

Gate Farm in History

The Place

The land around Temple Balsall was given to The Knights Templar in the twelfth century. They were a monastic order, dedicated to protecting travellers making the long pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Wealthy pilgrims gave the Templars land as a thank you for their safe return home, and the Manor of Balsall was one of these gifts. The Manor lands were cleared from the Forest of Arden and were divided into three main areas – the Deer Park, the arable fields and the Common, or land for grazing animals.



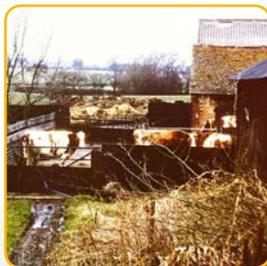
The Farm

Gate Farm is situated on one side of the medieval arable fields where crops were grown and against the boundary of the Deer Park. After Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in 1538 the Manor became Crown Land and this was given to Robert Dudley and, subsequently, pieces of it were sold to individual farmers. In 1759 Gate Farm was owned by William Cattell whose family also rented other nearby farms. We know little of the historic farming practices here, but we know that sheep farming was important and, as the farm was situated on some of the best arable land in the old Manor, we can assume that it has always been a 'mixed' farm, producing both crops and animal products.



The Family

Susie Hammett's parents and grandparents bought the farm in 1961. It was then a mixed dairy farm and they continued to concentrate on producing milk for people in Birmingham and the surrounding towns up until 1986. Barley and oats were grown to give the cows extra feed and straw for winter bedding and summer grass was preserved as hay and silage to feed the animals during the winter. After the milking cows left, the farm became less productive for many years, but this had an advantage in providing expanding habitats for native wildlife of every kind. Four generations of the same family continue to live on the farm.



Gate Farm today

The main farm activity today is permanent pasture – which means growing grass to feed animals. This includes grazing for sheep and lambs, cattle and horses and also growing hay and haylage to preserve for winter feed when the grass does not grow. Two fields still grow arable crops – a rotation of wheat, barley and rape seed, one of which is grown each year. The farm also has an important wildflower meadow which supports more than 130 plant species, including flowers such as cowslips, bluebells, meadowsweet and yellow rattle. This field is an important focus for our farm visits and provides endless opportunities for children and adults to experience and learn about the natural world at first hand.



What you will discover

- ✿ farm animals – sheep, cattle, chickens, donkeys and horses
- ✿ wild mammals like foxes, rabbits and fieldmice
- ✿ birds from the tiny wren to the giant buzzard
- ✿ insects - butterflies, moths, bees, dragonflies and all kinds of minibeasts
- ✿ reptiles and amphibians – frogs, toads, newts and grass snakes
- ✿ wild plants – flowers and grasses, including some local rarities
- ✿ ponds, ditches and a brook feeding the River Blythe SSSI, full of aquatic life
- ✿ hedgerows and wooded areas which support wildlife and provide us with useful materials



Exciting learning activities

for every age group

Farmers for a day

- ✿ feeding animals and hens
- ✿ grooming the donkeys
- ✿ collecting eggs
- ✿ tidying stables and yards



Nature study

- ✿ plant names and habitats
- ✿ bird and butterfly spotting
- ✿ minibeast hunts
- ✿ pond dipping
- ✿ the changing seasons



Outdoor skills

- ✿ building shelters and dens
- ✿ campfire making
- ✿ outdoor cookery



Creating from found natural materials

- ✿ clay pottery and art
- ✿ willow weaving
- ✿ journey sticks
- ✿ sensory collecting
- ✿ art & craft projects using leaves, wool, plants, feathers



Personal and social development

- ✿ discovering and recording
- ✿ teambuilding challenges
- ✿ storytelling and living history

Specific themes and activities can be catered for by prior arrangement – please contact us to discuss your ideas.

