

Wendy Fairhurst

Started volunteering at Lyveden in 2016

I imagine that many Volunteers, when prompted for memories of their time at Lyveden, would recall their encounters with people, either with their colleagues or with visitors whom they have welcomed to the New Bield over the years. Then again, they might remember events and special occasions, or having to deal with an unexpected crisis situation. My own memories, however, do not involve 'real' people at all. They conjure up characters from the past whom I have never met but nonetheless feel I know. I should explain.

There was a suggestion, some ten years or so ago, that I might like to have a go at researching one or two less well-documented chapters in Lyveden's history - a challenge not to be turned down. One such chapter, therefore, and one memory would be the pleasure I derived on discovering more about William Harbord of Grafton Park, Northampton (1635-1692). One of four sons born to Sir Charles Harbord, William became a politician and diplomat, and held a number of prestigious posts in government during his career. Towards the end of 1691 he was sent as ambassador to Turkey to mediate between the sultan and the emperor Leopold, but died on the way there in 1692, in Belgrade, after suffering recurrent bouts of ill-health on the journey. Over the years he had amassed great wealth. A copy of his Will is available to download (for a fee) from the Public Record Office at the National Archives. It is dated October 1691 and is meticulous in its detail. He left his estates and money to his wife and four daughters, and also monies to his servants. One of the estates included Lyveden Manor which he had acquired in the 1680s. On William's death the Harbord co-heirs dealt with the Manor during the first half of the 18th century. Laetitia, the fourth daughter (by his second wife), married Sir Rowland Winn of Nostell, Yorkshire, in 1702, and they acquired the largest share of the estate. Their son, Rowland, conveyed his share to Anne Fitzpatrick of Farming Woods (widow of Richard Fitzpatrick, Lord Gowran) in 1732. The Manors of Lyveden and Churchfield were passed down through the Fitzpatrick family until they came to the two unmarried daughters, known as the ladies Fitzpatrick of Farming Woods, in 1818. When both ladies died in 1841 the estate passed to an illegitimate daughter of the second Earl of Upper Ossory. This interesting little story forms a link between the Tresham era and that of the Barons Lyveden.

I enrolled as a Volunteer proper in 2016 when the Graffiti Group was formed to photograph and record Lyveden's assorted graffiti. I had, of course, noted the inscriptions on numerous visits prior to then, but never really paid them much attention. That all changed. The inscriptions now interested me greatly, and it occurred to me that it should be possible to work out who had carved them. And so, some years later, seven little biographies have taken shape: the stories of a farmer, a shoemaker, a veterinary surgeon, a rope-maker, a baker, a carpenter and a stonemason. They and their families lived in the 19th century in the Lyveden area; their stories illustrate what life was like in those days. Trawling through parish and census records, and occasionally coming across snippets of information about these characters in the British Newspaper Archive, has been so enjoyable. Fieldwork involved both of us exploring the towns and villages where these families once lived, as well as searching graveyards for their memorials.

Lyveden has provided me with a hobby I enjoy immensely: identifying records, pursuing hunches which prove to be correct, experiencing the thrill when a missing piece of the jigsaw suddenly falls into place, and the final satisfaction of completing a project. Ghosts from the past, maybe, but very happy memories for this Volunteer.