

Jane Lightfoot

"The Hat Lady"  
of Goslings Farm



There is no disguising it any longer. Autumn is creeping towards us in a stealthy but determined fashion. Walking to Goslings' Farm I noticed the hedges were sporting elderberries and scarlet haws, whilst the tops of the hedges were tinged with rust brown leaves. The abundant strawberry crops were flecked with wasps greedily seeking some sweet, late summer solace and the only human occupant of the fields was Jane, picking fruit and filling her containers for jam making. I joined in her steady rhythm, as she walked slowly up and down the fruit aisles, gathering the ripest of the crop while I listened and took notes.

Jane, who lives locally, has worked for the Farm Shop for about 12 years. It all began when she came to do the washing up on a casual basis,

*"I loved the suds", she said,*

laughing at the memory. But the suds were soon to be replaced by the more serious craft of baking delicious delicacies for the small café, which pre-dated the larger one so many of us use. Even now, Jane will turn her hand to baking scones in the winter. Sometimes they are the small, dainty variety but occasionally they are the larger option requiring a serious length of time in the oven. Both varieties are scoffed with pleasure by Café customers. Generally speaking, the visitors to the Farm Shop will find Jane either behind the counter or single-handedly bringing out weighty crates of fruit and vegetables from the cold store. Jane is another multi-tasking team worker who can turn her hand to fulfil a multitude of requirements and significantly, during the course of our conversation she emerged as someone who loves being and working out of doors; the countryside is her preferred environment. She has a range of jobs, including one cutting the grass of the Suffolk Show Ground.

*"We had to cut two widths around the trees and the footpaths also had to be two widths across. We estimated we used to walk about 14 miles a day."*

You have to agree this is good preparation for life at the Farm Shop, with its substantial array of outdoor fruit beds.

We had just started to talk about her love of using natural resources when she started “*ouch-ing*” in long, loud accents. (More truthfully, there were one or two expletives but these have now been deleted.) An impertinent wasp had attacked her hand in a vicious and unwarranted manner and the conversation came to an abrupt halt as she ran off to locate and apply medication.

*“I’ve had six wasp stings in 10 days” she ruefully reported when she returned, “Ow.”*

Stoically marching on and defying the wasps, we asked ourselves,

*“Where were we? Ah, yes’...*

Being outdoors, the countryside and foraging. That’s where we were.

It quickly emerged that Jane enthusiastically embraces just about everything outdoors, other than wasps, making her the perfect member of staff for the Farm Shop. She is in her natural element at the Farm Shop, following up her love of the Countryside by walking, orienteering and foraging when she is not at work. Jane goes walking with a friend who is skilled Orienteerer but admitted to me she leaves the locational skills to others as she has a terrible sense of direction. Some of us will understand and identify with her need to hold the map upside down as this often appears the best way to find the way back to base. At home she gardens, growing bedding plants and herbs and as the conversation progressed it was clear she certainly does know how to live off the land. Foraging is something she enjoys and expeditions can garner a range of foodstuffs. She and her husband gather wild mushrooms, using her husband’s identification expertise. Jane picks and cooks them after her husband has given the all clear.

*“You should always leave one of the mushrooms you are cooking by the cooker, in case you become ill and then people will know what it is you have eaten.”*

This seems like sound advice for something potentially hazardous to eat.

Other free food in her sights include blackberries which are found in the hedgerows and available to all. They are turned into jam; wild horseradish comes from the verges; wild garlic grows in Jane’s garden and sloes from Blackthorn trees are turned into Sloe Gin.

*“But they say you should wait until the first frost before picking them.” said Jane, “as it makes the skins softer before you have to prick them. I have some 15 year old bottles at home. They’re like Nectar.”*

The shore is another source of food. It furnishes Jane’s kitchen with Cockles, Winkles and sometimes Oysters, although Jane did explain she is not an aficionado of Winkles, partly because they may glide across the kitchen floor when they are being purged. I found myself agreeing as I reflected upon the unnerving nature of watching your meal walk away from you; it must be a little off putting.

In addition to walking and foraging Jane finds time to nurture a range of animals, with an African Grey Parrot, Corn Snake and ferrets filling up her household. I nervously asked if she had ever been bitten, by the ferrets but she reassured me this had never happened, emphasising the affectionate nature of these creatures who recognise her as their friend.

Eventually the conversation came full circle and returned to the place where Jane works, Goslings' Farm Shop, and the service it offers the community. The subject of wasps was re-visited and how they have been exceptionally prolific this year. A small example of customer care emerged. Jane is a great respecter of her country surroundings and her ethos is complemented by her respect for Goslings' customers. Recently, a little boy hoping to visit the Strawberry fields was stung and understandably, he was very upset. Jane and the staff had helped sooth the situation, shooing the wasps away and helping the child to the car. They could have left it just there but as a way of helping him to feel better, they made sure he departed with the strawberries he had wanted to pick.

Concern for customers has always been a notable feature of all of Goslings' Staff.



Jane Lightfoot  
August 2018

If you have any comments or observations, you may contact me at:

[trimleystmartinrecorder@gmail.com](mailto:trimleystmartinrecorder@gmail.com)

LR 23/08/2018