

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 05

Date interview conducted: 24th Sept. 1997
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When did you first come to Dersingham?

I first came to Dersingham in 1967. At that time I was working in a hospital in King's Lynn and I was approached by Doctor Shaw, the Dersingham doctor at that time, and asked if I'd like to come into partnership at Dersingham. He asked me if I wanted general practice; I said, "Yes I do but not at this stage." He said that we want a new partner and we were going to ask you to have a meal with us; but come anyway. My wife and I came and we saw things and we decided there and then that this was right for us. So we moved at the end of October 1967 and I started in the surgery on November 1st that same year.

In those days there wasn't the lovely purpose built surgery then. Would you tell us about the surgery then.

At that stage the surgery was a small bungalow in Bank Road. It had 2 rooms, one was a waiting room that you walked straight into and the other was the consulting room. There was no examination room, no toilet or anything like that; it was just the two rooms. Just one doctor at a time and no receptionist; the doctor had to do everything, come and call the next patient through.

Where do you live now

I live in Dersingham obviously, in 24 Station Road. There were just a few houses down Valley Rise off to the right; I think about 10 houses when we moved in. At the end of the 10m houses was just grassland or field. The builder was building houses down there.

Were the trains running?

The trains were running when we moved in, yes.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham

Just my wife. We've had three children but they've all left the nest. One is married, that was last year.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

My earliest memories of the village are basically what a lovely quiet place and everybody was so friendly. You just seemed to know everybody. It was a small village. But moving into Dersingham I think our first memory was the very first night we were here we found it difficult to sleep because it was so quiet.

We had lived in King's Lynn on London Road at the they were doing some gas works and outside the flat where we lived was an uneven man-hole cover and all through the night these heavy lorries came and it was BUMP. And one just wondered if it was an accident each time. And it was just so quiet here we found it hard to settle at night.

And were things different at the clinic? Did people have different health problems?

I suppose they did. It's a bit difficult to think back over 30 years. The basic medical problems must have been the same but perhaps they weren't diagnosed to the same extent in the way they are diagnosed today.

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

Clubs and Organisations I think no. What we have been members of was the Methodist Church in the village because we were members of the Methodist Church in King's Lynn before we moved. And during that time we also attended the mid-week fellowship at the vicarage, mid week, on a Wednesday. But I suppose after about 12 years or something like that we left the Methodist Church because we felt at the time it was right to do that. And it was strange that three or four other couples had left their churches and we came together because we thought it was right and we formed a fellowship in the village which we called The Vine Fellowship. We started meeting in our house, in our front room but we then found people were finding it difficult to come to church in someone's house and we looked for a hall in the village. It happened just at that time the Forester's Hall was available so we started meeting in the Forester's Hall on a Sunday morning. We also had times of showing mid week film sessions for us and anyone else who wanted to come along. There came a time in the Forester's Hall when it was a little too small for us. There was just the main room and a little room off at the back and the children we had for Sunday School would find it hard to fit into that room at the back. So I looked around the village and the Youth and Community Centre was available at that stage. So we moved into there from whatever time it was.

Could you tell us a little about the Vine Fellowship?

It's very informal; we don't have a set pattern or liturgy. We don't have pews behind each other. When we met in the Forester's Hall and again in the Community Centre we used chairs around in a circle so we could in fact see each other. Some people find that difficult because its nice to hide behind someone in the pew behind. We found it important to see each other, to talk to each other and be, if you like, a bit more direct and personal. We do pray, we do sing choruses and we do a sermon. We had a guitar and a keyboard; there is always music there.

How many people belong now?

We started off with three or four families of us, perhaps 10 people. It grew up and down a bit over the years; we've had as many as 30 or 40 at times. But we found that people for reasons not under their own control have moved from the village, employment and other things, so our numbers have dropped gradually. Eventually, going about four or five years, our numbers dropped so it was not a viable proposition to meet in a big hall like the Community Centre so we came to meeting in our own house here and up to 10 or a dozen people was a comfortable number. Even as few as five or six was comfortable. We felt it, that Sunday morning was not a good time to meet. We felt if we met mid week and not on a Sunday we were free then to go to other churches on Sundays if we wanted. And now we have become a prayer fellowship and we meet every Tuesday evening at our house purely as a prayer fellowship.

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

That's a difficult question to spring on somebody is that but I suppose the most important day has got to be my very first day in the surgery on November 1st 1967 when I took the plunge of actually being there and having people come with their problems and having to find the solution for them. And there's no training work then it was straight in at the deep end in general practice.

Can you remember anything particular about that day?

Well I can because a lady came to see me, it may not have been the first day but certainly the first few days. She had scalded her arm and I had to dress it and she came back to see me; in fact she remembers that, she is now in her nineties and I still see her at intervals as a friend in the village. *(Note from transcriber: This lady was my mother Thelma Fiddick who died in 1999 aged 96 and did indeed always remember this).*

What was the worst time you remember?

Well a very sad time was when the station actually closed. When we moved in there was the regular train service and we said we must go sometime into King's Lynn on the train and we never made it before the station closed. So that a sad time; we regretted that.

Another bad time was going back three or four years our garden here we had three or four inches of water here in a good part of the back garden through most of the winter. I had to investigate that and in fact down the side of our garden there is a dyke that takes the water from the main road, Station Road. It goes down through our garden, through the next garden and the next garden and eventually it goes out into the sea. But in our deeds we have to keep that dyke open. It turned out that some people further down the line hadn't kept their dyke open so water was coming from Station Road through our garden and not

being able to get out back into our garden. I got the NRA onto this and they soon sorted it out. They didn't clear it, they can't, they have no authority to clear it but they tell people to clear it.

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

The biggest changes over 30 years; I've got to think of the increased building in the village over that time; houses and estates. As I say there were just 10 houses down Valley Rise there are now 100 or so possibly. There were more houses built down Station Road as well; now off the left we have Mountbatten Road, going through to the Main Road at the other end. So houses and estates, yes.

The other big thing is the by-pass because the traffic doesn't come through Dersingham now to get to Hunstanton; it goes along the by-pass. It's much easier to get out onto the main road. The other of course is the traffic lights; those were put in by the builder at the time because he was told he couldn't do any more building because of the amount of traffic until the traffic lights at the end of the road. He paid for those himself.

The other of course is the new surgery. Bank Road is now reverted to a dwelling place and we have a brand new surgery in Saxon Way. That was opened in 1985.

Would it be on the site of Lloyd Pratt's? I gather it was. Yes, or very close to it any way. Part of it was. *I believe all those grounds belonged to the Lloyd Pratt's property that was burnt down.* As far as I know, yes, but I can't go into detail about that.

How has the house building affected the work of the doctor's around here?

It has obviously increased the work load tremendously. I think when we first moved into Dersingham there were about 2000 or 2500 people. We're now nearly double that population. So obviously the work load has increased tremendously. The new surgery is of course run by appointment which does make it easier. In the practice I think there are now seven doctors. When I started there were two; I joined it as the third. There were three partners, the senior one retired and I came in at the bottom. So there were three partners, then we reached to four, to five, to six. Then I had to retire through ill health; then it crept up to seven.

But is the area they have to cover much bigger?

Probably not, no, because when I joined we were Dersingham, going back to Wolferton, Babingley There was then Ingoldisthorpe, Snettisham, Ringstead and Sedgford. There was Snettisham, Heacham, Hunstanton and even beyond there Holme. Now we have clamped down, we don't go beyond Heacham.

I think the hours were longer yes; but I enjoyed it. Often I didn't finish surgery until half past seven, eight at night; that doesn't happen these days. But I enjoyed, I even did a visit on the way home; but I enjoyed it.

Have we come to full stop with the building?

I think so. I do not think there is much more building land in Dersingham left. There this new estate planned but I don't think there is any more.

Other changes in the village. There has been a library since I came to live here, which has been a godsend for some people. Also the Dun Cow, a landmark for Dersingham, is now Budgen's. The other change in the village is the loss of a High Street bank; there used to be a Barclay's. Also there's been a tremendous growth in the Garden Centre. Thaxter's Garden Centre since Rankin's amalgamated. There is a big garden centre which is very widely patronised.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

It may sound negative but I think it's positive; first thing I think is no more growth. But I think bearing in mind the lack of land I think there is unlikely to be more growth. I would like to see further growth together of the churches in Dersingham. There's Anglican, Methodist and Catholic at the moment and there is a togetherness to a degree; but I would like to see further growth together of that over the years. And I would like to see arising the growth of a definite Christian community. I'd like to see the people getting into closer contact and fellowship with each other. This does happen as we have these united services once a month at the moment. And there is a growing closeness of people but I would like to see further growth even without wearing denominational badges; just a growth of a Christian community rather than a church community.

Will you retire in Dersingham?

I retired in 1988 because of ill health. I'm still fairly active as much as I'm able to. I've had MS, I may as well mention it, for 25 years. It was diagnosed in 1972 and since that time I've worked as a GP in the practice. I suppose I did find it increasingly difficult as the years went on. But in 1987 it was pointed out to me I wasn't doing things I used to do and that was only because I wasn't physically able to do them. It was difficult to walk up people's driveways, climb their stairs and the sensible thing to do was to retire at that stage. In retirement I've still kept fairly active doing things.

You've become a village personality seen around the village in a wheelchair.
It's a scooter actually. I intend to go on into retirement in this village.

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham?

Not as such no, because my aim is to be cremated. I expect to be cremated at Mintlyn and my ashes scattered there. *Do you come from this area?* No, I was born in Bolton. I went to school in Bolton. My father who was a bank manager was moved to Longeaton Nottingham then from there I went to University. He retired at Sidmouth in Devon.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

That's the year 2000. I suppose in many ways, well what it means to me is that in that year 2000 it will be two thousand years since the birth of Christ and in many ways it doesn't mean more to me than that.

What would you like to say to someone in Dersingham in a 100 years time?

Difficult to know that but perhaps the main thing I'd like to say to someone on 100 years time is welcome to this village.