

# **DERSSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT**

## **INTERVIEW 08**

**Date interview conducted:** 11th March 1999  
**Name:** Gill Griffin, I live at 4, Woodside Avenue

### **When did you first come to Dersingham?**

I was born in this village in 1935.

### **Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?**

My youngest son lives in the village. My eldest son lived in the village until 18 months ago then he moved to Ingoldisthorpe.

### **What are your earliest memories of the village?**

One of the first things I can remember is going down getting the milk from Mr. Balding's. Mr. Fred Balding, he used to live opposite White Horse Drive. It was only about 200 yards from my house. I used to go down there with a can for fresh milk; I was probably 3 or 4. You could see the house nearly from where I lived. I lived on the Main Road opposite Bank Road. I didn't have to cross the road, just 200 yards down from where I lived on the same side off the road. There wasn't the traffic.

Another thing I can remember is seeing all the sheep come down the road; lots of sheep, and it was a picture to see those sheep because they completely took all the road. I mean you just used to stand and watch them. People used to run outside to get all the droppings for the garden. I can't remember how often it used to happen but it was a regular sight. Same with the big steam engines used to come down the road. I don't know where they come from; probably from Thursford when they used to do the roads.

The sheep were possibly coming from farm to farm. Whether they went to Mr. Balding's field I don't know but I can always remember seeing them pass Linford's Corner. You'd hear them and then you'd watch them and they'd go right down the road. They could have been coming from Jackson's which is still on the Main Road on the hill going towards Hunstanton. His son still lives there. I can remember him moving out from there. Then his son took it over. He was a Methodist preacher. He moved away.

*Can I ask you now, Houchen's coaches,  
Mr. Houchen he was your---what?*

He was my father. Before he started in the coach business he used to work at Terrington's the butcher's, now John Lincoln's Funeral Parlour. He used to be a butcher and slaughterer. When I was a little girl he used to go out on the butcher's round and when he'd finished he had some cars. He started up a taxi service and then he had the bus business. He kept the bus business at Bank Road. There is still a garage there now; he had that built I think early in the 1950's. It was a big decision. He started with a very old bus, an old star bus.

He had one or two second hand ones. Then I can remember him having his first bus; it came from Dougal's (?) in London; it was real event and everybody came out to look at this new bus. He progressed till he had 5 new buses.

He had school contracts. He had football teams. Dart teams. Then later on he used to do the tours. He used to do school trips. Mr. Harrison of King's Lynn, George Harrison, used to organise the trips to the Lake District for St. James' Boys School and they used to stay at Hammerbank. He used to do that every year. From then on Mr. Harrison would probably have other trips out and father would take holiday trips in England. Two buses always used to go. It wasn't any problem finding drivers then. There was public buses; not very many and it was quite a thriving taxi business. Soon as I was 17 I couldn't wait to pass my driving test so then I use to do taxi work and I used to drive mini-buses. I used to take loads to Yarmouth or wherever. After I left County Electrical Services in King's Lynn, where I worked in the office when I left there, I worked there for 5 years, I helped my father. He finished about '67 I think. He sold it to Mr. Wagg. It started to go down after that. By then there was a lot of cars. No one had cars then.

*The village was pretty dependant on him.*

They were then, yes. It was a very busy time. There wasn't hardly a night when he didn't have to work.

My mother used to drive on schools as I did as well. In fact everything was out on schools. It was school contract work. They used to take children from all the surrounding villages to all the different schools, such as Harpley, Flitcham, Dersingham, Hunstanton. Pick up all round to take the children.

I went to the local village school and I can't remember when Dersingham Secondary School opened. There was 5 or 6 girls we all went to Gaywood Park School. We went on the bus.

Flitcham children used to go to school at Flitcham from Anmer, and Shernborne. I used to pick up a teacher from Dersingham. She used to teach in Harpley School and I used to pick up another teacher in Hillington, a Mrs. Emmerson, and then I picked up children at Harpley Dams and took them to Harpley School. We all walked to school.

When I was a little girl I can remember we had to have soldiers billeted with us; we had 3. We had a 3-bedroomed house but they had to sleep in the front room - bedroom I can always remember. One of them taught me to ride a bicycle; they used to teach me over the playing field.

There was a lot of bushes on the field, opposite Mr. Cross. There was just a track across to the other gate; it was all little bushes. What always stuck in my mind was that none of them came back. They all got killed in the war; one of them came from near Lowestoft. I have a letter that the parents wrote to my parents; they wrote this letter 1941 I think.

Other families had to have some. If you had a spare bedroom you had to have them. It was just me on my own then; I was an only child. Then we had to - the evacuees came. I had 2 cousins living in London and they were evacuated here. So they came to live with us after the soldiers had left. Then one of my cousins went to my aunt's in Heacham and the other cousin stayed with me all my young life. She went to Dersingham school. She was here a long while. They was happy here. We had a happy time here. I can always remember all the evacuees coming off the train. Several evacuees were put in what was a hotel right near the station, down Station Road. There were several families there. There was some more in the white house on the Main Road.

Another family near the Fish Shop which is now the Chinese; there was others opposite the church. I don't think they all arrived at once. Some of them came with their parents and their parents lived here. The family who used to live at the White House I think their name was Hold? One of the families that lived at the Railway Hotel was the Peels. I can always remember my mother saying she didn't have anything. She was a relation and she wouldn't take anything off her sister.

My mother used to do a lot of dress making from any scrap of material she would make up things; she always made our clothes. I can't remember going to King's Lynn as a little girl.

You knew all the people. There was a lot of us girls used to play together. There was my cousin Margery Houchen used to live on Centre Vale, Elsie Batterby, Marian Carter, Margaret Watts, who now lives in America, Joy -----

who lives in Norwich. We always used to meet up and just enjoy ourselves. Our pleasures were simple really. We used to go to one another's houses. I can't actually remember it as wartime. I can remember the ship? searchlights. I just saw these searchlights in the sky.

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

My mother used to run the Concert Party. The Dersingham Premiers Concert Party; they were mainly all village people. There was one man from Snettisham; he used to sing. One lady from Gaywood who played the accordion. Mrs. Nora Nurse, she was in it. Mrs. Walden was in it. Yvonne Hyner. Rita Hyner and I used to tap dance. We was very young.

We used to go to tap dancing lessons. Then there was Edna Linford, Peggy Martin, and several other names. There wasn't much social life. And that was entertainment for people. And then we used to go out doing it in all the villages. Out as far as Gayton, Bircham, Snettisham. My dad used to take us and we used to have a trailer and put all the props on the back. My mother used to make nearly all the costumes. There used to be little sketches and other - all variety of things. A singer and a comedian. My mother used to write the sketches. One scene was a sailor's horn pipe. And the sailor's hats - I can remember her making those out of - you remember the bags of flour we used to get - they were a muslin bag - we washed those and then starched them and she would make the sailor's hats. We had a lot of long dresses; she used to make a lot of them. Sometimes she had help. My mother had a spare bedroom then so she used to put it in there all packed in cases. It was nearly every week we was out with the concert party somewhere.

It was just after the war. There used to be programmes made out. They would be put on the notice boards. The hall was always packed. There was no television. People really used to like it. There was no other entertainment. There was one particular place we went; I think it was Gayton. The stage was made up of \_\_\_\_? On top of that was some blackboards. I remember Rita Hyner and I used to tap dance on these blackboards.

I used to belong to The Young Mothers. I don't know how long that ran for. I went after I had my first child and I ----- it over about 3 year afterwards. As a little girl I belonged to the Girls' Life Brigade; it was a Mrs. Bird who ran it. It was more popular than the Brownies. There used to be several of us go. It was all interesting , something to do. You had to go to Sunday School as well as the Girls' Life Brigade. We used to go on church parades. We always had to have our uniform on. It was chapel.

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

The day I got married. 1956; he was from Bircham and I met him dancing. My mother used to run dances. She used to run the old time dances, in the Church Hall; or the Institute as it was called. She used to run them regularly every Friday. They used to be packed. People from all different villages used to come. We used to go out in the taxi, people used to book it up to go to the dances. Used to be a dinner every year and a fancy dress. And that was where I met my husband.

It was old time dancing. The Valeta, the Boston two step, Mr. Selby, he had a record player; it was the old records. Mr. and Mrs. Bachelor from Docking and Mr. and Mrs, Fred Owen from Heacham taught the steps; it was very popular.

I moved away from the village in 1963. My husband worked for the Construction Industry Training board and we went to live at Bircham nearer his work. Up till then we lived in Bank Road next to my fathers garage. My parents had our bungalow. I came back to the village 18 months ago. I was coming back two or three times a week. My parents lived here and both my children at one time.

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

I noticed all the changes. I think how it's got so built up. When I think back where I used to live I used to look out of the bedroom window and it was a big field with a pond in the middle. From my bedroom window I could look across to Chapel Road. I could see the bake house that Mr. Fitt used to keep; where we used to go when we came off the school bus, we used to go and get fresh bread. We'd wait for it to come out of the oven and we'd get fresh bread. There was no library or bungalows there. Not so many changes in the road where I lived. When the Dun Cow used to be there and there was no houses - all where Mountbatten Way - just like all fields. Doddshill there was hardly any houses going up there. Mr. Lloyd-Pratt's was a beautiful place and that is all built up.

Where the library stands, all round that corner, Mr. Reynolds used to have his nurseries. The house on the corner was always derelict as I remember. But next to that one Mr. Reynolds's shed his nurseries it was always kept lovely; and all greenhouses, I can remember all the cucumber. That old house isn't there now, that's all bungalows; the same where the Gamekeeper's is now. That was always like a derelict place.

***You've seen a lot of changes. You are not happy with it?***

Things can't go back; they've got to progress. We would all like to have that time back again. But I'm afraid it's the population everywhere.

**What was the worst time you remember?**

I think it was about the railway closing. The railway station always looked nice. Mr. Tilson used to be the Station Master. They used to have all flowers, all where there were steps was all plants. It was just an event to see all the trains coming in. I can remember when the prisoners of war came home there wasn't many cars about but my mother or father would go down to meet them in the taxi and take them home, all their baggage. There was always a lot of people down there to greet them. That was one of the sad things when that closed. The station used to be full. If anyone got married and go away for a honeymoon on the train there would be crowds of people on the station to see them off. One of them (soldier) I remember in particular. I don't know how long he'd been away He marries Eva Balding (*Poor quality recording here*) When they got married I was asked to be their brides-maid with another girl. We went to the wedding on a fire engine because he joined the fire service. Mr Tilson [the Station Master] retired.

The floods; I can remember the water virtually up as far as the station. I didn't see the animals which were drowned. There was a lot of talk about all the animals But I didn't see very much of it.

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

The only thing I can think - would they have liked to have lived in 1800's. I wonder what the difference would be from 1800 to what it is going to be in 100 year's time. One of the hardships for people was washing. I can remember my mother filling her copper up, lighting the fire. You couldn't start your washing until the water had got hot. All done by hand, had to go through the wringer, no dryers or anything like that and then the old flat irons. The washing was done on one of the old rubbing boards. I can remember my grandparents and especially my granddad he used to help my granny with the washing and he used to have one of the dolly tubs. It was big drum about three foot high like a barrel. That would be hot water in that the dolly was a long stem with three feet on it and a long handle to turn it. So the same action a washing machine uses today. I can see my granddad doing that now. It was soda I think. I can remember soda going in. Everything was white; all white underclothes, bed linen, shirts. I can't remember colours. Everything was boiled. I think they had overall type things then.