

Jane Harris

Started volunteering at Lyveden in July 1996

### Lyveden ..... and Children

At about the same time as Mark commenced work at Lyveden, the National Trust started a "Guardianship Scheme" whereby a local school was linked with a National Trust property and, by learning about the property and undertaking practical tasks of conservation and restoration, became more involved in the work of the National Trust, its aims and objectives. Teaching at a local school in Peterborough, I and my colleagues were delighted to get involved and so started a ten year plus association with Lyveden and our school's children.

What were the highlights?

One of course, must be THE WEATHER! The British weather is never predictable and Lyveden was never suited to thirty plus children and a wet day. Despite instructions to wear wellington boots or 'sensible shoes', girls would appear in flip flops or ballerina pumps; some would come without a waterproof and would be wrapped up in a black bin liner. Until the property purchased a gazebo large enough to accommodate a class of children, where to eat lunch on a wet day was always problematic. On one particular occasion the rain was coming down in stair rods as only it can do on an English October day. Half the group was accommodated in the aga room of the cottage, the other half were squashed into the garage (latterly Visitor Reception). The children sat where they could find a space and took out their sandwiches. "I've got mine here," said Mark, opening the lid of a large wooden box and pulling out a couple of pheasants, dead of course. The reaction from a group of towny children can only be described as ..... amazing!!! -no photo of this occasion.



Another must be the children's fascination with the little things ..... The day they saw a mole ..... The day they looked inside a hollow tree..... The day they helped to take the honey off the frames and put it into jam jars.....The day they counted how many cowslip plants were in a metre-square piece of the



orchard.....The day they picked apples and ate them straight from the tree..... The day they used willow branches to make their own willow fence.....The day they fed the lambs. (Who remembers the lambs the Bradshaws kept in a box by the aga?) The day they climbed the pyramid mound.

Exploring the New Bield was always fascinating. Of course, climbing the spiral staircase was fun for some and a challenge for others. The graffiti, especially the names and dates always proved particularly interesting as did the fireplace in the kitchen. One member of the class, by necessity the smallest boy, pretended to be the “pig” and was rotated by Mark on the “spit”.



The children raised the money to donate a tree to the orchard project and, on each visit, we went to the William Law walnut tree. They learnt that the wealthy Elizabethans thought that eating walnuts made you intelligent (the nuts are brain-shaped after all) and that the poor thought putting the leaves inside your shoes kept your feet from getting sweaty.

We took Lyveden back to the classroom, often in the form of acorns collected from the oak tree, which we planted, watered, measured, killed off with too much tlc and even planted into gardens. How many have survived I don't know but at least one has been nurtured over the years and now is established in a garden in Greatford.



The children enjoyed ‘helping’ at Lyveden and one of the most successful projects was Spring cleaning the New Bield. They brushed the walls and collected up all the twigs and sticks dropped by the birds in the winter. With buckets and rakes they spread new gravel across the ground.

We also took part in national surveys – counting earthworms and black spots on sycamore trees being two of them. And the children also produced a play about the life of Sir Thomas Tresham which they acted on the Elizabethan day.



During this time Lyveden also welcomed other groups of children. A group from schools in Corby worked on a collaborative art project, designing and creating spheres which were placed all around the labyrinth. (The William Law children collected them all in at the end!)



Children from Oundle Primary School also paid visits – Olivia visiting Lyveden with her class was interesting as she had always accompanied the older children on their visits before she started school.



A particularly poignant visit was made by a group of children who had been brought to England by Friends of Chernobyl's Children. Their visit took place on a particularly wet and cold July day. Did they complain – not a word. Did they get wet – absolutely



soaked. They spoke little English, we knew no Ukrainian but their joy at their visit was wonderful. Those children are now in their early twenties. What now for them?



On later visits, we were accompanied on our activities by Cirrus. He took part in his first school visit as a small puppy and always joined in enthusiastically with the more active activities like playing football at lunch time or moving the sheep from one field to another. His presence often helped to allay a child's fear of

dogs and he was frequently mentioned in the accounts the children wrote about their day on their return to school.



My retirement and Mark moving on brought an end to the school's association and also the Guardianship Scheme. However, throughout all our visits, Mark's enthusiasm and passion for Lyveden brought the day alive. Whatever we had planned, we could guarantee that Mark would change the timetable within the first half hour and we would be off on a journey of discovery.

Of course, one mustn't forget the Easter Trails, Halloween, the B B stories – Down the Bright Stream, Bill Badger and the Wandering Wind and Bill Badger and the Pirates. The Family Den inspired by Claire Barrett and all the activities for children which led from the N T 50 Things to do booklets. (Remember the Snail Game?), the Little Acorns which Dave Stanforth started and which was, so sadly, cut short by Covid.



There was one further notable visit by children in 2018 when children from four local schools were inspired by Tom and Ellie of the Come and Sing Company to sing parts of the Miserere by Allegri – a magical performance on a summer's evening.

What was the legacy of these visits? Of time spent at Lyveden as a child? For the school groups, hopefully, a greater love of the past, of nature, conservation and the countryside; of team-work and projects they would have never undertaken in the classroom. For children and families who took part in the trails, greater knowledge of BB, Lyveden, of their environment, history on their doorstep .... and eating copious amounts of chocolate after the Easter Trails!

From the school visits I know that at least :

One family went on to become National Trust members

One family donated a tree in the orchard and mum became a volunteer

One child enjoyed Lyveden so much that she became a volunteer at Lyveden when she grew up

One child was so inspired by the nature activities at Lyveden that she gained employment with a conservation charity.

And finally .. a poem written by a group of children after their visit to Lyveden

A cross on the hillside  
Standing proud after hour hundred years  
Facing the lush green fields  
Windows like eyes, watching admiring visitors  
The sandy stone holding the silent signatures of past generations  
Quiet  
Peace  
Stillness  
Only the sound of birds  
And the fresh, gentle breeze brushing against my skin.

Thanks Lyveden, Mark and the staff and volunteers at Lyveden who made it all possible.