

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 02

Date interview conducted: 11th February 1999
Name: Gwendolyn Ida Balding.

When did you first come to Dersingham?

1930; I came to get married. *It's your husband's family who have lived here in the village?* Yes.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

Yes, several. My youngest daughter lives here with me, or I live with her. My youngest son lives still at what is known as The Dun Cow Farm. (*The Dun Cow farm now is not at all like the Dun Cow Farm that you can remember.*) No it is not a farm at all now it's just a name.

What are your earliest memories of the village and farm?

It was a very small farm about 100 acres, farmed by my father-in-law and my husband and his brother. We had cows, about 20 cows and all other crops we grew, sugar beet, potatoes and corn. We also had turkeys and chickens. We sold it to the local market. The cattle used to go to King's Lynn Market which was held every Tuesday and the milk from our cows we used to sell ourselves around the village. So we had a dairy in the farmhouse. So the milk was brought into the dairy, which hadn't been sold and it was creamed off and I used to make the butter. I should to sell it for 1/6d a pound. We had a big churn. You had large pans of milk which used to be skimmed off every day. The cream that was taken off was saved and collected for 3 or 4 days. The milk that was left was sent to the pigs. Then after 3 or 4 days I used to put it all in then churn and churn away until I had some butter which sometimes used to take 2 hours or even 3. You turned the big churn right over. It was a big churn and you didn't stop. At that time we didn't have any electricity in the house or any water. I was only 19 and I had come from London where I hadn't done anything.

We used to have oil lamps and the water was got up out of a well by pump. We had a pump. Most people had wells which they dropped their buckets down. I used to just get hold of a handle and pump. In about 1936 we got the water.

My husband was my fourth cousin and I'd always known him. We used to come down to Dersingham, for holidays. We used to have a hut at Heacham

and that's how we got to know each other. I lived near Hampstead. I used to love coming here to the quaintness of it all. I used to hate going back to London.

Station Road was here when I first came. The Lynn Road and Hunstanton Road. There were very few properties. There were not any houses down Station Road when I first came. I saw them all built. We made use of the station all the time. Our sugar Beet used to go away by train. My husband used to cart the sugar beet down the station; it went to Lynn to the Sugar Beet factory at Lynn. The cattle used to go by road; lorry. There was a time, when we were first married, my father-in-law went to buy young cattle my husband used to drive them home on the road.

We went to London now and then which was very nice. You could go to London for 7/6d. Dersingham to Liverpool Street. The train used to go at 5 and 20 to 7 and it would be in London at 10. The stops were Wolferton first, then King's Lynn, Downham, Ely, Cambridge and then straight through. We didn't use to have holiday makers here at all; Heacham and Hunstanton did. We didn't have a beach. There was a pier. When you went right over the marshes there used to be a little beach with a little pier; it was very small. It was there for the boats to bring up shingle and that sort of thing. We used to take the kids down there in a pony and cart and picnic on the beach. It wasn't a good beach it was all stony.

My day started at 7. Cook breakfast, a cooked breakfast, a proper one. Then there used to three of us. Myself, my father-in-law my husband and my son. My brother-in-law. We had a coal oven for cooking. Imagine an old fashioned kitchen with a fire and an old black range at the side. I used to do all my own cooking. You had to think to yourself how much coal to put on the fire to get the temperature up to what you wanted. You learnt by experience. We had the electric irons. I used to have a woman in on Mondays to wash for me. We had a copper we had to heat up to get the hot water so that was a day's work that I used to pay half a crown for. We had a mangle and hanging out. I did all the ironing the next day with the old metal irons. There was a lot of washing because there were three men working on the farm. The shirts were not like they are today. They were heavy thick ones. We saved it up and did it once a week because it was such a performance.

There was all the housework. The men used to come in for lunch at 12, another cooked meal. They would go out. My brother-in-law would come back to get the things for milking. Then at 5 o'clock we would have another cooked meal.

There was only one shop in the village at that time. They were two. There used to be a Parkers and Terrington's the butcher used to be across the road. And Terrington's the Grocers shop. There was also a grocers shop at the top of Station Road that was known as Linford's.

We used to kill our own pork of course. but that's all otherwise I used to buy from the butcher.

The villagers used to come for milk. After a bit my brother-in-law and myself used to deliver around the village in a pony and trap. No wait we didn't, we had a tricycle with a box on the front. Similar to what the Walls Ice Cream boxes used to be look. They had to bring the jug and we had to give them the milk out of the churn.

I had my first son after I'd been married nine months. Then I had my second, my eldest daughter and then 8 years after I had another son, then a few years after that came Linda.

I used to have chickens and sell eggs. They were 18d a dozen.

My first week's wages I was given for housekeeping was a pound. My first lot of groceries came to 32 shillings so I was in debt right from the start.

We had no radio. It was couple of years before I could afford a radio. It cost me £5. That was the first radio I had. It had a battery as we hadn't got any electricity.

We didn't have a holiday. The first holiday we had was when Robin was 8 years old. We never had a holiday. We could not afford to. My brother-in-law was there when we went away. We very rarely did. We always used to have one day off for the Agricultural Show wherever it was. It was in Lynn for a long while. And in Hunstanton but now its gone to Norwich. But we always had that one day off. It was a lovely day out.

We go to the pictures perhaps now and again. Not a lot else. It was a happy life. Not stressful, that word was never heard.

The big worry was when the Government took over and the Milk Marketing Board and we got all those forms. That used to worry us a lot.

(Did any of your family carry on with farming?)

Actually they all did.

My eldest daughter married a farmer's son. Then my oldest son he didn't ever work on the farm. We sent him off to boarding school. He stayed there until he was recruited. He went in that for 2 years. My youngest son he still farming up there. Well he's not farming up there, he's living at the farm house but he works for another farmer. So Baldings farm is now just a house with a bit of land around it. All of the land had been sold. Where Budgen's is now that used to be the old Dun Cow.

What was the worst time you remember?

How were you affected by the 1953 flood?

We were not affected all that badly. We managed to get the cattle off the marshes. The flood came up as far as the station. Other than help clear up and sort bodies out that was what we did. About 9 weeks after the flood they found a body down on one of our fields. I remember Michael had to go down with our tractor and fetch her home. A lady's body. There were so many people drowned.

They gave us some stuff they called Gypsum which we used to put on the fields, loads and loads of it. That was to take the salt out of the land. We could not grow a lot more a long while after that. It was about 6 or 7 years I think before the cattle went back down there. We had to have them up nearer the house. Our fields stretched down the railway line. Over the railway was marshland which we used to hire of the Queen, or King in those days.

The closing of the railway.

That was the worst thing. That stopped everything didn't it. We couldn't get our stock away, couldn't send the sugar beet or anything. It all had to go by roads everything was changed. We had to find lorry drivers. Then we had to go to Kings Lynn to get on the train. It would be a smashing thing today if they got it back between Lynn and Hunstanton. The traffic it would get off the road.

Can you remember about war time on the farm?

During the war my men stayed. We did not have any land girls. Both of them became Home Guard. My husband and my brother in law. There was rationing and all that. Even that was not really hard for farmers. We were self sufficient.

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

The electricity and the water; and of course housing now. Lynn Road was the first to be built up, bits and pieces were sold off to different people. We were not really affected. I can remember all the council houses over Whitehorse Drive being built. There was nothing there only fields. There was no shops up by Thaxters.

Centre Vale; the old Centre Vale was always there and then they built on it. The land going down to the by-pass was ours. The by-pass cuts the common field which still belongs to me. When they built the by-pass they came to force by the land. I didn't have any option. I had to sell them that part of the common. They wanted it for a picnic area. I didn't have any options. The common down where the picnic area is, not the actual picnic area but the rest belongs to me.

The whole place has changed from a lovely little village where every one knew everyone else into what it is today.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

It's an important date. Things won't change. We could do with a new village hall.