

Cathy Nichols

Started volunteering at Lyveden in July 2011

My first visit to Lyveden was in 1948(ish), when local Catholic families were given permission to have Mass said. I remember thinking it was a long walk and just what were we going to do in a field in a large building with no roof.

When I became a volunteer, Ann Hoxley had just taken over from Mark Bradshaw. I was amazed at the changes. The moat, snail mounts, terrace, orchards – so much had been revealed. My interview with Ann was informal, as she was cutting the grass when I arrived. She introduced me to Pat Coutts. I stayed for the rest of the day and continued volunteering for the next 7 years. I was made to feel very welcome by the team assisting Ann – particularly Susan Lees, Ana Geyer, Barbara Ding, Geoff Fairhurst and Gerald Fisher. They all had such knowledge of Lyveden, it was infectious. I was sent off round the site with an audio guide and realised what an asset it was. It took me a while to learn how to use the drinks machine in the Visitor Centre – not putting a cup under the hot water tap was a mistake...

Meeting so many visitors was (mostly) great fun, especially visitors from abroad. They were often very well-informed about the Tresham family history. One lady reported that she had walked round the labyrinth (see below), reciting her prayers! I found that very moving. People often remarked on how tranquil Lyveden was and that it must be a lovely place to 'work'. I can only agree, especially when you arrived so early – so quiet and peaceful. Then, when we had a busy time such as the Easter Egg hunts, there was a different atmosphere.

When the Tea Room opened, it added a new dimension and became very popular. I remembered a remark by a visitor that when they arrived, they felt there was not very much to see. The more they looked and walked around, they felt drawn in. I think that sums up Lyveden.

I loved my time volunteering there and met some remarkable people.

What is a labyrinth? A Labyrinth is not a maze. There is only one entrance, one path and no choices, tricks or dead ends. A maze is designed to make you lose your way; it is a game. A Labyrinth serves the opposite purpose; it is designed to help you find your way. By encouraging you to walk without having to think about where to go next, it can enable you to be still, to let your mind escape the bustle of everyday life and reflect.

