

Report on the Alison Uttley Festival, Dethick, Derbyshire, August 26-29th

This highly successful event was held at Manor Farm, Dethick, the home of Simon and Gilly Groom, who kindly opened their home and conference room to visitors. Manor Farm so captured the imagination of Alison Uttley that she made it the site of her novel, *A Traveller in Time*.

In Tudor times, the house belonged to Antony Babbington, who led the plot to supplant Elizabeth 1st by Mary Queen of Scots. For this, he was executed and his family lost many of their lands.

The first day of the Festival was by invitation, with a lively mix of local personalities attending, including the M.P. From then on the public came in droves, viewing the wonderful collection of photographs and signed books, brought together by Gilly Groom, from manuscript sources at the University Library, Manchester; Ashburne Hall, Alison's old college and letters to Mrs Clay of Castle Top Farm from Alison. Gilly and her team laboured all day, selling refreshments to visitors, in aid of both the Uttley Trust and Dethick Church Roof Appeal.

We also sold several hundred pounds of Alison's books. Sadly, we had to tell visitors that the BBC film of *Traveller in Time* is not available to buy. Simon Groom, who worked for many years in T.V. as a Blue Peter presenter, is anxious to get this remedied. Similarly, it would be good to have the Little Grey Rabbit stories, made by Granada TV, shown once more.

During the Festival we were delighted to welcome Professor Denis Judd, Alison's biographer, and Susan Dickinson, who was AU's editor at Collins. They hosted a discussion on what it was like to work with Alison. Susan entranced the children present by reading aloud to them; Joyce Varty spoke on the connection between Alison's work and Derbyshire; Pete Castle contributed folk songs. Another visitor was Radio Derby, who gave Professor Judd and Sheila Griffiths of the Uttley Society, live time on air to speak of Alison's growing reputation, not just in children's literature but also in her country essays, where she recorded a way of life fast disappearing.

This was a delightful occasion, when so many devotees came together to explore Alison's work. The photographic exhibition followed the sequence of her life whilst the talks and discussions gave more insight into her personality. On the final day, visitors were able to visit the gardens of Castle Top Farm, where Alison lived as a child, and which is being lovingly restored by the Brennan family.