

Witney Remembers

**A Cogges Oral History Project
Funded by the National Lottery**

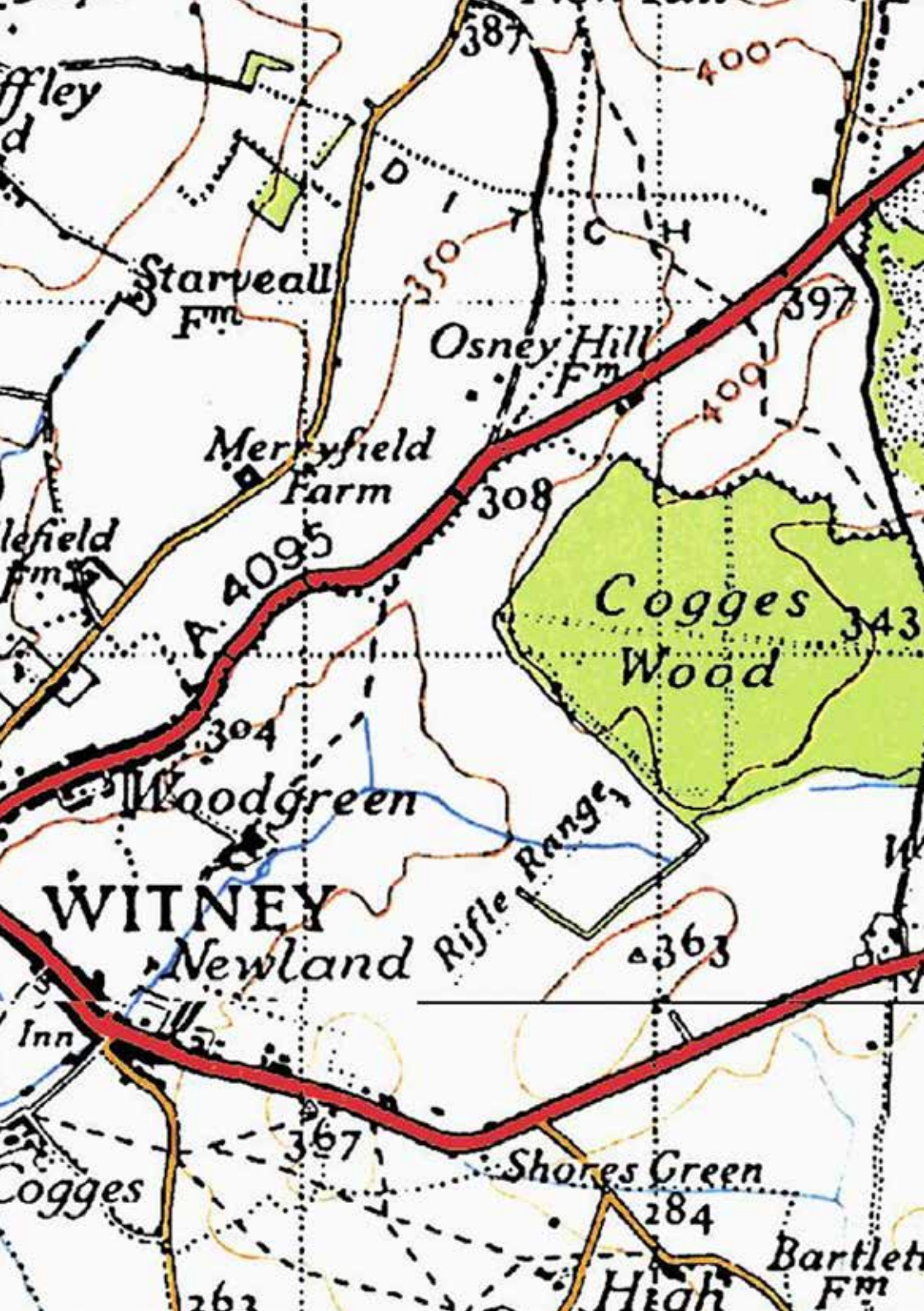


**Find out more about our contributors,
and some of their stories**

Original artwork by Nina Carroll,
Photography by Cereta Drewett

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Starveall
Fm

Osney Hill
Fm

Merryfield
Farm

lefield
fm

Cogges
Wood

Woodgreen

WITNEY

Newland Rifle Range

Inn

Cogges

Shores Green

Bartlett
Fm

High

Witney Remembers is a Cogges Oral History Project, funded by the National Lottery.

Volunteers at Cogges Manor Farm interviewed around 20 people who have a connection with Cogges from the 1950s to the present day. The recorded interviews create a collective memory of Cogges past.



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‘What Cogges means to you’ is the first of a series of exhibitions. The stories show the importance of Cogges in the local community over the last seventy years. From children to farm workers, staff to volunteers, everyone has a story to tell, and you can find out more in this booklet.

What does Cogges mean to you? We’d love to hear from you!

Roy Bicker

Roy Bicker's dad worked at Cogges Farm as a cowman from 1955 to 1974. Roy lived on Stanton Harcourt Road, in a house that looked out across the fields. His dad went off in the mornings at 4 am to milk the cows, and came home at 5pm. Roy told a fascinating story about his father recording the markings of each cow, sketching them by hand, as there were no electronic tags then.



“When they had new cows or calves, Dad would have an A5 piece of paper with an outline of a cow printed on. Then he'd have to do the markings of the cow, there were no tags or anything in those days. He used Indian ink to put the markings on the paper and the year they bought it or it was born, that was the records. I remember Dad coming home and sitting at the table...and he'd paint in the markings of the cow, front-on and side view with the Indian ink. They only had Friesians, black and white cows.”

“Trouble with the farm, living in Stanton Harcourt Road, when we got old enough to wander the roads and play in the fields everybody knew you, so if you got into trouble, it got back to Dad before you got home Yes, it was a good life. We had plenty of fields to play in.”

“Dad would let us feed the calves. The bucket of milk, put your fingers in and let them suck the milk, then suck the milk out of the bucket. It was alright until they got teeth and then you'd find out by surprise.”

Ken Smith (known as KP)

Ken was born in 1931 and has lived in Cogges all his life. Ken shared his memories of the countryside around the farm, and his boyhood playing there. He had observations about farming methods, and of Cyril Mawle, the farmer at Cogges. Ken also remembered the farm during wartime and having time off school to pick 'spuds'. He talked about the shops and shopkeepers in Newland including 'Ogg Pudding' Walker. Despite the changes to the area, Ken told us that "it's still a joy to live in this parish".



"Ogg Puddin' Walker. That was his nickname. He used to make these special ogg puddings they were sort of made of maize and meat in sort of a skin. But they were a delicacy. People still remember them."

"The barn was open when they had the threshing... and all the chaff that came, it was lovely for the chickens and we were allowed to bag it up and take it home."

"I always looked forward to the harvest time, when all the activities started. I can remember when it was done with horse driven stuff, and it's done into sheaves and the sheaves had to be stooked.....and of course they were left for days to make sure they dried out and then the harvest was more or less ready. They used to build ricks.....these ricks were on big stones and they used to lay rods across them and then twigs and they used to build the rick on top and then thatch it. The ricks used to stand till autumn, just before winter set in and then of course it was all taken down to the barn and threshed."

Derick Smith

Derick was born in April 1949. He lived on Stanton Harcourt Lane and worked on the farm in his school holidays - in the garden, baling, and feeding the animals. He remembered Cyril Mawle, Rhoda the housekeeper, and some of the other farm workers. Derick described the farm machinery and buildings at Cogges, and the fields that surrounded the farm before the area was developed for housing. Derick went scrumping with his friends and swimming in the river near Cogges.



“We...used to go to Langel Common, there used to be two white bridges you used to call that The Bend, because it was on the bend. On the other side was Uglese....we used to go cray fishing there, they was English crayfish then, there was plenty of ‘em then but the second bridge we used to regard as the paddling area.”

“... pitching the bales. The trouble is, is when you get too many people on the trailer, which was all hand loaded, your hands in the wrong place you had a pitchfork stuck in your arm. And I did have one that one day. and even been thrown off the top of the load which was quite normal.”



Eileen Mawle

Eileen first visited Cogges around 1968 when she met her husband, John Mawle. John was Cyril Mawle's nephew, and Cyril owned Cogges Manor Farm. On Cyril's death, Eileen and John moved into Cogges Manor Farm. She recalled that the farmhouse is virtually unchanged from when she lived there. She brought up her family at Cogges.

“I remember there was a beautiful Galloway, belted Galloway that was really quite old. She only ever stayed in one field, the big field you look out now if you go through the main field gates. It's all built on now of course... she was just as fat as a little pig. It was 32 acres of the most wonderful grass that you never had to do anything to.”



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Ben Potter

Ben was born in 1948 in a house on Newland. His mother worked in the shop/post office next door. His father was stationed at RAF Brize Norton, and his brother John worked as a farm labourer at Cogges Farm. Ben has vivid memories of growing up around Cogges in the 1950s and 1960s, going scrumping, swimming in the river, and playing in the fields before they were developed for housing. Newlands had a separate village feel then, with three shops and two dairies.



“We always used to enjoy swimming down in the river. There was a summer house in the gardens down by the moat ... we used it for our changing room...and one day we got back there and found all our clothes had disappeared and all we were left in were our costumes. Well, we daren’t walk round half naked in them days Cyril Mawle had actually taken the clothes and chucked them under a gooseberry bush in the orchard!”

“We climbed to the top of Oxford Hill .. overlooking the mushroom field towards Witney church and down there, the other side of Stanton Harcourt Lane.... and that was known as The Valley And I remember there along that very end of Mud Lane where it joined Stanton Harcourt Lane, I was shown a wren’s nest. I think it’s the only time I’ve ever seen one, and local name for a Wren was a bum barrel ”

Valerie Brooks

Valerie's father Lou Clack worked for Cyril Mawle for many years, and Valerie often helped him with jobs around the farm. When the cook was away, Valerie's mother would also help out. Val stayed in the farmhouse with Rhoda the housekeeper when Cyril Mawle was ill, and after he died.



“Rhoda [the housekeeper] didn't want to live in the house on her own. And she asked my dad to ask me would I go and stay there while Mr M was in hospital. And she said ‘I'll happily pay her’ and my dad said ‘no she wouldn't want anything’.”

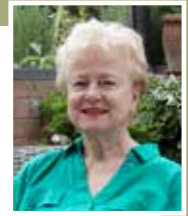
However, Val said she would definitely have liked to have been paid!

“... my dad loved his job.. He didn't ever moan if he left at four in the morning and he got home ten o'clock at night you know, he didn't ever moan. I think it's wonderful if you can enjoy your work like that.”



Margherita Pierini

Margherita moved into Cogges Manor Farm with her husband and two young children in the 1970s. Her husband worked for Oxfordshire Museum Service, and he, together with other Museum Service employees who realised the historical importance of Cogges, lived in the Manor House while a decision was made about Cogges' future. This working party put a proposal to Oxfordshire County Council to convert the farm into a living museum. Eventually, the proposal was accepted and Cogges was saved for future generations to enjoy.



“We had electric lighting, but it was quite dim. The bedrooms were freezing. Cracked windows, so we just piled on the duvets and went to bed with all our clothes on and huddled together with our children. It was crazy really. It was a cold winter too, ‘76-’77.”

“The bathrooms were freezing! One bathroom between us all ... there was just about hot water, but sometimes we didn’t. Sometimes things would freeze over. It wasn’t comfortable, but we just got on with it. In the summer, friends could come and we could go into the orchard. It was lovely really. I remember at Easter-time painting little eggs and we all sat round the table blowing them and painting them. It was fun.”

“[Cogges] wasn’t so built up. When we were there, you went over to Langel Common and there was like a dirt track you went over to a little Waitrose.”

“We’ve got some paintings by Nina Carroll ... she was an artist, and a teacher. She was very creative. I remember her coming to visit. ... Nina did lots of paintings of Cogges, and the rooms upstairs.”

Sally Stradling

Sally lived at Cogges Manor Farm for six months in 1974 as part of her sandwich course at Brunel University. She worked for the Director of Woodstock Museum in the lead up to Cogges opening as a Museum of Farming in the Countryside. Her room was above the kitchen. She remembers it as a very sociable place with parties in the walled kitchen garden, and making nettle soup and elderflower champagne. Later, Sally was working at Cogges as a Site Supervisor on the day the Farm Museum first opened to the public. The atmosphere at Cogges, together with her love of architecture and history, influenced Sally's decision to work on historic building conservation.



“There were various challenging moments like one busy bank holiday one of the black and sandy pigs produced piglets ..we had to clear the public away from the pigsties and get in there and help ... and in the meantime ring the vet ... so that was quite a day.”

“The dairy was open from pretty much from the start. The ground floor – the kitchen and back room, and also the left-hand side with the still room - the semi-basement area were open, but the upper rooms weren't open to the public to start with. ... At the same time the building was being assessed and recorded – the architectural history of the house was being undertaken. I remember they got the floorboards up from the middle room – the dining room – and they found out that there had been a sunken house building, a very early Saxon building on his site. And there were quite a few items found ... in different places by taking up the floorboards ... things like thimbles and sewing things, children's toys ... that kind of thing. ... It always had a very nice, friendly atmosphere and you can imagine it was a happy, family home and working farm.”

Stuart Harrison

Stuart's connections to Cogges Farm goes back to his grandfather and his great-grandfather, who both worked at Cogges. Stuart's father, Henry Robert Harrison, was born in 1890 at Cogges and worked there as a horseman and carter until the First World War. Stuart knew the Mawle family well through his friendship with Cyril's nephew, John Mawle.



When Oxfordshire County Council acquired Cogges, Stuart helped to secure a grant through his role with the English Tourist Board. He orchestrated the opening of Cogges Farm Museum and established a visitor information centre.

“...[for] the opening of Cogges Farm Museum, the President at that time was the Duke of Marlborough, so I got the Duke to come and open the Farm Museum, and .. I got some wool from what we know as the ‘Cotswold Lion’ and I had it spun into the equivalent of what we would call a ‘ribbon’ and then I got the family shears, which are clearly very old, beautifully made, to cut the ribbon.”



Hazel Adams

Hazel Adams was a member of the local Women's Institute (W.I.) when she first volunteered at Cogges, around forty two years ago. She helped with the cooking, laundry and butter making demonstrations at the Museum. She remembers her uniform: a long pink dress, a mop hat and a white apron, which helped her get into role as a Victorian servant. Hazel's daughter got married at Cogges in a Halloween-themed wedding.



“We used to demonstrate on the range which was very temperamental, sometimes it was hot and sometimes it wasn't. We weren't allowed to use anything that wasn't in season or anything in packets from the supermarket. You brought the stuff in and tipped it into a container, took the butter out of the wrapper. We didn't make anything complicated, normally scones or tarts, things like that, mince pies at Christmas. People wanted to buy the produce but we weren't allowed to sell it.”

“There was a separate oven for the bread in the laundry, it's a hole in the wall basically. They would fill it with wood the night before, light it and let it burn all night. Then they would sweep it out so it was literally just the heat of the stones that cooked the bread. We used to have quite a few people wander around trying to find where the heating was for it, trying to find out if there was gas, they couldn't understand how it cooked if there was no fuel.”

“The other range used coal, I think, but they lit it and we didn't have a lot to do with it. A lot depended on the wind, if it was in the wrong direction, it was a bit temperamental. Most of the time it was okay.”

“The range, which was very temperamental, sometimes it was hot and sometimes it wasn't. The washing up was fun as we had to use cold water. Just soap and elbow grease.”

Christiane Jeuckens

Christiane is Conservation Manager for Oxfordshire County Council Museum Service. She first worked at Cogges in February 1986 at the start of her career. Every spring, the Conservation Department would systematically work through everything that was on display in the Farm, cleaning and conserving, and getting items ready for the season's opening at Easter. Christiane has fond memories of Cogges - a unique place with an amazing history.



“We had quite a few items from the Mawle family. which were absolutely main collection treasures ... so there were items of furniture that came directly from the Mawle family., but also small things, you know, dinner services, a stag's head. I don't know if the stag's head came from the Mawle family but it was a bit of a conservation nightmare. And pictures, and those sort of things. And then, for handling, we had a lot of small items. So we had crockery that was used for cooking and baking. And you'd have things for washing demonstrations, and dressing up, and all the dairy equipment. ... The historic items were items that were actually purchased for Cogges, sometimes from auctions ... so toys for the nursery that were appropriate in terms of age ... the cutlery, the implements that would be used. ... Then there were donations, given to us, and they would have a local provenance.”

“One of my rookie mistakes ... There was a whole table of flat irons and I thought they could be black leaded so I set to work, got them all perfect, put them back and carried on ... and then there was terrible, terrible cursingone of irons they had been using obviously left black streaks on all the bloomers, the Victorian bloomers.”

Carol Anderson

Carol, a newly-appointed Education Officer, started working at Cogges in 1983 when it was run as a Victorian-themed living farm museum. She had mentioned in her interview that she could cook, and she soon found herself in the kitchen, dressed as a Victorian servant, tasked with lighting the range and cooking on it while talking to groups of children about all the things they could see in the kitchen. While it was a 'baptism of fire', Carol quickly recognised Cogges as a 'magical place'.



Carol remembers sitting in the garden. "Everything had gone quiet and there would be a few visitors but my memories of that are it never rained, I'm sure it did, but I don't remember that. I remember thinking, "ahh this is lovely", and looking out over the garden - you got that sort of step back in time, and if you turned around you might have seen Mr and Mrs Mawle, coming out of the back door."

Carol has vivid memories of teaching children there, and of its value as a living history museum. Carol later became a Museum Service Manager at Cogges.

"...we ended up with a group of children all in costume in a big sort of flat cart, going up to High Cogges to have a picnic And .. on the way back they wanted to sing, and it was wonderful 'cos the only thing they could all agree on singing were hymns! And apart for the cars passing us on the road this... was the Sunday School outing of however many years ago."

Davina Chapman

Davina worked as a Cogges Manor House demonstrator from March 1996 for about ten years. By this time, the ground and first floors of the house were open to the public. Each floor had a demonstrator, and Davina found herself butter-making, doing laundry, cooking, or showing the costumes to visitors. She told us that as she walked from the car park to Cogges, she'd almost have to pinch herself that she worked in such a lovely place.



“... We called it the back kitchen. You had the washing copper. The mangle was in there, and then another fireplace and a bread oven on the side of the fireplace. There was always a bit of a struggle to light the fire under the washing copper to show how it would have been heated up. ... You went through the long, long process – pumping up the water, heating up the water, washing the clothes, putting the clothes through the mangle, getting them out, rinsing them through the mangle again. ... You mangled before rinsing to squash that soapy water out., otherwise you would have had a lot of soapy water in the clothes and it would have been heavy. ... The sheer drudgery of it all fills me with horror to think about even now, and I think that’s what amazed visitors that doing the washing took all day ... typically on Monday.”

“...but I think really whenever you work in a historical site you’re always learning, and you would learn something every day not only from members of staff but from visitors coming in who would just tell you interesting things and I suppose you’ve got that shared experience of all working for a common goal and in such a lovely place.”

Lorraine Horne

Lorraine started as an Office Assistant at Cogges in April 2001, but her work soon evolved into a publicity and events role. Lorraine found that giving an event a wacky name, such as 'Pig Pampering Day' got media attention and pulled in the visitors. She organised an annual events programme, as well as coordinating the daily school visits, and starting a Halloween tradition at Cogges. Lorraine was always very aware of Cogges' thousand-year history. To her, it is a place where you can 'touch the walls and feel the memories'.



“It was hugely popular with the schools. The teachers and the children loved it. We got children in from city-centre schools that didn't have so much access to farms but it was more about hands on activities and access, where you could pet the pigs if you wanted to ... The chickens were wandering around free, as were the ducks. We didn't so much have goats then ... but there were several different types of sheep. I think we had Oxford Downs and Cotswolds. We had quite a selection of cattle, and they were all rare breeds, traditional breeds, so long and short horns, and again, the horses ... I think we had Clydesdales, so two of the heavy horses and they were really, really popular. The public loved them, because they were enormous, you know, with these huge feet. They'd bring them out and brush them. And seeing a cow milked, up close - I think was just fantastic for children. It gave them a real sense of where food came from.”

“I was well known for wearing my stilettos to work so I'd be wandering through the farmyard first thing in the morning, sometimes with the pig board if Rodney was out having a wander. ... Rodney was a Gloucester Old Spot that we had. Then we had Queenie who was the ugliest pig I've ever seen, but charming in her own way, and Amber who was a Tamworth. They would usually have free run of the yard in the morning first thing before the public arrived.”

Laura Dean

Laura started working at Cogges when it re-opened under the Trust. She was at Cogges for over eleven years, first as Operations Manager and later as Learning and Community Engagement Manager. For Laura, it was her dream job. She met her future husband here, learned about the animals and their care, and learned about herself. She told us that Cogges ‘has had a massively important part in my life and will always have a special place in my heart. Laura had a special role at Cogges when it was used for filming Downton Abbey – she was ‘chief chicken wrangler’!



“They put up an area where they wanted chickens with this roll of picket fencing and metal trays for their feeders and drinkers. Well, of course this metal bowl had a hole in it! So I was there trying to make sure our chickens could drink and so stood behind the camera with my bright red plastic watering can constantly going back every time they shouted, “cut” to fill it up!”

“Lots of people are struggling at the moment. This house and this space has gone through that same sort of journey, I suppose, as well. And it’s still here and it still represents, I think, a safe space. And a mindful space, and I think whatever message Cogges is trying to portray from an organisational perspective, the building, and the site itself has its own essence. And that is what shines through really and what keeps Cogges going - and will keep Cogges going - and being a space for local people to enjoy in the future.”

Gabrielle Conway-Morris

Gabrielle married at Cogges Manor Farm) on 6th of October 2018. She and her husband Hugh have very fond memories of Cogges and the wonderful barns. Gabrielle told us “just a wonderful place. It felt very much “us” and I think people said afterwards, agreed, and that really was wonderful. It didn’t feel like we were sort of fitting into this cookie cutter hotel wedding, it felt like we had a historic place and a place where the trees and the apples and the seasonal food and all fitted in beautifully. My, uncle said afterwards, it was one of the most beautiful weddings he’d ever been to.

Gabrielle and Hugh had a nature inspired wedding, with home grown or local food, and of course a barn dance. One of their highlights was the far from traditional way that they made their exit. Both keen walkers, they changed into corduroy trousers, black felt hats and, just after their final dance, with their walking sticks just stepped out into the night, “like a couple of hobbits”.



Dave Hill

Dave first heard about Cogges Museum when he attended a Volunteers Open Day on 14 May 2011. The Trust had recently taken over Cogges a few months before. Dave worked as a volunteer guide, giving tours, and also with some much-needed digging in the garden. When Dave first started giving tours, the house was set up as though it was 25 October 1898, as a 'day in the life of Joseph Mawle' with furniture and photos from the Mawle family. The focus of the tours later broadened to look at Cogges' 1,000 years of history, starting with Wadard, and ending with the Mawle family, and encouraging visitors to look more closely at the buildings and how they evolved over time.



“Wadard was our key figure. You lit the blue touchpaper with Wadard, and in the tours of the house you’d finish with the Hollis’s and the Mawle’s. ... but the house is pretty much the one William Blake built, or altered.”

“The house told its story. We were simply voices on behalf of the house” We would take people through the building of the house...and describe its original construction under the Grey family, and then its amendment under the Pope family and you’d come on to the upper floors and talk about the restructuring of the later Popes.”



Maureen Hopkins

Maureen moved to Witney in 1981 and worked as a teacher at the Blake School where her classroom actually backed on to Cogges Manor Farm. She has clear memories of taking school groups to Cogges and its value in terms of teaching Victorian history. When the Farm Museum closed Maureen was an early volunteer for the Trust working on the welcome desk initially and more recently in the café. She regularly visited the Farm with her children and is now taking her grandchildren there.



“The children had to dress up as Victorians and we had to dress up as Victorian ladies and the staff looked after the children, and we were treated as guests. So, I have a wonderful memory of being sat in the walled garden dressed in the most Victorian dress I could find which wasn't that Victorian really, and the children served us an afternoon tea with the little drop scones that they'd made, and made us cups of tea which was lovely. It was just perfect. And they learned so much about the farm as it was run all those many years ago.

“This is somewhere right in the middle of Witney where people can walk to and experience that lovely open air feeling of theatre-going outside, and of beer and cider festivals and music and it's a local event. It makes money for the Farm Museum and generations of people have come.”

Jo Alder

In 1949, Jo Alder started school at Cogges. The schoolchildren liked to play rounders in the playground which backed on to the land around Cogges Manor House. Any ball which went over the wall was lost, as no one would dare to ask Mr Mawle to return it. Jo remembers Cyril Mawle as a very tall, stern figure, and that his housekeeper, Rhoda, rode a high bike. Although Cogges Manor Farm felt a private place, the teachers were allowed to take the children on nature walks over fields owned by Cyril Mawle.



“We took our great-grandchildren on our most recent visits. ... They love the animals. I liked seeing in the Manor ... the kitchen. ... I think my Dad actually gave them some bread tins when he closed the bakery in 1974, so some of them are in the kitchen.”



Our thanks to everyone we interviewed:

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