

Jennie Wickham

Started volunteering at Lyveden in July 1996

My first visit to Lyveden was in 1993 when I took Mark to meet Mr & Mrs Faulkner, the custodians, for him to volunteer during his summer holidays from college. We had tea and cake in the parlour. In early 1995, there was an advertisement in the Peterborough Standard for the position for of Part-time custodian at Lyveden . Mark applied and was fortunate in getting the job, which he started in July of that year.

After a settling in period, the first teas served were served on all four Sundays in August 1996. It was very much a family affair, making cakes, preparation and serving with Mike making the tables and Dad at the age of 84 doing the washing up. Chairs were hired from Benefield Village Hall. The teas were served on the grass in front of the kitchen. From those four teas we made £401.96 and was suggested that a slide projector or a bench seat to be placed halfway along the track be purchased.

From doing that, for every Easter there was an Easter trail. In the morning we served bacon rolls and sausage baps washed down with coffee, tea and hot chocolate. We got the bacon and sausages from Titman's Butchers in Glinton and bread came from the baker at Kings Cliffe. We were protected from the elements by an awning continuing to serve, whatever the weather, sometimes even gales and snow.



The cowslip tours and teas were in late April. We were



rushed off our feet. On one afternoon tea, when cars still parked on Harley Way, looking out the back door, all I could see was a stream of people walking up the track. On that occasion served 200+ teas of sandwiches, scones, jam and cream and cake – all homemade.

On all occasions throughout the year, food was supplied – the Elizabethan Day, Evensong on the last Sunday in August, the Lyveden Challenge, the Brass band on Father's Day followed by other performances in July and August. By this time we were serving refreshments, all homemade, under the marquee on the lawn in front of the cottage. We had 'runners' fetching jugs of hot water to



keep the urn topped up. When we drained the water tank, we had crates of bottled water or Mark organised a bowser to be delivered. It arrived pretty promptly after his phone call!

Halloween was our most ambitious catering event.

Members of the family made 25+ litres of soup which was heated up in large saucepans in the kitchen and was carried over to the new bield going down the steps into its kitchen – all in the dark. Jane



greeted the children with a tray of homemade spooky treats – witch's fingers, eyeballs and spiders. There were two tours in the evening catering for 50 people each time.

From Easter to October the whole family and friends catered for every event – and there was at least one a month and every Sunday in August. We catered for evening events like the Pantaloons and Tresham tour and Tipple where we wheeled the freezer out onto the grass to serve ice creams.

My association with the catering finished with tea, coffee and hot chocolate at the Son et Lumiere "Gunpowder Treason and Plot" in 2009.

Mark, Angela, Tom and Olivia moved from the cottage in September 2010. Shortly afterwards the cottage was converted into a tearoom with an office, volunteer room and kitchen upstairs finally opening in 2013. Staff and volunteers served a varied menu and another chapter began.

Royal Postscript

In the summer 2002, HRH The Prince of Wales, on a visit to Northamptonshire, visited Lyveden and was given a tour of the property by Mark. Although it was a private visit Mark was allowed to have members of his family present. At the bottom of the track, there was protest about the Wind Farm.



Before he arrived, no one was allowed to use the toilet as Mark had cleaned the bathroom! When Jane arrived she found men in suits behind the hedge. She thought that they were from the local TV station but they were security men.



We watched from afar as Mark took The Prince on his tour. When they returned, we were all invited to meet the Prince. Angela and Sarah, Mark's sister, were both pregnant and HRH asked if there was something in the Lyveden moat that caused their condition! Tom presented him with a bowl from Lyveden oak that Mike had made, Dad told the prince that Mark ought to have an OBE in the next honours list for all the hard work he had put into Lyveden. (It never happened).