

## A Fond Farewell For Cathy

**After 11 years promoting food, farming and the countryside in the West Midlands for educational charity The Country Trust, Cathy Evans looks back at her time doing a job she loves, as she prepares to enjoy a well-earned break.**

With a short blast from her trusty whistle, Cathy restores the attention of her group of school children, distracted by the sights and sounds from the farm around them. She is very adept at managing excitable young children on what is often their first visit to a real working farm.

The Country Trust's mission is to bring food, farming and the countryside alive for disadvantaged children, sharing knowledge, igniting curiosity and broadening horizons and Cathy has been at the heart of delivering this mission to thousands of primary school children, from some of the most deprived urban areas of the West Midlands.

Cathy has always had a keen interest in the countryside and has been a regular volunteer for the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, helping with flora and bird surveys and on their nature reserves such as Doxey Marshes and Loynton Moss. She leads guided walks for the Walking for Health Initiative and is a keen bird watcher. She began teaching children about the wonders of the natural environment when working as a visitor guide on the Shugborough Estate Park Farm. It was these experiences that made her the obvious choice to be appointed as a Regional Manager at The Country Trust in 2006. At the time, The Country Trust employed 10 staff scattered around England, who organised excursions for children to discover the working countryside in all its guises. One of the founding members, Peter Marsden, was an inspirational mentor for Cathy as she settled into her role. She found that generous landowners in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire and Worcestershire readily agreed to host school trips, so she soon had a full diary of events, building up to an impressive 80 trips annually for around 2,000 children from schools in Birmingham, Cannock, Kidderminster, Stoke on Trent, Telford, Wolverhampton, Walsall and similar urban areas.

*"As a child growing up in Norfolk I was fascinated by nature and have always had a deep love of the countryside. I get a real buzz from opening children's eyes and hearts to the joys of the natural world" says Cathy "Many children The Country Trust work with come from areas of high deprivation and their family circumstances mean they rarely get the opportunity to visit the countryside or learn how food is produced. I know from my own experiences, as well as the Country Trust's evaluation reports and studies carried out by other organisations, how spending time outdoors, eating well and meeting new people can make a huge difference to improving a child's confidence, well-being, mental health and diet."*

Over the years Cathy has visited some wonderful farms and estates, sharing happy experiences with the children, teachers and hosts she works with. She has many fond memories of both the places she's been to and people she has met. One of her favourite venues has been Bickley House Farm in Worcestershire. Here children have enjoyed exciting experiences, including the busy lambing period in spring and apple-themed activities in the autumn, picking then pressing apples into delicious juice and making tasty apple flap jacks. The ancient Whitmore Estate near Newcastle Under Lyme is another beautiful place that has welcomed groups of children through its gates to have fun in the great outdoors while discovering more about farming, food, nature and history. It is not surprising with so many amazing excursions she's organised over the years, that Cathy still remembers responses like the one from a little boy who declared

*"this is better than Alton Towers!"* and the teacher from a Cannock school who reported that : *"...it was a superb day. The hosts were excellent, they were great with the children and provided excellent resources. This was one of the most well organised and enjoyable school visits I have ever been on in my 40 years of teaching..."*

Probably Cathy's greatest claim to fame while working for The Country Trust was when the charity was featured in an episode of BBC Radio 4's *The Archers*. The BBC recorded an episode at Broadheath Farm, near Ranton, representing the farm of David and Ruth Archer, where some children from Wolverhampton enjoyed a Country Trust visit.

Although Cathy has loved her role at The Country Trust she feels it's now time to wash down her wellies and spend more time focusing on her family, friends and interests. The Charity's Chief Executive, Jill Attenborough says *"We will all greatly miss Cathy and the amazing work she has done to enrich thousands of disadvantaged children's lives. She has bundles of energy, enthusiasm and knowledge that has really benefited the charity and all those she has worked with. I can't thank her enough for all she has done."*

Although Cathy will formally retire from The Country Trust in July her work will carry on, led by two new Farm Discovery Coordinators, Corinne Caddy and Julie Warburton. If you are a school wanting to know more about our visits, a farmer interested in becoming a host or would like to find out how to support the work of The Country Trust, please go to [countrytrust.org.uk](http://countrytrust.org.uk)

## Editors' notes

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### About The Country Trust

- Founded in 1978, The Country Trust is the leading national educational charity that brings the working countryside alive for those children least able to access it, whether through disadvantage or disability. Every year we support hundreds of volunteer farmers and landowners to welcome thousands of disadvantaged children from all backgrounds and faiths onto their farms.
- The Country Trust has 3 main strands of activities:
  1. Farm Discovery - day visits to real working farms
  2. Countryside Discovery - residential visits to the countryside
  3. Food Discovery - yearlong programmes exploring every aspect of growing, cooking and even selling food
- The Country Trust focuses on working with the following:
  - Primary age children from schools with an above average percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals
  - Schools catering for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
  - Looked After Children and Pupil Referral Units
- In 2015 The Country Trust enabled
  - 18,079 children to go on a farm or estate visit
  - 6,650 children took part in farm led assemblies and food and farming workshops
  - 1,113 children took part in Food Discovery Programmes
  - 918 children went on 29 Residential visits
  - 361 children with Special Educational Needs took part in Countryside Adventure days in Hampshire.
- The Country Trust currently works with schools in and around London, Essex, East Anglia, Hampshire, Birmingham and the East and West Midlands, Yorkshire, the North West, North Wales and Northumberland.

### What we do

- We make it easy and safe for children to visit farms and for farmers to share their knowledge and passion.
- We bring urban and rural communities together, increasing communication, respect and understanding of the countryside as a place of possibilities but also a place on which livelihoods depend.
- We facilitate children's cultural understanding about the life and work of the British countryside through visits and talking with those who live and work there.
- We enable children to experience the wonder of the countryside:- open space, breathing space, the people who live and work there, habitats, farm animals and wildlife.
- We enable children to understand the possibilities of food, what a variety there is, why and how it grows, who grows it and where, what it tastes like, why all this matters.
- We introduce adult role models who nurture and take responsibility for crops and animals. People who often work in strong family units.
- We bring two interdependent but disconnected communities together for a stronger future. Our school community includes many urban children and a significant number of children from ethnic minorities.
- We can help schools to meet the new Ofsted common inspection framework which now includes a judgement on 'personal development, behaviour and welfare'. Ofsted states that the first-hand experiences of learning outside the classroom can help to make subjects more vivid and interesting for pupils and enhance their understanding. It can also contribute significantly to pupils' personal, social and emotional development.

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