

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 04

Date interview conducted: 26th January 1999

Name: Eric Henry Cross

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I was born in Dersingham in 1922 in the house next to the Drift. My mother's family lived there all their life.

Where do you live now?

Heath House Heath Road.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

My mother and Father's family lived in Dersingham all their lives. My grandfather told me he used to work on the railway. He told me how they used to walk to Lynn to go to work every morning. Walk from Dersingham to Lynn on the railway and then walk home at night. There wasn't a train at that particular time. He didn't say how long it took him.

My Aunt told me. I have a photo of the old cottages that used to be opposite the Gamekeeper's Lodge. They were knocked down and Mecklenberg House was built behind them. They were pulled down before I was born.

There used to be some old cottages stood opposite the Feather's Hotel, next to the Emblems. They were pulled down a long while before my time; I've seen bits of rubble round there as evidence that they used to be there. There was one particular man used to live in one of them called Dan Grice (Grief?). My Aunt she seen him washing outside with a bowl on a table both summer and winter.

I have a sister and a brother living in the village.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

My first recollections are when I was about four or five. I was supposed to be taken onto the common but living next to the Drift we used to spend time after the tiddlers in the dyke there; they are all long gone now. The dyke is still there but when the water got polluted there; the tiddlers went. The Drift dyke down to the railway line you'd find water hens nest and quite a few water voles there. Since the dyke has been cleaned out nothing lives there now. At times we used to walk down to the sea. At Easter I remember we used to walk down to Dersingham Beach and have a day down there. There isn't a Dersingham Beach we used to call it that but it was either Wolferton or Snettisham. We used

to have to follow the banks to the sea and all the marshes were grazing marshes for cattle not for cereals like they are now. That was all altered during the war. The marshes were ploughed up and concrete roads were put in and they were used to grow cereals. They were to feed the people in War time.

I used to go to school; I remember walking to school. The Sears family (?) I remember them; they used to do quite a bit of laundry work mainly for the Sandringham House. I recall walking past their wash house being greeted by Mrs. Sears and her daughter and seeing the steam going through the roof tiles. They always had a cheery word for us children. They had a copper and did all the washing by hand in the large tin baths.

I liked going to school. I remember when we were allowed out to see the R101 airship when it flew over Sandringham. I can't tell the exact year but it must have been 35 or 36; they knew it was coming. It passed directly over head; it was huge.

During the lunch hour from school we used to go bird nesting. Some of us would go over the school wall and up into Sandringham Woods, do a bit of bird nesting, go home and have lunch and be back in time for school. We had hour and half for our dinner hour. Most boys had an egg collection. I never saw a magpie, hawk or fox; they were controlled then. There used to a lot of keepers on Sandringham at that time. Magpie is a predator, it will eat other birds eggs; they ate Pheasant eggs. The Royals came shooting more than they do now.

I was 14 when I finished school. I went as apprentice cabinet maker at Queen Mary's Carpentry School at Sandringham. I learnt cabinet making-making furniture. I worked there in 1936 for three years and the war came along and I ended up in Percival's Aircraft Factory in Luton. I could not survive there; I got 26/- a week and had to pay 23/- a week for lodging. So I intended to join the forces and when I came home there was a vacancy for a carpenter at Sandringham House. I was there in the carpentry shop at Wolferton until I was called up for service in the Navy. I was away from the village for 4 years.

The boys from the village worked in various departments in Sandringham like the gardens, the carpenters' yard which included brick-layers and painters, woods department where they did work in the woods and the Wood Yard. There weren't too many other jobs locally. At that time in this village there were three builders and jobbing builders.

At Sandringham I can recall at 5 o'clock which was knocking off time up there you'd see all the workers coming down the hill on their bicycles. Sometimes you'd see about 30 of them about 10 past 5. You could be had up if you did not

have a light on your bike.

That was when we had a local policeman not like it is today. He went round on his bicycle. He had to patrol his beat our biggest fear of him was on Fireworks Night. You never knew when he'd catch up with you. There was a little bit of vandalism years ago but not as bad as it is today. There used to be the village dump on the common, on the Shut Up Common. We used to buy the fireworks from Riches Shop take them on the dump, put them in the bottles, light them and blow the bottles up.

We went on the Sunday School Outings. They used to go on Horse and Wagon. They went to Snettisham Beach. We used to go to Hunstanton on the train. That was our Sunday School Outing. We'd play on the beach. We had a few pence to spend.

As a little boy my first pocket money was a halfpenny a week. I'd spend it on sweets.

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

No, I didn't belong to any clubs at all in the village. I'm a bit of a loner I'm afraid. I used to play football and cricket on the common with the other lads; never good enough to play for the village.

I went to church. I was in the choir for several years. The organist and choir master was Mr. Willis; he used to come down on his motor bike and side car. He'd go to the service and on your way home you'd see him in the Coach and Horses. We had practice once a week. The choir was quite big; there must have been about 20.

What was the worst time you remember?

The worst thing was doing away with the railway. I know the floods were a disaster but they did not really affect Dersingham, or the inhabitants of Dersingham. They were a disaster for Snettisham. It affected the Marshes.

Look what an asset the railway would be today with all the congestion on the roads, which will get worse. But it will never come back. I suppose it was not viable. The railway then was a fair distance away from the village. Now there is a lot property near the railway. I can remember on Sundays during the summer time. We went to watch the excursions go past from the bottom of the Drift. The day tripper excursion trains were from the Midlands. Six or seven would go through at five minute intervals; this is before the war.

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

I can remember before the war when piped water came to the village; 1934. Before that we drew water from wells. We never had a well, we had to go over the road and pump it up from my grandfather's well. There were various places where there were wells. One of the main ones was at the Albert Victor; it was round the back. Several occupants from Lynn Road used to go there for their water. You had a yoke on your shoulders and two buckets. Mostly the men went to get the water. We used the water a bit different to today. Sharing a bath; I recall there were six of us in the family and three of us would go through the same bath water. Once a week we had a bath. Most people had a copper in the house to heat the water. A cast iron copper was bricked in. Washing took a good part of the day. I can never recall the pump at the Albert Victor running dry. A lot of the old wells got filled up when Mains water came. I remember someone committing suicide in a well.

I recall the electric light coming; about 1935/36. We had oil lamps before that it was candles. Cooking was done on a cast iron range. I remember turning the switch on and thinking how marvellous it was.

Since the war the village has grown out of all proportion. I never visualised it would grow like it has; I hope the growth slows down a bit. There is nowhere else unless Sandringham sells off some land which is unlikely. I think it has grown too fast. In my youth I knew 90% of the people and where they lived and we'd pass the time of day. Now people walk past and do not speak.

There were two sides to the village. Us who lived this side near the common were called "The Whin Bush Jumpers"; Whin Bush is gorse. At the other end they played on the Recreation ground or the Pastures.

I can remember Park Hill being developed. I can remember the house I lived in at the Drift there was nothing between it and the Dun Cow. It was agricultural land and pasture.

I was a builder. I did not build many on the village. Mr. Chambers was a builder. Mr. Townsend built most of Park Hill, Centre Vale and Valley Rise. The White Horse council houses were built just after the war; I worked on them in 1947. The pub was open then.

There were five pubs in the village. They were all favoured at different times for some reason. Sometimes the change of landlord was the reason. One would be a favourite for a while then they would drift away to another. The Albert Victor had a bowls club. The Coach and Horses had one.

