

Woodwell Meadows

Mary Wilkins

The year was 1976. We were living in Alveston and looking for somewhere to keep our ponies. We were also looking for a family home to accommodate our family of six. My mother, Win Peirce, had moved to Thornbury and she wanted to buy a field to walk in. So when two fields in Littleton came up for sale we all went to the auction and she bought them! Shortly afterwards Central Farm came up for sale and we all moved there, very close to the meadows. My mother moved into Rose Cottage, next door.

Our family, including the extended family, enjoyed using the fields in various ways' and the ponies were very happy there too! We didn't use fertiliser or weed-killers and gradually we began to notice all manner of wild flowers emerging and increasing year by year. There were primroses, violets, celandines and cowslips in the Spring, followed by bluebells and red campion in the wooded area at the top.

Then, about fifteen years ago we were strolling up the top field when we came across a bee orchid. We were very excited and have seen bee orchids every year since, sometimes one or two sometimes up to twenty. At the same time we began to see pyramidal and spotted orchids and many other wild flowers, insects and butterflies.

Win always loved the fields and for as long as she could she walked up there every day with her dogs. We put a bench at the top and all enjoyed sitting there and gazing at the view over the Severn.

When Win died, in 2007 at the age of 95 we realised that we would have to sell the fields as part of her estate. We were very anxious that they should be maintained as 'unimproved grassland,' by now quite a rarity. We were thrilled to be able to negotiate the sale to South Gloucestershire Council as a Local Nature Reserve.

Now that it is up and running we are even more delighted at the way it is being protected and used. In the Summer of 2011 all the pupils of Olveston School had a wonderful 'Safari' day out there. Win Peirce had been a primary school teacher and had run cub packs all her life. She loved the outdoors, camp fires, fun and games and I know that she would be so happy that her legacy is being used in this way.