

Dave Thomas and Paula Martin gave a presentation about their work as volunteers at Home Farm, Tatton Park, something they have been doing for the past seven years.

Dave said that they were part of the Field to Fork project, bringing to life the farm in earlier times for visitors. Dave and Paula are two of the characters in the story and came to the meeting in their period clothing of the 1940's.

Dave plays the part of Albert Belsham who was born near Tatton in 1880 and was one of 13 children, out of 21, who survived. He was employed as a teamsman, working with the horses. There are now just four heavy horses on the farm, one a 22-year-old Clydesdale called Blossom and three Shires. Blossom's foal Tabitha is now 14 years old and in 2017 she gave birth to Sensation, her second foal. Tabitha's brother, Friar, is an 11-year-old. He is a ridden and driven horse and is regularly seen at the Cheshire Show.

Dave explained that in 1900 there were about 3 million breeding females of Shire horses compared to 120,000 now. The farm has a commitment to the conservation, breeding and promotion of rare or endangered breeds of farm animals. In 2007 it was awarded the Rare Breeds Accreditation award which recognises this commitment.

He explained that the horses are looked after very well and he is responsible for cleaning their feet, grooming and feeding as well as explaining to visitors the impact which horses had on farming in earlier times.

Paula Martin said that the character she portrays is Mary Sant, born 1877, who came to work on the farm in 1909 as office caretaker and lived in the farm cottage. The land agent, her boss, at that time was Mr Wigglesworth. In Lord Egerton's absence, Mr Wigglesworth ran the place, said Paula.

Mary apparently did everything – cleaning, washing, baking, making butter and cheese and, most importantly, lighting a fire in the range every day. It was every day, explained Paula, because the fire heated water for clothes washing and the weekly bath, heated the oven and the clothes irons. Mary was the only woman on the site and with only one privy for all the workers it was decided to install one flush toilet – perhaps because of the arrival of land army girls.

Mary's nephew, Herbert, came to work on the farm. The farm had its own forge and he wanted to be a blacksmith, a well-paid job. After war service he returned. He had married and had a daughter, Dorothy. Sadly, his wife died when Dorothy was very young so she came to live on the farm, looked after by Mary. Lord Egerton, who hadn't married and didn't have children, was very fond of Dorothy and when she married in the 1930's he gave her the use of a weaver's cottage, rent-free, for as long as she wanted it. Paula said she was in contact with Dorothy's daughter who lives in Canada.

Dave explained that Maurice Egerton owned 10,000 acres in England but 30,000 in British Columbia and 35,000 in Kenya. He was a keen photographer, film maker and traveller, collecting specimens for English museums. He was also an early motorist and had a keen

interest in technology, importing one of the first combine harvesters into the country. He was absent from Tatton for long periods of time and Reginald Wigglesworth was an important employee, running the whole estate, not just the farm. Lord Egerton died on his estate in Kenya in 1958 and bequeathed Tatton to the National Trust.

There are a number of different animals on the farm, most of them rare breeds. As well as horses there are pigs (including Large White and Saddleback), cows, sheep and goats. The goats are Golden Guernseys. This rare breed only survived due to the efforts of Miriam Milbourne who risked her life by hiding a small herd from the occupying German army who ordered all animals to be slaughtered for meat.

Dave ended by saying that the Field to Fork project had been a success from the beginning and had been given, in its first year, the Tourism of the Year award. He said that to keep the project going volunteers are always needed. He recommended a visit to the farm, including harvest festival and other special occasions. He said that group visits can be organised.

For information about Tatton and the farm see www.tattonpark.org.uk