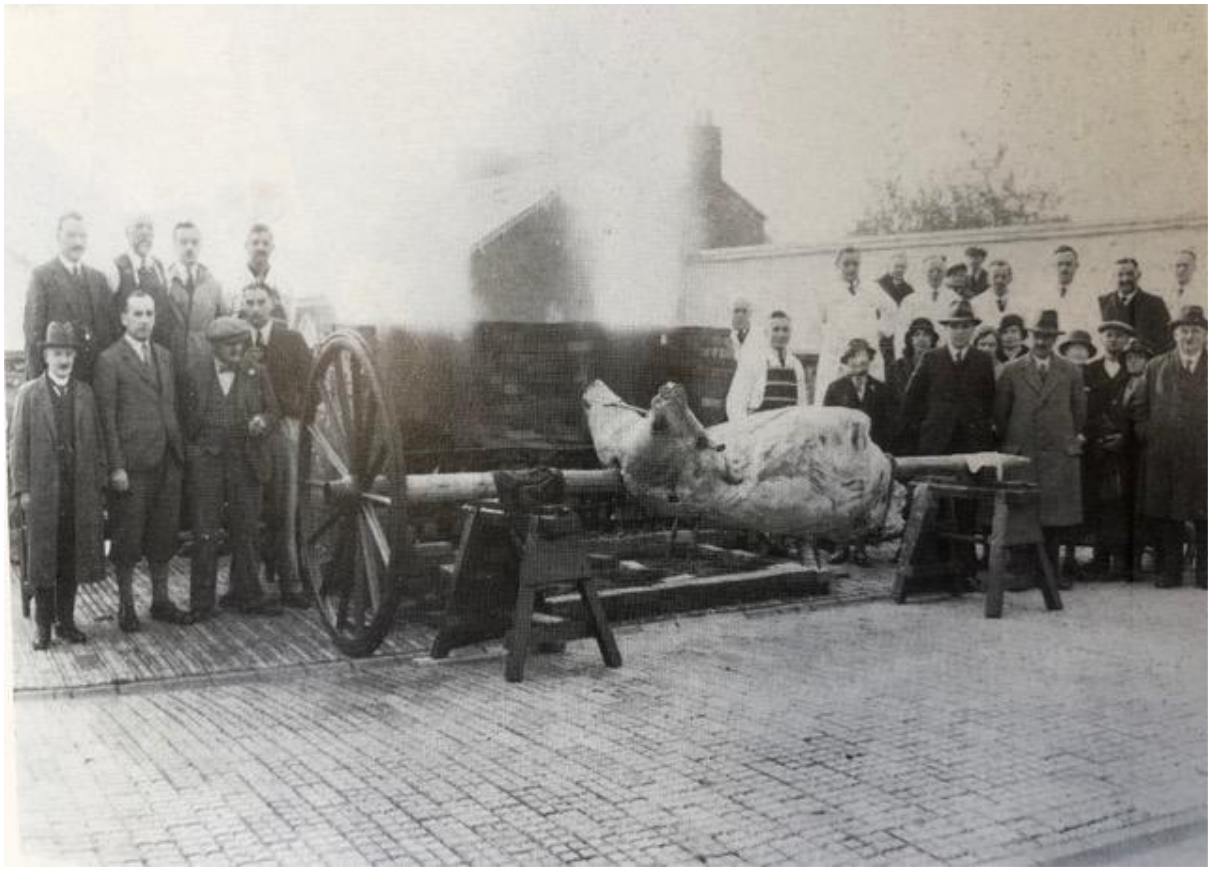
[78] Ibid., 18 April 1929.
[79] Ibid., 11 July 1929.

to borrow £3,700 and it would add £140 on the rates, which worked out at an extra 3 farthings per ratepayer. But despite the cost, councillors agreed the abattoir would be a boost to public health and sensibilities; the carcasses would be rigorously inspected with no diseased meat getting into the food chain, and animals would be humanely killed.

Two-thirds of butchers still said they would not use it. But the council was hoping consumers would boycott any local butcher still killing his own beasts and eventually they would all have to come into line. The abattoir was not expected to even break-even in the short term because annual costs were estimated at £372 and income £232. Two-thirds of the cattle and around 85% of sheep and pigs eaten by the town were expected to be killed in the planned new facility. In support, Sir Ian vowed that his slaughterhouse in Wellbrook Terrace would never be used again.[80] It looked like the stun guns would be readied and public knives sharpened at last. Hang on, though – just a month later it was reported that members of the Tiverton Mercantile Association were still unconvinced about the merits and affordability of the project. There were calls for another public meeting, and town councillors were relieved when they heard the motion had failed.[81]

*Barrington Street today. A small slaughterhouse was situated on the righthand side of the street. It caused outrage amongst residents in the 20s. They complained animal bits would spill on to the pavement and the noise and smells were upsetting. Over 100 residents signed a petition calling for the abattoir to be closed. It was eventually bought by the town council. Photo WBA*

[80] Ibid., 17 October 1929.
[81] Ibid., 28 November 1929.



*There are few early photographs of the marketplace. This one is one of the earliest showing an ox roasting. Tiverton Museum Collection*

## Keeping Out Diseases

One of the main reasons for a public abattoir was to control the spread of disease among the animals. In 1920 there had been cases of foot-and-mouth disease in South Devon and tuberculosis was a constant threat to herds. Carts coming into the cattle market were ordered to be disinfected regularly, at a cost of 6d each, after six pigs were found to be suffering from tuberculosis.[82]

But there was no agreement on how to react when disease struck. The *Devon and Somerset News* reported that the 'modern' policy of slaughtering foot-and-mouth-affected herds was not popular.[83] Farmer W. Dester of Hockworthy and former chairman of the Tiverton Rural District Council said he had had long experience of the disease. He believed it would never be eradicated by killing the cattle. He said the diseased cattle should be left where they fell, given oatmeal gruel and linseed and they would recover. His cattle had had foot-and-mouth six or seven times and he had never lost one.

[82] Ibid., 17June 1920.

[83] Ibid., 22 January 1920.

In February 1924, the Devon Diseases of Animals Committee agreed to close Devon and Cornwall to any animals from outside the two counties because of the threat of foot-and-mouth. That had annoyed Somerset council, but the committee stood firm because Somerset had taken from cattle from Southampton, and it was 'doubtful what may have come in there'.[84]

The threat of disease spread remained and the Tuberculosis Order was in force from 1925. The government ordered the destruction of hay and straw used for packing imports in an attempt to prevent the spread of germs. Tiverton's thrifty farmers had been using the packaging as bedding for animals, but much of it came from France, Belgium and Holland where foot-and-mouth disease was a problem. Chief Constable Benyan said notices had been handed out to dealers at the market. Traders across the town were ordered to use only British packing materials; foreign packaging had to be destroyed.[85]

The problem of contamination between animals at the market was still very much on the town council's mind the following year. The *Devon and Somerset News* reported that the highways committee was publishing orders by the Ministry of Agriculture.[86] They concerned the disinfection of the market and the keeping of records to track contact between animals.

Another line of defence against disease was also already in operation. It was the Market Sales and Lairs Order of 1925, which involved the paving of markets and saleyards and their regular cleaning. Councillor Lewis said the Order had had serious financial results for many farmers. He told the Highways Committee he knew of one case where a farmer bought a bullock for £31, which just seven weeks later had to be slaughtered. He was only paid £2 15s for the beast. He said it was the small farmer and dairyman who were being hit hardest. Six TB-infected cows had already been slaughtered in Tiverton by the end of the month.[87]

Meanwhile, foot-and-mouth disease was creeping closer to Tiverton. On 12 August 1926, the 'plague' had reached a farm just outside Yeovil in Somerset and the entire herd of seventy-five was slaughtered together with all the other farm stock, including 120 pigs. A 15-mile infected area had been declared. Farmers had to get a licence to move cattle if their fields fell within the zone. Rattled stockowners were asked to have a 'will and determination' to stop the disease spreading by obeying the restrictions which were likely to be in place for several weeks.[88] But in February 1927 – six months later – restrictions were still in place.

[84] Ibid., 7 February 1924.
[85] Ibid., 17 December 1925.
[86] Ibid., 14 January 1926.
[87] Ibid., 11 February 1926.
[88] Ibid., 12 August 1926.

Devon issued its own Foot-and-Mouth Disease Regulations 1926, requiring a licence for the movement of stock into the county. Farmer and dealer, Claude Coram from Hartnolls Farm, Halberton, was summoned for moving 138 sheep from Washford in Somerset to Tiverton by rail on the same day. He then took them by road to his farm. The sheep had not remained in one place for 21 days nor had they been inspected by a vet. He was fined £5. As was William Cosway from Upton, who admitted at the same session moving two steers and eight sheep into Tiverton.[89]

## Market Going From Wealth to Poor Health?

As early as January 1924 there was disquiet in the town from the local traders and shop owners who believed the cattle market was going downhill.[90] They always believed the Tiverton saying, 'If the farmers had a good Tuesday, they had a good Tuesday too,'[91] but over the years they noticed fewer cattle, sheep and pigs were being auctioned on Tuesdays. Instead, farmers were taking their stock to Tiverton Junction, Cullompton, Bickleigh and other small markets. The livestock market had been reduced to fortnightly, but that had not improved the outlook.[92]

The Mercantile Association decided improvements had to be made. A subcommittee of mercantile members; farmers; the auctioneer Mr Stagg, clerk to the Market Trustees; Mr Carpenter; Trustee Sir Ian Amory; and the town mayor had met 'two or three times' to discuss the future development of the market. Mr Carpenter explained the income from tolls showed the market as a whole was doing well but the cattle market was going downhill. He said the farmers' wives who brought produce to sell in the pannier market spent much more in the town than their husbands, so the town traders were not losing out. He told them he was old enough to know 'without fear of contradiction' that traders were more prosperous than they were in the 1870s and 1880s.[93]

Chairman of the association, Mr Home Smith, said the trustees had to raise enough money to keep their charity commitments going and to provide a market for anybody who wanted to buy or sell – that was the charter by Act of Parliament. At this point, he said, very little revenue was derived from cattle. The revenue came, instead, from the hucksters and the pannier market, which had 'grown greatly'. They could not expect the trustees to spend £500–600 to make improvements to the livestock section.

[89] Ibid., 10 February 1927.
[90] Ibid., 31 January 1924.
[91] Ibid., 15 November 1928.
[92] Ibid., 1 July 1920.
[93] Ibid., 8 May 1924.

Mr E. Coombe said Tiverton was deteriorating month by month as a market town. More farmers needed to be induced to sell their cattle and sheep at the market. If that happened, it would improve trade for everyone. The shop owners also wanted to keep the cheap jacks out. They feared the hucksters threatened their trade by selling similar items in the open marketplace without the obvious overheads. Market trustees and the clerk had asked farmers to sign a petition against pig sellers, who they also called hucksters. These sellers, apparently brought pigs to the market for sale but refused to unload them or use the pens, thereby avoiding the tolls. Instead, the pigs were kept in their carts, which then blocked the entrance to the market. The Mercantile Association members also wanted the Market Trustees to use their powers to close markets within a 7-mile radius. This included Tiverton Junction and Bickleigh.

The trustees were, of course, responsible for the smooth running and profitability of the market, but the Mercantile Association members knew all the town traders would suffer if it was allowed to go downhill. They agreed to join forces with Tiverton Town Council to push for improvements.

Meanwhile, they decided to hold an Exhibition Shopping Week, ideally to synchronise with the electric light switch on, and to offer prizes to farmers who increased their stock for auction. Their plan was to make Tiverton the best trading centre possible. And another subcommittee was set up to consider what prizes could be offered.[94] The date was set for a week before Christmas to coincide with the special annual sales held at Tiverton market. The Tiverton Shopping Festival was reported to be a great success with ticketed balloons 'of value' being released on Tuesday and Father Christmas paying a visit to the town. It is later reported that balloons reached Wales, Stanton in Staffordshire, and Portland. The Dead Poultry, Butter, Egg and Christmas Cake show held at the market had an entry of 171 compared with 163 the previous year and 'the show well maintained the excellent reputation of the Tiverton district for these products'.[95]

But disquiet about the cattle market continued. In January 1927, the Tiverton Farmers Union, chaired by Mr W.E. Shapland, asked the press to attend all Tiverton cattle markets and record details and prices of cattle under a new weighing system, which had been introduced so that the public could see they weren't paying inflated prices for the meat. Members also asked the Market Trustees to provide better facilities at the site.

Figures issued by the Market Trust for 1926 now revealed that more than half the £32 tolls at the cattle market were in respect of pigs. The total amount received by the trustees was £690 10s 7d. Since 1923, receipts from poultry and fish had decreased but the vegetable and miscellaneous sections were expanding. A surplus of £148 7s 8d was allocated to charities

[94] Ibid., 31 January 1924.
[95] Ibid., 17 December 1925.

and another £100 repayment made to the capital debt, which was scheduled to be fully paid within two years. The pannier market was going from strength to strength, while the cattle market was shrinking.[96]

In November of 1927, Council George Physick was elected mayor of Tiverton. His banquet speech gives us a lot of insight into the state of the town and, especially, the market. The banquet was held in the town hall. To mark the occasion, lamps were strung both inside and outside the building, making a great display of the newly installed electricity. One of the speakers at the banquet, The Rev W.H. Parsons, vicar of St George's, called for a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. He pleaded with Tiverton shoppers to only buy locally and not be tempted by the bright lights of Exeter.

Mr G.H. Hiles said there was an interdependence between the main employer, Heathcoat factory, and the more important farming community. He said agriculture directly impacted the prosperity of the town and it was in a worse state now than in the 1880s. He added it was vital to the town that the market was thriving, and agricultural workers were not treated like slaves. 'Here, agricultural is our lifeblood and does not come second to the factory'.[97]

In 1928, Mr Physick was re-elected mayor for a second year and in the widely reported mayor's banquet address we can get a feel for the health of the town. Heathcoat factory was again booming after a long period of depression, but Tiverton Market was in the doldrums. The old adage: 'If farmers have a good Tuesday, so do traders' was repeated throughout the banquet. Councillor W.E. Shapland, whose family still farms Prescott just outside Tiverton, said it was essential everyone in the town did their bit to make farming profitable. Shoppers were urged to support the market.[98]

An editorial in the *Devon and Somerset News* titled 'A Lost Market?' rued the state of the cattle market. Once the most thriving in the West, it was now declared to be 'dwindling to vanishing point'.[99] Traders, farmers and auctioneers blamed the narrow roads getting into the site, competition from Exeter, 'small' local auctions that had sprung up nearby, and the trend for bypassing the auction (and tolls) and buying direct from farmers. Trustees had almost given up trying to find a solution, it claimed. The editorial suggested that turning part of the market into a 'parking station' would please motorists and also boost revenue for both the market and the poor of the town. Little did they realise that the whole of the cattle market would be turned into a car park by the 1970s.

The vice-chairman of the Devon branch of the National Farmers Union, Mr D. Wrayford, told members it was 'deplorable' to have a shrinking market in the heart of the county,

[96] *Western Morning News*, 4.February 1927.
[97] *Devon and Somerset News*, 17 November 1927.
[98] Ibid., 15 November 1928.
[99] Ibid., 1 November 1928.

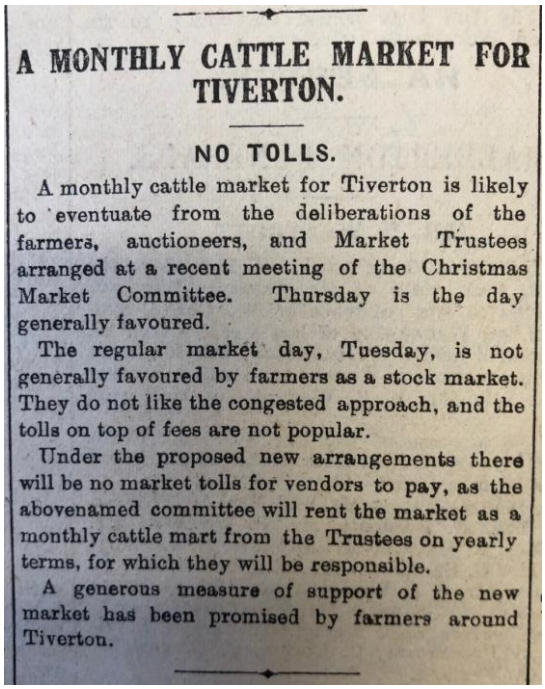
especially when most local markets, like his in Newton Abbot, were thriving. He called for Tiverton farmers to come up with their own remedy to stop the decline.[100]

However disappointing the livestock market had become, Tiverton's shows and fairs were still successful. The Fat Stock Show 'compared favourably with the best shows held so far in the country'.[101] Prices for stock were up, attendance was up, and sellers came from as far afield as Reading, Taunton, Torquay, Paignton and Teignmouth. The champion beast made £44, but the energy and support for the fairs and shows could not be replicated at the monthly auctions.

The future of the market was now the topic of debate at the Tiverton Christmas Market Dinner in December 1928, attended by ninety of the town's councillors, trustees, farmers and traders.

Market Trustee Robert Cook had proof the cattle market was in decline: In 1914, the market tolls were £446 with the cattle section accounting for £36 6d. In 1927, the tolls were £666 but cattle made just £26. Pigs represented £14 8s. He feared smaller markets nearer to homesteads would grow as Tiverton declined. The auctioneer Mr Stagg said farmers wanted a monthly cattle market which, he predicted, would do well, but only if farmers stuck together.[102]

By February 1929 the local paper was reporting this:



**A MONTHLY CATTLE MARKET FOR TIVERTON.**

**NO TOLLS.**

A monthly cattle market for Tiverton is likely to eventuate from the deliberations of the farmers, auctioneers, and Market Trustees arranged at a recent meeting of the Christmas Market Committee. Thursday is the day generally favoured.

The regular market day, Tuesday, is not generally favoured by farmers as a stock market. They do not like the congested approach, and the tolls on top of fees are not popular.

Under the proposed new arrangements there will be no market tolls for vendors to pay, as the abovenamed committee will rent the market as a monthly cattle mart from the Trustees on yearly terms, for which they will be responsible.

A generous measure of support of the new market has been promised by farmers around Tiverton.

[100] Ibid., 29 November 1928.

[101] Ibid., 13 December 1928.

[102] Ibid., 20 December 1928.

Two auction houses were taking responsibility for holding a monthly Thursday livestock market, selling only beasts and sheep. The auctioneers maintained farmers had complained the town centre was too crowded on Tuesdays to drive stock through the streets.

Obstructions to the free flow of traffic was a constant problem on market days. The streets were so crammed with wagons and all kinds of carts that visitors tended to assume they could park up anywhere. Commercial traveller, William Coward of Mere in Wiltshire, parked his car in Newport Street on a Tuesday, and because it was so crammed with carts he assumed it was a back street. He appeared before Tiverton Borough Police Court, where he was fined £1 for obstruction.[103] The auctioneers believed splitting the cattle and pannier market days would mean a less busy town and make it easier for drovers and lorries to navigate the narrow and crowded streets.

The Market Trustees agreed to break tradition and see if a monthly Thursday auction would breathe new life into the ailing livestock market. Licences were issued in 1929. They allowed auctions on any one Thursday in every calendar month, apart from the town fair days on the first Thursdays in June and October. The auctioneers were allowed to sell cattle, sheep, calves and horses at a charge of £8 a year for each auctioneer house. They were both charged £10 a year to run the auctions on Tuesdays, when pigs and other items could be sold. A charge of 12s 6d was made each market day for cleaning. The auctioneers also had full use of the two market entrances and a car park and could charge for those. How much the auctioneers charged for the privilege of parking is not recorded.[104]

Tiverton Mercantile Association was not happy with the move to Thursdays. Farming families were used to supporting shops, cafes and public houses in the town on market days. The change of a day was a disaster for shop owners because Thursday was traditionally ‘early closing’. Traders feared it would hit the economy of the town hard. Mr E. J. Musgrove, secretary of the association, observed:

> The weekly half-holiday on Thursdays has been observed for many years and it appears in all the guidebooks etc. It is very probable that if an alteration is made the town will be seriously affected for many years to come. It is questionable whether the market could be kept going after one o’clock on a Thursday.[105]

But if the town traders were not happy, the same newspaper reported that the auctioneers thought ‘Tiverton’s New Market Venture’ was ‘most encouraging’ with 32 fat beasts, 99

[103] Ibid., 24 December 1925.
[104] Devon Heritage Centre, Tiverton and Exe-bridge Trust 7235.
[105] *Devon and Somerset News*, 2 May 1929.

store beasts, 10 cows and calves, and 200 sheep sold in the first auction. Regret was expressed that only two fat beasts were bought by local butchers.[106]

The second monthly Thursday market was declared 'very successful', with almost all livestock sold by auctioneers Cockram, Dobbs and Stagg, and Knowlman and Sons, including 450 sheep and 75 various cattle ranging from £32 to £21 2s 6d.[107] The Thursday market was even more successful when it was combined with one of the annual Great Markets.[108] By October 1929, the Tiverton Christmas Market Committee was having a 'spirited' discussion on whether the Christmas Fat Stock Market should be held on the traditional Tuesday or be moved to the Thursday. Tuesday won out.[109]

The Mercantile Association decided action was needed to make the most of the influx of farmers on a Thursday each month. After years of shutting at lunchtime on the fourth day of the week, many café and shop owners believed early closing should be moved from Thursdays to Wednesdays. A decision was adjourn for three months – just in case the new cattle market reverted to the traditional Tuesday.[110] By the end of the decade, the two divisions of Tiverton Market were performing very differently: the dwindling livestock market had become monthly, on a Thursday, in the hope of breathing new life into it, while the pannier market appeared to be thriving and still operating, as tradition dictated, twice weekly.

As the decade ended, the *Tiverton Gazette* asked Britain to not underestimate the importance of agricultural self-sufficiency ever again:

> One is sometimes included to think that the great urban populations of the country underrate the importance of agriculture. They seem to imagine that its only purpose is to produce cheap food and are more or less indifferent to the return which the industry gets….We cannot even feed ourselves. Vast quantities of food has to be imported. Did the war teach us nothing? If this or any other Government can do anything to make us more self-supporting, agriculture more widespread and prosperous, and the average townsman more conscious of his debt to the land worker, it will deserve the thanks of the whole community.[111]

[106] Ibid., 2 May 1929.
[107] Ibid., 9 May 1929.
[108] Ibid., 15 August 1929.
[109] Ibid., 31 October 1929.
[110] Ibid., 28 November 1929.
[111] *Tiverton Gazette*, 23 July 1929.

*Tiverton market site today, as seen from a hot air balloon! The pannier building is top centre, with stalls either side. Shops and a car park now replace the livestock stalls, pens and bullring. Photo WBA*

## Summary

As the 1920s dawned, Tiverton Market reflected the buoyant state of mid-Devon agriculture. Farmers and agricultural workers were on a bit of a high. The Great War had ended in victory, and they had played a vital part in that victory by helping to keep Britain fed. Grassland and ancient meadows had been ploughed up to sow more wheat, oats and potatoes. The land was worked hard, despite a lack of horses and a third fewer labourers. Profits were made and workers' wages, notoriously poor, were rising.

But within weeks of the new decade, fortunes began to unravel. The Lloyd George government reneged on its promise to give four years' notice on cereal price protection, and the importation of cheap food put pressure on the price of key foodstuffs. Returning soldiers, who bought up agricultural land in the hope of making a good living, often found themselves deep in debt. A quarter of farmland changed hands.

Tiverton had always had a 'divided' market: the twice weekly pannier section, which was the commercial heart of the town, and the livestock section where animals and goods were auctioned once a fortnight, and, by the end of the decade, just once a month. Over the ten years we see how the pannier market continued to thrive, despite big swings in prices. And we read how the town businesses supported the market because they knew sales would be up on Tuesdays and Saturdays when families from across the district rode into town. The town's Chamber of Trade even held special 'shopping weeks' in conjunction with the pannier market to tempt buyers away from the bright lights of Exeter.

But as the pannier held up, the livestock market fell into the doldrums. Auctioneers' fortnightly front-page newspaper adverts showing the following weeks' sale-lists revealed a steady decline in the amount of stock handled. In contrast, adverts for similar markets across Devon showed increased trade.

The Market Trustees had little scope to make radical improvements to the market site. It was in the cramped centre of town, amid narrow and winding streets. The motor car was increasingly sharing the roads with the livestock. Drovers were finding it easier to take the cattle elsewhere. The town council seemed to be committed to the cattle market, and as early as 1924 solutions were being sought.

We end the decade with the auction houses taking the proverbial bull by the horns and changing the livestock market day from a Tuesday each fortnight to a monthly Thursday. We will have to explore the 1930s to discover if this was a winning formula for Tiverton Market.

# APPENDIX 1: Timeline

**1920** Beginning of the end of food controls.
Building starts on War Memorial Hall and Library.
Tiverton peaceful and law-abiding, with smallest municipal police force in the country.
Revolt in market over high price of butter.
Call for a public abattoir.
Outbreak of Foot-and-mouth in South Devon.

**1921** Repeal of the Agricultural Act and 'The Great Betrayal'.
Tiverton's guardians of the poor say one-fifth of town's workforce is jobless.
New imports of butter and meat from overseas affect market prices.

**1922** Local farmers want labourers wages cut from 38s a week to 34s, and hours to rise.
Heathcoat Factory closes for three weeks over decline in orders.
First general election where women over 30 can vote. Tories win Tiverton (Weston Sparkes).
Nearly a quarter of agricultural land has changed hands.

**1923** By-election on death of MP Sparkes. Francis Acland wins for the Liberals.

**1924** Fear cattle market is dwindling.
Big council housebuilding programme underway.
Electricity comes to Tiverton!
The town gets its first motorised fire engine.

**1925** More than 100 homes now have electricity.
Sales of wirelesses soaring.
Acland loses to his Tory cousin Col Troyte in general election.

**1926** General Strike. The market 'carries on'. Coal rationed in the town. Three brick layers and a carpenter on the borough council strike. Wholesaler S. Durbin hires lorry to take produce from market to London.

**1927** Town has forty licensed drinking places – 1:242 people. Chief Constable says it's too many.

**1928** Suggestion that part of cattle market becomes a 'parking station'. Ratio of car to people 1:56 in GB (In USA it's 1:6)

**1929** Cattle Market moves to Thursdays.
Public slaughterhouse still not built.
Major flooding in the town when The Loman bursts its banks.

# Appendix 2: Glossary of Stock Terms

| | |
|---|---|
| Bullock | Castrated bull |
| Calf | Under six months old |
| Heifer | Over six months and having never calved. |
| Cow | After first calving |
| Barrener | Can't bear young |
| Feeder | Calf needing more growth before slaughter |
| Steer | Castrated male |
| | |
| Store beast | 15–18 months, not yet ready for slaughter |
| Fat | Ready for slaughter |
| | |
| Ewe | Over 1 year |
| Lamb | Under 1 year |
| 2-Tooth | 1-year-old sheep |
| 4-Tooth | 21–22 months old |
| 6-Teeth | 27–32 months old |
| Wether | Castrated lamb |
| Tup | Ram |
| Grit Ewe | Needing more growth/fattening before slaughter |
| | |
| Sow & farrow | Pig and piglets |
| Weaner | Just weaned |
| Slip pig | Just past weaner stage,10–14 weeks |
| Fat pig | Ready for slaughter |
| Hog | Castrated male |
| | |
| Stot | Farm horse used for pulling carts etc. |
| Cob | Short-legged, stocky horse, often used for driving |
| Colt | Male horse younger than four and not castrated |
| Cart | Large horse breed for pulling heavy loads |
| Gelding | Castrated male horse |
| Pony | Horse less than 14.2 hands |