

OPERATION NOAH'S ARK



TONGE STATION IN 1955

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - AUGUST 2024

INTRODUCTION

Mr. John. Dibb-Smith, junior well known in agricultural circles in Leicestershire, had farmed on Breedon Lane, Osgathorpe, Leics which leads to Breedon Brand, for five years. He was the only son of businessman Mr. John Dibb-Smith, of 'The Grange' Melbourne, Derbys who was the proprietor at the time of his death in September 1939 of Messr's H. W. Earp & sons, wool staplers and seedsmen, and had lived in Melbourne for 45 years. Mr and Mrs. Dibb-Smith, junior, continued to live at 'The Grange' following the death of his father and were living there in 1948. Between then and 1955, they had moved to establish a farm on Breedon Lane, Osgathorpe, Leics

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A furniture van is all that normal families usually need when they decide to move home, however, that was not the case with Mr. Dibb-Smith, when in April 1960, he decided to uproot and move to Cornwall. So, he chartered a special train to move his family, animals and effects including a farm cat to St. Erth, a civil parish and village between St. Ives and Hayle. Sadly, two cats which could not be caught remained.

The animals were loaded at Tonge station on the Derby to Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Midland Railway nr, Breedon-on-the-Hill as shown in the front cover photograph. The small station had closed the previous September in 1959. However, it was opened with the goodwill of British Railways especially for the event. Four containers of furniture and effects were taken to a goods depot in Derby where large cranes lifted them on to railway trucks.

The train then made its way to Tonge station where the rest of the operation was carried out. 35 cattle, seven calves, and farm implements (including tractors) plus fodder for the animals etc., were there loaded onto 11 special transporters. Four crates of chickens were loaded into the luggage van, but over a thousand had to be sold prior to the family leaving.



CRATES OF CHICKENS BEING LOADED

In addition to the train of goods waggons and cattle trucks etc., was one passenger coach. In it were Mr. Dibb-Smith, Mrs. Smith and her two daughters Sally (4) and Betsy (6 weeks), Mrs. Smith's parents, Mr and Mrs. John Barr and a number of friends travelled also. The baby, Betsy Dibb-Smith, apparently slept soundly in her pram throughout operation 'Noah's Ark'.



BETSY SLEEPING SOUNDLY IN HER PRAM

The 300 mile overnight journey ended at St. Erth at 8 a.m. in time for Mr. Smith to unload his milking machines off the train in order to be able to milk his cows as soon as he could at 'Tring Farm'. The cattle and implements were unloaded at St.Erth whilst the furniture and effects containers were dealt with at Hayle.

At 'Trink Farm', a similar operation was taking place as the farmer from whom Mr Dibb-Smith was taking over from was moving from St.Erth to Hambledon, Bucks by rail also.

Apparently all that was left at the farm on Breedon Lane, Osgathorpe, were the two uncaught cats and the kitchen sink.

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**MR. SMITH WITH ONE OF THE THREE FARM CATS
THAT WAS SUCCESSFULLY CAUGHT**

ADDENDUM

It is possible that at some point John Dibb-Smith moved to Lelant, as there is a record that a John Dibb-Smith was the assistant curate there from 1982 to 1984