

## Past and Present

In this new feature we profile a villager from the Wychwoods and, in turn, the person they nominate who has contributed to the life of the local villages in the past.

Jo is one of the most well-known people in the area but is often referred to as The Turkey Lady for reasons which will soon become clear!

The Cook family moved into Cromwell House, Shipton in 1950. Jo's father was a seed merchant and chose Shipton because of business links in Worcester and London. The railway line made the village an ideal place to settle. There were three daughters, Lesley, Alison and Jo but also the Fowlers, who were wards of the family.

In 1960, Jo moved to Woodside where she lodged for 30 years. In this time she became a farm secretary for Jack Dunfee in Ascott who bred turkeys. Mr. Dunfee had good contacts with Canadian turkey farmers at that time and soon began producing Bronze turkeys and then the Beltsville White breed which enjoyed huge popularity in Britain. The Poults, ('day olds') were exported to Italy, Spain, Holland and the 'White Highlands' of Kenya.

When breeding became untenable the farm switched to fattening. At one time the turkey farm in Springhill, Shipton was producing 10,000 birds.

Jo eventually took over the farm in 1992 but now farms only 400 turkeys and 120 cattle. Her busiest time of year is Christmas but she and her sister, Alison who often helps out, have 'a very organised team' according to Jo so they manage to meet all orders in time with little panic!

Jo has found the red tape and bureau-



### Jo Cook

cracy of farming an incredible burden on her business. She showed me just a part of the paperwork-cow passports. It defies belief how much legislation has to be complied with these days.

"When you think that we have a such a little farm and our cows probably move just once in their lives it is incredible the constant paperwork I have to file for each animal," says Jo.

"Imagine if I had a 1,000 head of cattle!"

Recently, Jo was very badly injured when a cow charged at her. However, this lady is made of strong stuff and will soon be returning to full time work on the farm in time to fulfil those Christmas turkey orders.

"Its a way of life" says Jo. "I couldn't give it up. I have been very lucky in life."

Jo's 'newest' interest is bell ringing which she began in 1998. She and Alison both 'ring' in Shipton.

She also devotes time to the local British Horse Society and has always loved horses. Many villagers will remember her grey pony who lived in the field which is now Tothill.

"Sixpence would disappear at 3.15pm every day. His field sloped downhill so we couldn't see him at the bottom. In the end we found out he was lapping up attention from the schoolchildren leaving St. Mary's School!" says Jo. "He was a well-known character in Shipton."

Jan Harvey