

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 01

Date interview conducted: 4th December 1998

Name: Doreen Asker

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I was born in Dersingham. I lived at Doddshill.

Where do you live now?

Heath Road

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

Two brothers still live in the village; one in Post Office Road and one on Lynn Road. My parents both lived here until they died.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

The first memories are when I started school. It was at the building that is now the Community Centre opposite the Feathers. The Headmaster was Mr. Mason Jones who we all nicknamed "Old Foss" Polly Hudson was one of the teachers, and Miss Robertson and Mrs. Boyce who later married Mr. Barker. She hasn't long died and I think was well into her 90's. We used to have cookery lesson in the old Chapel. We moved to St. George's School when it opened after the war. I was put in the wrong class and I was put up a year older than what I was. They did not discover it until a year later so I had two years in the same group. Mr. Willis was the Headmaster and we were in the school choir. The Queen, she was Princess Elizabeth then, her mother and father the King and Queen, Princess Margaret came to the school. We had to sing the school song which was "England", and "Where E'er You Walk". Mrs Bell was the music teacher and she had this small class and we all formed into the choir.

We had a very much more formal education then now. We were allocated seats with desks with lids and all our books were in the desks. The teachers came to us we did not walk about to them. We stayed in the same classrooms until we moved on to our next group. No talking. We had a good PE teacher and sports. I can remember going on the sports outing and taking part in the Area Sports.

I liked school very much. I think more discipline would help now. We did the usual English, Maths, Geography, History and Religious Instruction. The girls had woodwork and it was a new thing out and we were allowed to have it in our last year at school. Mr. Bell was the woodwork teacher then we did sewing and

cooking. Our needlework teacher was very good and that got me into being a dressmaker. Miss Swift was the teacher. Miss Fife was the cookery teacher. The boys did the gardening, not as much as they did at Primary School. I can remember my brothers doing a lot of gardening there. The garden was at the back, the raised piece up the hill. There was a cottage there which was pulled down. There was a vegetable patch there we used to grow Marguerites. If you were good you were allowed to pick a bunch to take home.

My father worked on the farm and it was a recognised thing that my brothers would work on the farm when they left school. They never considered them doing anything else. It was assumed there would be a job for them on Mr. Stanton's Farm. My sister the oldest, and there used to be an estate agents in the bungalow where Mrs. Chisholm lives in (*The corner of Bank Road*). My dad paid for her to go to Lynn and she learned Pitman's Shorthand and typing. She worked in the office there for many years with Mr Monroe. I was put into apprenticeship with the Dressmaking; I did three years.

We went out to work when we were 14. My mother did not go out to work not until we were at Secondary School and Mr. Willis wanted a dinner lady/cook. He asked Mum to help; she was there 26 years.

Some work that she did do. Up Doddshill opposite our house where we lived which is now the field between the road and St. George's school it was all lavender fields. Every year when the lavender was ripe my Mum and the gang of women, my mum was in charge of all of them, used to go and cut all the lavender. That was our school holidays we spent all day in the lavender fields or the harvest. The lavender went to Heacham; Mr. Chilvers owned it then. I used to have to get the lunch ready for mum and my aunt.

My brother used to do a paper round; I used to do it if he wasn't well but I hated it. The other thing we used to have to do in the holidays was going up to the Harvest fields either up Chalky Hill or on the marshes with tea for the men the bottles of tea put in old socks to keep it hot. The bottles were wrapped in newspaper with an old sock around it. We all had bicycles.

I remember the year that my brother died; he was 17. He had a brain haemorrhage. About 2 months later another young lad of 16, one of the Axton boys, he died and another month later the boy Dennis died. He was epileptic He fell onto an electric fire and died. Three boys all of the same age group; that sticks out in my mind a lot and all were in the youth club.

There was a youth club at St. George's School. Miss Swift used to take that and one of the other teachers Mr Gee perhaps. We used to have dances. Miss Swift and Ivy Wheeler used to play the piano.

At the church hall Mr. and Mrs. Houchen used to run dances and they were big dances. The Old Tyme Dance Club went on for years; it used to be crowded. There were seats all round the room and Mr. Selby from Snettisham used to come with his record player and they used to be marvellous dos every Friday night all through the year. Then on Boxing Day they used to have one and on New Year's Eve. It gradually dropped off.

We also had the cinema when we were young. Someone used to come with a mobile cinema at the Forester's Hall. We'd go the pictures on a Tuesday night.

There was more feeling of community and you knew everyone in the village.

Have you belonged to any clubs or organisations in the village?

I belonged to Brownies, Guides and Rangers, the Youth Club, Sunday school and the church choir. Everyone went to church or chapel. It was somewhere to dress up for; you had dressing up clothes. You had your Sunday clothes and you had your week day clothes. We had gymslips at school it was not compulsory but was a uniform. You had the navy knickers and navy blue gym slips and a white blouse.

At Easter we all had a new pair of white socks; a new pair of white socks for Easter Sunday and a hat. If you were lucky you got a new pair of shoes as well.

We wore knee socks or thick stockings in the cold. There was the liberty bodices with the suspenders then.

What was the most important day you have ever spent in the village?

My wedding day or when the Duke of Edinburgh came to open the Sports Pavilion; I can remember the children being excited.

What are the biggest changes you have seen in the village?

I'm not that happy with the size of the village now; it has lost the village aspect. You don't know all the people now. There is not the community spirit. I think it is the older people who resent the newer people.

I hated the outside toilet the old bucket; there were no flush toilets. When we got married we had the flat over the shop in Manor Road, now the frame shop. We rented that flat and then Derek's grandmother died and left the house in the row of cottages the other side of it so we went there. We moved on a hand cart

and we pushed everything on a wheel barrow. While we there we won the pools; we had £232 in 1958. So then we were able to buy our own house so we bought the house on the corner of Senters Road. There was no flush toilet there. We had to put in a flush toilet and a bath room. My brothers and sisters all lived in Manor Road and we bought a tin bath between us and that used to go up and down Manor Road. You got the hot water in the old copper; you did not have a washing machine. I had a boiler.

My dad had an allotment and he kept pigs. Every year he used to kill a pig and he worked for Mr. Stanton so they used to kill them at the same time. The butcher used to do it and cut it all into joints for us and then Mr. Stanton used to brine his hams. When they had finished brining their hams we used their brine to brine our hams. That lasted us a long while; no freezers then. Relatives used to have it.

Christmas puddings and mince pies were made. You made your own mince meat. We had a big house full of relatives. Every Christmas Mum used to have to make a new hearth rug; you cut the old coats up and she was always sitting and finishing them on Christmas Eve. All the cottages had them. She made a carpet out of rug wool; her and dad did that of an evening. We did not have a radio. We used to sit and play jig saws and dad had a clock and we would time each other who could get down to the least time to finish the jig saw. My friend who lived down Doddshill had a radio and when "Dick Barton" was on we were able to go down and listen.

We had chicken at Christmas and that was another thing done on Christmas Eve. The chickens were killed in the week and they were dressed and had to hang in the shed until Christmas Eve and Dad was always out in the shed plucking the chicken and Mum was doing the rug.

There used to be the wine merchants down in the village Norfolk Stores. That's the old cottage next to the Red Pumps. We used to go down there on Christmas Eve