

All in a day's work: bloody business

In the second part of the Echo's Dorset Food Week series on how our food makes its way from the farm to the kitchen, **MELISSA THOMSON** visits an abattoir to have a look at the less than glamorous process of meat production

DORSET ECHO

Household money saver

FREE energy price check

Find the best energy deal and switch today

We all like the idea of saving money, but sometimes the effort involved can make it feel like more trouble than it's worth.

Wouldn't it be great if you could make one free call to an impartial expert and have a hassle-free way of saving money on your energy bills?

We can help...

We've teamed up with SimplySwitch, a leading price comparison service to find our readers a better energy deal. A **FREE** energy price check will compare prices from all the major suppliers and explain the available tariffs. If you've switched before, you can still make significant savings by changing supplier. If you're living in one of the 50%* of households that have never switched, the savings could be even greater.

Nothing to lose...

The service is impartial and free to use, and if you want to change after hearing all the options, SimplySwitch will complete your application, leaving you free to enjoy the savings.



simplyswitch

Five great reasons to get in touch with SimplySwitch

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Speak to a trained expert |
| 2 | Free and impartial service |
| 3 | All major suppliers compared |
| 4 | Compare tariffs on thousands of products |
| 5 | Switch on the phone or online |

Call now on **0800 011 1260**
Monday to Friday 8am – 8pm, Weekends 9am – 5pm

*Ofgem

Energy calculator approved by **energywatch**



MEATING PLACE: Anthony and John Norman outside their Bridport abattoir

AN ABATTOIR is a very noisy place.

The smooth tones of singer Lemar on the radio are just audible over the whirring of extractor fans, the constant noise only broken up by the occasional snaps of an electric insect killer.

Soon, other sounds become familiar: there is the gush every five minutes or so as a cow – stunned only seconds before – has its jugular cut and the blood slaps on to the ground. And the sound of meat hooks sliding along runners as everyone does their bit to transform the just-killed animal into a carcass ready for sale.

But the most penetrating noise of all is the silent seconds before the bang of the bolt gun.

The abattoir is where the things we meat-eaters don't want to have to do ourselves get done. It removes all the unsavoury aspects of meat production so our minds can be left with sanitised, pleasant images either side of it: the animals grazing in a field and the mouthwatering cuts tempting us at the butcher's counter.

The family behind S J Normans in Bridport has been dealing with meat since 1902 when Tom Norman opened up a shop in Bridport. Over the course of the last century their methods have changed, equipment has been modernised and legislation has complicated the procedure.

But at its heart the operation is still the same – providing meat to eat – run by Tom's great-grandsons and great-great-grandson.

Dealing with death has not dampened the spirits of the people working there. On the contrary, the atmosphere is upbeat.

Men chat as they work; the foreman whistles as he prepares carcasses for the delivery van and slaughterman Tony Richards has a ready smile on his face as he chats while loosening the skin of a recently-killed animal.

It is a smoothly-run operation with everybody in place and knowing what their role is.

"It's got to be well-run," said Tony,

54, from Bridport. "When you're dealing with something's life you have to know what you're doing."

Tony has worked as a slaughterman for 40 years, having 'come down after school to help out the old man' as a boy. His career length seems to be the norm and most seem to have been in the industry for a long time.

"We process meat from all over the West Country," said John Norman, 64, Tom's great-grandson.

"We sell it on to pubs and hotels and from the shop in Bradpole. I'd say it is all sold within 100 miles of here. We do pigs, cattle and lamb and goats if anyone wants them doing. About 90 per cent of

The cows seem inquisitive when they are in the pen sniffing around

the meat we process is free range.

"It's changed a lot over the years. Where there used to be one meat inspector there are now three, plus a technician and vet, all doing what one person used to do. There's a lot more paperwork, more than 10 times what there used to be, and a lot of it seems unnecessary, really.

"It's very repetitive, you get one person checking something and then another person checks it's alright. It seems silly."

From the outside the abattoir just looks like an ordinary processing plant.

The animals are brought into a large, open room that looks and smells like a farm barn. Barriers form corridors that eventually lead to the enclosed pen where they will be stunned.

"This is the lairage," explained

slaughterhouse foreman Stephen Chilcott.

"Most of the animals will be in here for an hour at the most. They can go out the back where there's a covered soft-bedded barn and drinking water."

When it is time, the animals are coaxed through to a small pen. A sliding door is lifted up and one by one the animals are passed through into a concrete pen a bit bigger than they are.

There is a square hole in the concrete at the head-end and to their left is a wide hatch that swings open like a garage door.

Martin Hawkins is the man in charge of stunning the cows. When a cow comes into the pen and the door closed behind it, he checks the ear tag and crosses that particular animal off his list.

He said: "We take the ear tag numbers so we know where it has come from – for traceability."

The cows seem inquisitive, sniffing around the pen as though trying to familiarise themselves with their new surroundings.

It has been said that the animals are aware that they are in a slaughterhouse, but judging by the ones passing through they are not, or they were at peace with their immediate destiny.

They went into the pen with little encouragement and showed no outward signs of distress. They cannot see anything that hints at their fate, aside from a few drops of blood on the floor. All in all, it is sensitively done.

Martin, 50, from Honiton, encourages the cow to look up at him so that he can get a clear shot between the eyes.

His treatment of the animals is paradoxical: he is their executioner and yet treats the animals tenderly.

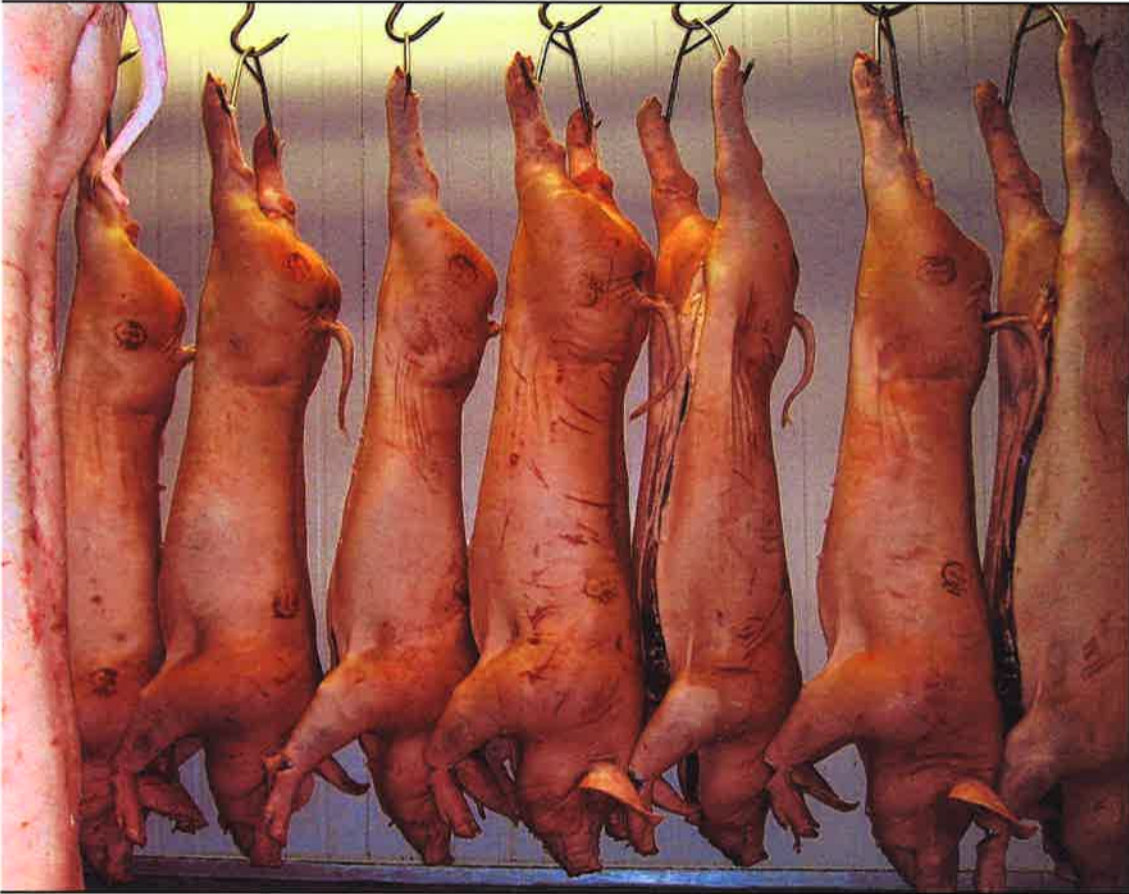
When a cow won't look up at him, he remains patient until they eventually respond.

He said: "We use a captive bolt that penetrates the brain and renders the animal out of it. It can't feel anything afterwards."

The bolt gun is made up of two separate parts. A tiny brass cartridge, about one-and-a-half-cen-



but it's a



Above: a chiller filled with pigs from the previous day's hanging

HG1781/MT

timetres in length, is filled with powder.

"The cartridge is a blank," said Martin. "Gas comes out and it sends the bolt through."

There is a muffled bang and immediately the cow drops to the ground – still for a beat until the twitching starts. The door to the side of the pen opens and the cow rolls out, quivering but otherwise gone.

Martin attaches a chain to the cow's hind hock and the animal is levered into the air and pushed towards a bay with a drain.

In one swift movement the jugular is cut. The ground instantly turns bright red. The blood runs down a drain, and is collected in a tank. The tank is emptied several times a week.

The blood from the animal runs steadily for a good three minutes. Carcasses collect at the end of the drainage bay. Once the blood stops running the head is cut off and goes to a vet to check in a separate room. He checks the teeth to help determine that the animal is less than 30 months old, as is the requirement.

Slaughterman Tony said: "The cattle get identified by the vet – they each have a passport, the same as humans. We know exactly where it was born, where it's come from and where it's going."

"It has tags with its details, so it can be identified at the shop."

The hooves are removed and, in three stages, the skin is stripped by slicing along the connective tissue. The hide is sent to a tannery to be made into leather for clothing, and the underside of the carcass is split with an electric saw and the intestines removed.

After five minutes, the team has transformed the cow from a living and breathing animal into food.

When the staff went on a break there was an eerie feel to the place. There was no movement anywhere until, on closer inspection, a naked muscle in a carcass could be seen gently twitching with a movement akin to a heart-beat – a good 10 minutes after it had been killed.

The floor was covered in all

sorts of different blood – watery, runny blood, gloopy coagulated dark red blood and everywhere else, bright red fresh blood.

The scarlet tones make an interesting contrast against the industrial steel and the cold white floor. As Tony said, "If it wasn't for the blood, you wouldn't know what went on here".

The intestines go through a hatch into the gut house, manned by Malcolm Hughes.

Of all the smells – they were surprisingly OK and verged on the tolerable side of unpleasantness for the most part – and the sights of the abattoir up to this point, nothing compares to the

A naked muscle in a carcass could be seen gently twitching

smell of a cow's stomach as it is cut open.

"This is what the cow ate yesterday," said Malcolm, 48, from Bridport, as he sliced open the creamy-coloured sack. A greeny-brown mush, recognisable as partly digested grass, spilled out, quickly followed by a stomach-churning sulphury stench.

Malcolm got busy separating the small intestines of a lamb from the rest of the guts, collected from an earlier kill. He put them through a 'running machine' to squeeze out the digested food and then he hand-balled them and left them in a bucket. He said: "They get sent off and treated to turn them from pink to white and then they're used for chipolata casings."

"Pig's intestines are used for sausages. A few years ago we used to do cattle's as well, for big sausages. Not any more, because of BSE."

The gut house is also where the tripe gets washed and hung up. Lamb stomachs – called paunch – are kept as well, used for dog food.

The intestines to be thrown away go out to the back yard, the disposal area. The area is filled with all sorts of gory nasties: blue-grey watery entrails, trolleys filled with sheep heads and others full with various limbs and snippets. Before it leaves, everything has a blue dye poured over it. Malcolm said: "We stain it with a permanent ink to stop people pinching it and mincing it up for human consumption."

Back in the abattoir, carcasses are hung in chillers for a couple of days. They are either sent out whole or cut up and prepared, depending on the order.

Butcher Tim Parfitt, armed with a metal glove, expertly cut up the carcasses in the boning room. They are brought in as quarters and he cuts them up into primals: brisket, silverside, top-side, rumps and sirloin.

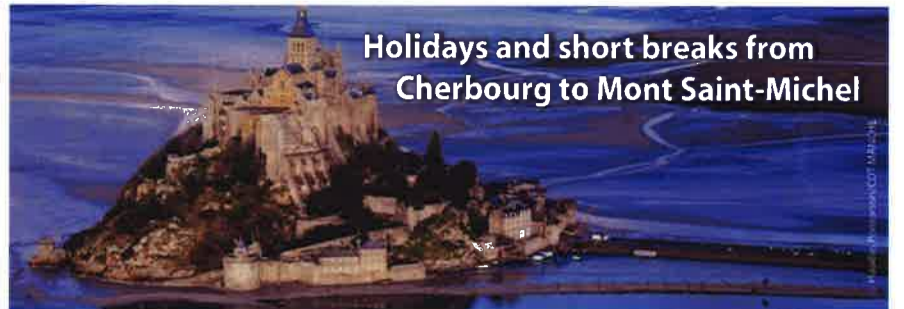
Tim has been doing this for 25 years and the skill involved is amazing. It's not simply a case of cutting the animal up into the major sections, but he also removes little snippets here and there, each swipe perfectly aimed.

The cuts are boxed up and put in the chiller, awaiting delivery.

Very little of the animal is wasted, and seeing an animal go from a breathing creature to a piece of meat ready for the pan had a surprising effect. If shocking at first, it soon became straightforward and ordinary.

Passing some grazing cows on my way home was interesting. They no longer seemed quite as detached from what I might eat that evening. I eat meat, and in order to do so something must die. I could picture where the animals would end up and what would happen to them and it was something I was, surprisingly, very comfortable with.

■ For more information on Dorset Food Week and to see what events are taking place visit www.dorsetfoodweek.co.uk or call 01305 221003



Holidays and short breaks from
Cherbourg to Mont Saint-Michel

Freephone from the UK: 0800 02 86 572
www.manche-tourism.com

LA MANCHE
NORMANDY PENINSULA

DORSET
ECHO reader offer



2 for 1 Xmas shopping in France

The Offer

It's that time of year again when we all start thinking about all those important purchases for the festive season. A trip to France can still offer some amazing savings as well as the bonus of a great day out with family and friends. Dorset Echo readers can spend up to 24 hours in France and for every two persons that travel you will only pay £20 return. Why not take your car for just £25 more and really load-up for Xmas. This offer is valid for travel up until and including 23rd December and to allow the maximum time possible you can use any combination of Brittany Ferries Channel routes. What's more on overnight crossings there's free reclining seats (subject to availability) and cabins at half price!

Booking Dates now until 30th November 2006

Travel Dates now until 23rd December 2006

Prices £10.00 per person* Standard car (not exceeding 5m long and/or 1.83m high) £25.00 return

Supplements Motorcycle £15.00 return, Bicycles £5.00 return, Cars exceeding 5m long and/or 1.83m high £20.00 return

Reclining Seats Free reclining seats subject to availability at time of booking.

Cabins (excluding Commodore, Deluxe and Club) Half Price!

Exclusions Vehicles over 6m long and/or 2.60m high, trailers and caravans.

To Book Collect three advertisements appearing every Monday, Tuesday and Saturday until 11th November 2006. Then call **08705 360360** and Quote reference: **EO6DE8**

To Book Online www.brittanyferries.co.uk/e06de8

Conditions

*The per passenger fares quoted are based on a minimum of 2 persons travelling. All bookings must be made by no later than 30 November. Brittany Ferries condition of booking and carriage apply together with additional conditions specific to these offers including full payment with booking by debit or credit card only. A credit card charge will apply. No charge for debit cards. No refund when cancelled by client and no amendments permitted. Bookings cannot be made within 24 hours of travel. Fares are valid for up to 24 hours in France and for travel as per the ticket. If either portion is not used or the 24 hours is exceeded the applicable single or return fare shall apply and the difference collected from the credit/debit card used for the original payment. Vehicles exceeding 6m long and/or 2.6m high, trailers and caravans are excluded from this offer. Availability is from a limited and variable allocation.

A passport is required for travel and Visas where applicable for non-EU citizens



The advertisements collected (originals only), are to be presented for fare validation at the passenger terminal or vehicle check-in immediately prior to embarkation

FREE BOTTLE OFFER... BUY 6 FOR THE PRICE OF 5

On production of this advertisement at Normandie Wine Warehouse. Offer ends 31.12.06. No further discount applies to this offer.

Taste the real France

Olivier Latour

Vin de Pays d'Oc

only
£1.85
(€2.75)

**NORMANDIE WINE
WAREHOUSE
CHERBOURG & CAEN**

www.normandiewine.com

