

Countryside Myths

There are many myths in the countryside started in good faith or invented for amusement by Country-men for a leg-pull to their Townsman friends in the days beyond recall. The most common one, or at least when I was a youth, was on how a Fox gets rid of his Fleas. It was said that a flea-ridden fox would visit a flock of sheep and collect some wool from scraps of it laying around in the field with his mouth and go to the nearest stream or pond, then backing slowly into the water tail first, the fleas would run in front of the water, along his back and finally over his head onto his nose climbing into the wool, he would then duck under the water and let go of the wool at the same time, leaving the fleas to float away on the wool, then a flea-less fox would walk out of the water, shake itself dry and be on its way to the farmer's chicken run for dinner if it wasn't shut-up, safe and sound.

Anyone who has a dog knows that fleas do not run when it goes in water - the fleas just sit still. The experts on fleas say when water reaches them it does not touch them, nature providing them with a pocket of air, could be called a bubble which forms around them due to their water proof skin, until it is dry again. The only thing I know of this is that to try to drown one in a bowl of water they just float merrily on the top. When a fox with fleas comes out of water he brings as many out as he took in, all in good health.

Then we have the Hedgehog. Farmers used to kill them because they used to suck their milk cows dry at night (so they said or thought). It was said that when a cow laid down the hedgehog used to creep up and help itself at the Milk Bar while the cow slept - as if some hedgehog could drink that much! Today, a good cow can give up to six gallons of milk a day, milked at twice, which contains almost no cream; something like 70 years ago and beyond, with different breeds, a good cow that only gave three gallons though the cream content was excellent - on a pint bottle of milk you could see as much as an inch or an inch and a half of the real thing at top of the bottle and a family fight followed to see who could get it for their corn-flakes (today to put cream on them is sure death, according to the experts). So, a good cow at night would have a gallon and a half for the morning milking and along comes Prickles for his nightcap of milk - well, I would say by the size of him if he could hold a cupful (1/4 pint) he would be full considering he would still get a feed of the usual worms and slugs to fill up with (there must have been some "Obese" hedgehogs around with all that cream). The hedgehog suffered death for the sake of a myth or misinformed farmers.

Not to be left out is the Badger. I was told that they have three-inch (7cm for the younger generation) shorter legs at one side of their body than the other, which was explained to say they could run up a plough furrow (one leg in the furrow and one on the ridge) to keep level. What happens when they get to the end of it and a field which has been harrowed level, or a pasture field? No doubt you could observe a Badger with a 45 degree list to starboard, or Port whichever side of the legs were the shortest. This was in the days of horse ploughs with a small shallow furrow, today with the modern tractor ploughs the Badger would have to grow extended legs at one side to match the deeper furrows, maybe giving them a list of 90 degrees on level ground. However, this myth lasted into the middle of the last century. Next time you see a road casualty have a good look at the length of its legs and you will see they are the same length at both sides.

Others:

- * The easy way to catch a bird is to put some salt on its tail (if you are near enough to put some salt on you could grab it by the hand).
- * When crows nest high in the tops of trees (with reference to Rooks or Rookery for a nesting site) it is a sign of a good spring. If they nest lower, it is a sign of bad weather springtime. Maybe, maybe not!
- * A good Goose will lay an egg by Valentines Day: usually correct - there are many more such sayings throughout the Rural Countryside though these selected are relevant to Goxhill a century ago.
- * A Swarm of Bees in May is worth loads of Hay. Why? I don't know!

Ron Parker.

BARTON
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WEEK 2009
27 June – 4 July

Tickets are available from: Barton Local Link, High Street; Lindsey Relay, George Street; The Ropewalk, Maltkiln Road and from the numbers listed with event details.

Tel: 079 3456 1556 Email: bartonarts@hotmail.com

Website: www.e-voice.org.uk/bartonartsweek

Includes:

Sat 27th June - Midsummer Dinner Dance. Sun 28th June - Victorian Day in Barton.
Mon 29th June - The Path to Paradise. Tues 30th June - Illyria Open Air Theatre.
Wed 1st July - Concert Royal. Thurs 2nd July - BADAOS Best of British Night.
Friday 3rd July - Jon Richardson. Sat 4th July - 4You(th); Barton Town Brass Band.