

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 09

Date interview conducted: 13th November 1997
Name: Albert Haslam (normally Bert)

When did you first come to Dersingham?

First time was in September 1968. We actually chose this plot of land where we live now (*Edinburgh Way*) and we moved in when the bungalow was completed in March 1969. I was working then in King's Lynn at the college.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

Could you tell us something of the development of the village since you first came here.

The village then was quite small relative to how it is now with very few estates. Valley Rise was being made as a large estate. This estate had probably been started about 2 years previously. Other than that I think that the village itself, this estate in particular, Centre Vale Estate it was called, was actually developed up to about half way up Queen Elizabeth Drive. The rest of it had not even been started. The plans were there and we could see where we live now as a place on a plan, but there was certainly no buildings. We were able to watch the development throughout the winter as it was being built. They were part way up Valley Rise. We also looked there in case we wanted to live in that place but we preferred this spot overlooking the pastures at the back.

They have been there for hundreds of years and the history tells us that it was very much as it is now. There was an old Hall at the back, not in our time but in History and I'm interested in History. The old Hall was in the middle of the pastures behind what is now the bowling green with the moat around it. The moat is still there.

The church is directly opposite and it is just at the side of the church hall now.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

Yes they do, Alan, our son and his family, live on Old Hall Estate which is also a new estate and wasn't here. That was a pasture just at the back here. Our daughter lives in Ingoldisthorpe just up the road.

Old Hall Estate is named after the Old Hall which I can remember being there, a horrible old building when we first came to the village.

Yes that was built in 1671 at the same time as two other important buildings. One was Westhall manor at the bottom of Manor Road there and the other

building at that time all built within one or two years was the Tithe Barn.

The main part of the village would have been around Chapel Road and Sugar Lane. Down to the bottom of Chapel Road near to the traffic lights are some old houses there, cottages that go back at least 300 years or more. So Chapel Road would have been an important part of the village in those days.

Fern Hill and all these developments go back a fair while but I don't think they are ancient in the true sense; they are not medieval.

I hope we have reached the end of the building in Dersingham. Since we have come here in 1969 the housing development in this place has increased two-fold from the Valley Rise and Centre Vale which were the first, you've had your Old Hall Estate, Hanover Estate and the Guinness Trust which when we came were in fact allotments. There's the Mountbatten Estate which is massive. There's the King's Croft Estate. There is the Saxon Road and Tudor Way where the doctor's surgery is now. All of these were all pastures at the time. Just as the Old Hall which was really an old part of Dersingham. It was very close to what was the old Dersingham Hall on this pasture at the back of us.

I think developers must look very keenly at the allotments on Station Road. That seems to be a valuable bit of building land. But I believe it is not touchable.

And one up Sandringham Road which is I think is common land, as the allotments are built on common land. Therefore, they belong to the people in truth. It is managed by a trust, Dersingham United Charities. *They would have to give permission for a developer.* Yes, there is already land at this stage that is common land that is rented to Sandringham Estate where people don't have the use of it; only in name.

The allotments are still used by individuals. I think it would be fairly easy these days if somebody wanted to rent an allotment I think the chances of getting one now are quite high. If we went back 40 years they would probably have to wait until someone died or something.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

When we came there weren't all these estates. Some of the things that come to mind there were 4 petrol stations in this small village. There were also four pubs.

These days we have one petrol station now. *Where were the other three?* Where Cox's garage is now, Heath Road Garage the first one on the left as you come into the village, that was one and Red Pumps on Chapel Road. From four

we've now got one. So you've no choice now, it's Hobson's choice.

Do you think the by-pass made a difference.?

Yes it did. The by-pass we had been waiting for, for something like 50 years. That was the most exciting in this village I think really, was when people got exasperated and decided it was time they did something. I think you call it people power now. One Sunday we all went a walk and everyone joined in. And we just walked down from the village centre down the Main Road to the spot where the island is now. It was a kind of protest but it was as peaceful and friendly as one could wish but the message got over to the Ministry at the time and in fact action took place very soon afterwards.

People who have recently moved into the village and don't know anything about when there wasn't a by-pass have no idea of what it was like, particularly of a Sunday.

My first thoughts of that one are, each Sunday there would be a queue of traffic through the village, week in week out and if the sun came out the traffic was twice as long. And we had no traffic lights at all in the village then. We used to have a part time policeman who used to put his white coat on and stand at the corner of Station Road there and direct the traffic, each week that used to take place but in the summer particularly. It became almost a mockery at the end because they came up with all sorts of reasons why they couldn't make it. But they had apparently been putting the by-pass off since the 1930s so it had always been talked about. Every time it raised its head there'd be a new type of objection whether it be money, or no need for it.

The last one was the biggest joke of all - the moth. I don't know a lot about the moth because no-one ever sees it. And as someone said yesterday it's still not turned up and no-one ever mentions it except as a joke now. [Ed: the moth concerned was *Choristoneura Lafauryana*; it is now recorded as extinct in Britain]. That was the last objection and really the silliest. I think the people power, the little walk through the village, in fact swung the issue. The Ministry in fact acted very soon after and all these silly objections, and money was found and it went ahead.

There's no doubt it is a big improvement, life in the village is so much easier.

The people who weren't pushing it were the traders in the village, petrol being one. And of course we've seen the difference since. You can imagine people like Thaxter's would be appalled all the traffic being taken away. In fact it doesn't seem to have affected them one iota. They've gone stronger than ever. They were always a good village shop and always very available. Always open for long hours, 7 days a week, they still are, more than ever now in spite of the fact there is a by-pass.

They were in competition with a shop next door on the same site, Rankins. It was fierce competition until Thaxters took over the whole thing.

I can remember seeing a notice outside which said "Compare our prices". Indeed. They used to stand outside and look at each others prices each morning.

Well we had no Roman Catholic Church in those days either.

The doctor's surgery I remember was in Bank Road and was such a tiny little place. When you were sitting in what was called the waiting room your knees were almost touching each other with the person opposite. I suppose that was what was part of a small village and hadn't kept pace with the growing numbers. This village had always been a growing village. I have populations of this village going back hundreds of years. So it had been growing and I suppose the fact that there was just one doctor hadn't really kept up with the times. And eventually it was seen that you had to do something and lo and behold when the Saxon Way Estate was started they made this lovely new Dersingham Surgery. And of course it became a team of doctors instead of just one.

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

No, other than the church, I've devoted most of my time with our St. Nicholas Church. I used to be on the PCC I didn't re-apply to go on there again, I'm quite happy doing what I do. So I'm on a number of things, the finance side. Myson's the treasurer but I'm assistant treasurer so we look after that side. On the other side I have taken a great deal of interest in the history of the church and writing about it; being a church recorder. I help with the publication from NADFAS that is now in the possession of our church. So there's a true record of all that is in the church. Both the building and its material contents so everything is in there and a very useful document that is. The contents need looking after and the churchwardens have to be very responsible. That is their duty and they undertake that when they sign on as a churchwarden.

One or two things that highlight my interest in the church; it was noticeable to me that we hadn't got a good booklet on the church itself. You go into churches and particularly cathedrals you can always buy a good booklet with photographs. We had a little publication but it was a little piece of A4 folded over and it needed some interesting facts but I thought it was lacking in quantity. So I set about re-writing a record of that. Eventually I completed that and published that in 1993 and we've given it a title "Early History and Church Guide". So I tried to guide people through the church in all aspects so I'm quite pleased about that one.

Almost at the same time I was doing something about the village itself but mainly I wanted to link it up with the church because there's my history and my love. So I thought the church started in Norman times, our present church, we have dates of vicars going back to 1106. So I thought if I could record something about what has taken part in the Dersingham's history that I could look up from history. I've got together what, we've given it a title, The Dersingham Chronicle. I tried to take snippets of information that I've found that I thought might be of interest. It proved to be worthwhile; people bought it and there was some nice comments about it.

It hasn't stopped there. I got very interested in the churchyard itself and the people in there because that also goes back hundreds of years as well. As long as there's been a church there's been a churchyard. Whilst the churchyard's been extended there's a lot of history in there about names of families that lived here. So I tried to set about - for years I've been walking through this churchyard, and looking at documents and visiting Norfolk Registry Office and Record Office and finding information. Eventually I published a list which is in the church now of all the names of people in alphabetical order and date order of everyone we know who is in the church, churchyard and of course some inside the church itself. They are all recorded so the lines of family, such as the Pell family who were Lords of the Manor in Medieval time, became mayor of Lynn and became an M.P.; his sarcophagus is in our church now. Now that family were a main family in Dersingham for 200 years. (*That's why we have a Pell Road.*) The strange thing is after that period of time in the early 1700's, the family that had been here and been the main family in the village for all these years suddenly disappeared because there was no ---- because they were all girls. There was no continuity; the Pells just disappeared from the scene. There are Pells all over the world these days, particularly in America, who do visit here and they are so interested in their ancestors.

What was the worst time you remember?

I can't really; the main floods in 57(sic) I wasn't here. There was a flood in the late 60s; no, no about 1978 but it didn't really affect us in Dersingham. There were heavy floods that did affect as near as Snettisham; there were lots of caravans badly damaged. There really isn't one bad time.

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

You've already said the biggest changes you've seen. You mentioned the petrol stations and the buildings I suppose they are the biggest changes.

Yes and one we do recollect; very soon after we came here was the moth.

We must remember there was a railway from Lynn to Hunstanton and that was running when we first came. The way it was announced that the train was

finishing after Doctor Beeching had been round Wyn and I went down one Saturday evening to witness this last train going through Dersingham and I do remember it had a wreath on the front as well. It was a sad moment because it was the end of an era It had been had quite important and people these days wish it were back and I'm sure there is a use for it. It certainly changed Hunstanton because the station disappeared soon afterwards. They were able to re-design Hunstanton so if they wanted to go back there they couldn't put the station where it was.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

First and foremost I would like the main building to stop once the Mountbatten has been completed; this is an extensive estate. It is going to take the village over to the new by-pass; it is so large, taking a lot of land up. Gelham Hall, one of the main Manors in the village in the medieval times, it's approaching that site now. I trust they don't build on it; that would be almost criminal. Because the site is there, it's marked on all maps so people do know where it is. I would like the village to stop growing as estate after estate and remain a village. A large village it will be but nevertheless it's a lovely village and I'd like it to remain a village.

The Old hall estate was woods here. Rabbits used to run across. It was gorgeous to take children and let them see nature and the lady who owned the land declared that it would never be built in her life-time. I'm afraid that didn't seem to hold much water once money started being offered. In quick time it was turned over and in fact whilst they were digging that land they found Roman coins buried in there. I remember the digger driver digging the footpaths, no roads for the estate and he came across this site with all the coins.

Will you retire in Dersingham?

We are retired now.

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham?

I would imagine so.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

Because I've been involved in this millennium project from St. Nicholas Church I've looked at it from the religious side than anything else. It's lovely to think the world had been going, I don't know how many years the world has been going from the date point of view all we ever talk about is 1997 now and we're talking about the year 2000. We know that's only a very small part of the life time of this world so what are we really talking about. We're talking about the time Jesus was here; so it's a religious connection. That's my feeling that it is wonderful that someone who lived ere 2000 years ago we are actually

celebrating the year 2000 since his birth year. I think that's wonderful and I would like to see that continue for ever more. Tom, our vicar had been the one who came up with idea of a millennium project where we've called it "1000 to 1" People are putting a coin a day into the boxes. But the whole idea is that it is tied up with the religious side and not with expecting something free out of a lottery. It completely changes the whole aspect and I'm all for this.