

Parsonage Farm and the Gypsy Curse

My great-grandfather Isaac Rousell (1833-1915) farmed at Parsonage Farm in Pendomer around 1860. How he came to be there is unclear: his father William was a prosperous wheelwright from Beaminster and the only other relation known to have had a connection with farming had been transported for sheep-stealing. Isaac and his wife Sarah had four children: James, born in Merriott in 1859, and Edwin, Joseph (my grandfather) and Thomas born in the farmhouse in 1861, 1863 and 1864 respectively.



Isaac & Joseph Rousell

Isaac didn't farm there for long. As the story goes, Britannia Smith, the local gypsy queen, camped on his land. On his ordering her off she crouched in the fields one by one laying a curse. She told him that the fourth generation of his family would also be cursed. Not long afterwards it is believed that all Isaac's cattle died of anthrax and he was forced to give up the farm and move back to Beaminster where he became the farm bailiff to Squire Cox.

As for the fourth generation (of which I am one), some of us have indeed suffered unusually. I have a very rare type of corneal dystrophy that causes blindness, my late cousin Kathleen had glomus, a rare tumour of the feet, and another cousin Michael had Arnold's syndrome, a very rare progressive paralysis.



Parsonage Farm in about 1950

A few years after the move back to Beaminster Isaac saw an advertisement for an apprentice to work in the slaughterhouse and despite his protestations Joseph (who was then only 12 years old and wanted to stay on at school) was sent off to learn the trade. He eventually became a master butcher with a house and shop in Wellington Street Yeovil. The business was established in 1888 and continued for over 100 years.

Brian Rousell*

*Here in the West Country my name is always pronounced "Rousle" (rhymes with tousle). Elsewhere I have found that people refuse to accept this and insist on calling me "Roo-sell".