

Clare Bense

Started volunteering in March 1996

Sitting quietly in the 3 foot high grass of the meadow, now the labyrinth, 26 years ago doing the first flora survey when there was nobody else on site and seeing a grass snake slithering by and then a deer appearing through the grass 2 feet away.

Being the only person on site all day and it feeling busy if there had been more than 10 visitors all day.

Visitor complaining about dog mess everywhere. On investigation it was (Canada) goose droppings.

Taking visitors round. A group from Birkbeck College summer school of landscape archaeologists, at the base of pyramid going backwards uphill one pace to be slightly above group so they could all see laminate/map and ignominiously slipping onto backside and having to do rest of tour with a very muddy bottom.

On numerous occasions herding OAPs round the garden when all they want to do is talk and have tea and cakes but have to be back on their bus by a certain time and they do want a walk round the garden.

Just doing the initial research which took me to so many places and behind the scenes places I would never otherwise have been. The British Library manuscripts room all white gloves and pencils only. (not allowed to take anything else in at all). Hatfield House archives, Holdenby House, Deene Park library, Northamptonshire Records Office, Peterborough Local History archive, Swindon (JARIC) air photo collection, Cambridge air photo collection, Cambridge University Library. I got access all areas and it was fascinating.

Doing the BBC 2 Hidden Gardens with Chris Beardshaw. I remember him and Mark Bradshaw having a good laugh with cans of spray paint marking out the quincunx. The making of a TV programme was a revelation.

Having to abandon production of Henry V in full battle scene with big iron swords drawn as it was next to the Bield on the hilltop and there was thunder and lightning. Member of public next to me saying "I wonder how it ended and who won".

Angela (Bradshaw) bringing the volunteers cups of coffee in the days before the machine, tea room or café.

The amazing sound and light show production that was put on for bonfire night in 2009. It used sound bites from many of the volunteers. We were all asked for a few words as to what we thought was special about Lyveden. It was rather embarrassing as every one of us said we liked it best when it was quiet when there were no visitors at beginning and end of the day.



In general, it is the amalgamation of many small incidents that have made volunteering at Lyveden so special with happy memories, the lepidopterist, watching Zoe (Wilson) swim the moat, helping the water diviner find the old well near the cottage.

The list is endless...