

## The Tale of the Pig Bladder

*The following extract is from the memoirs of Ron Hickman, a Witney butcher. It is one of many curious incidents that occurred as he delivered meat to Oxfordshire villages in the late thirties.*

In Ramsden I used to go along a narrow little alleyway between the houses, along the footpath and up to a dilapidated little shack of a cottage. Basically it was just one bare room, very small, not much bigger than nine by twelve feet, with a little outhouse built on the back, which served as a kitchen, and an open staircase that went up into the bedroom at the top. In this dirty little cottage lived an old man. In his working days, he had been the local pig slaughterer, going around slaughtering the cottagers' pigs. As you went into this little old cottage, you literally had to hold your breath because the smell was horrendous.

### Cat's Paws and Crockery

I usually got there round about his lunchtime, and he would be sitting at the filthy, dirty little kitchen table, eating his dinner. Filthy old cups and crockery, which had never been washed up, sat on the table, also two cats as close as they dared to get to his dinner plate.

Every now and again a paw would go out trying to snatch meat off his plate. This particular day, as usual, the cat's paw went out and snatched a lump of meat from the old man's plate, which he was



about to eat himself. Immediately, he flared up in temper, lashed out and hit the cats all the way across the room with his knife. Luckily they weren't hurt

### All About Pigs

This little tumbledown cottage had a very low ceiling, the whole of which was covered in inflated, dried pigs' bladders from the pigs he'd slaughtered. They touched your head as you walked into the cottage. You can well imagine what they smelled like.

Although he was an evil-tempered man, I always got on all right with the old chap because we had something in common, we knew all about pigs. I was chatting to him one day and I got around to the black pigs' bladders all over the ceilings, so I asked the old fellow; "What have you got these pigs' bladders all over your ceiling for?"

"Ah my boy," he said, "they be my fire alarm. If I happen to fall asleep," he said, "in my chair, or I was up in my room and fell asleep and the cottage caught fire," he said, "they'd all keep going bang, bang and wake me up."

I thought, blimey, we do hear some tales.  
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