

# DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

## INTERVIEW 13

**Date interview conducted:** 21st April 1999  
**Name:** Ken John Martins. I am 77.

### When did you first come to Dersingham?

I have lived in Dersingham all my life; I was born here two doors away from this house, the Nook No. 64. *And you now live at No. 60. How long did you live at The Nook?* Till I got demobbed from the war. My Mum and Dad were married and lived in the village. My father was a postman for about 40 years I think in this village.

*Can you remember anything they told you about living in the village?*

They were hard times. They used to have to get the drinking water from the Albert Victor, two to three hundred yards away. *The Old Albert Victor in Manor Road?* Yes, if we wanted any washing water we got it from the Drift Dyke.

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

Well I first kept pigs and chickens over the Albert Victor, when I was about 12 years old; while I was still at school. My father went with me to buy them and I used to feed them when I went to school and feed them in the afternoon when I came back. I always wanted to farm. They cost about 5 shillings for a little pig.

*Had you any jobs to save money for the pig?*

I worked for Mr. Ewer who sold papers and boots and shoes and everything were Sue Mebbrey is now. *On the corner of Post Office Road?* Yes, and I was getting a shilling a week there for doing the garden and the pigeons.

I went to Dersingham Bottom School. *Can you remember anything about that?* Not really; there was a house in the school yard at the time and they was pulling it down. Us boys had the job of wheeling the bricks and the rubble rather than doing our lessons; we used to volunteer for that. It was a little beyond the playground where there is a garden. And there was a tree in the playground, a Chestnut tree. Sandringham Estate pulled it down to make it bigger and we volunteered to wheel the rubble out.

*What games did you use to play?*

Well, football, cricket and everything but I wasn't very interested in sports. Not like my father he was a very keen footballer, horse racing and every sport.

When I was school I had two allotments to attend as well as the pigs. Yes my time was taken up. The allotments were behind the Forester's Hall. Where the

houses are all on now.

*So your dad got you the allotments. Then you got your pig and chickens. Where did you keep the pig?*

I kept them down on the allotments.

When I left school at 14 I went to work in the Sandringham Gardens. And then all us single chaps was made redundant; six months notice. And Captain Fellowes took me on as his house boy and gardener and I got on very well with him. He was at Laycocks, Sandringham. He was the Estate Agent.

*Why were the single men given redundancy?*

Well the King abdicated at the time. They were shortening up and all the young single fellows got made six months notice; they were cutting down. I was the youngest one in the gardens, 15 then I think, Captain Fellowes took me on. He wanted me to go back with him after the war. He wanted me to go as his Batman when he was in the Scots Guards. My height failed me. You had to be five foot eight and I was five foot six.

*So Captain Fellowes employed you in his house, what jobs did you used to do then?*

Look after the horses, the garden, the stoke hole, the central heating, the cars and all the running about. When he went away I went into the woods for a few months, I went and volunteered for the Air Force. I left Dersingham at 19 I think. I was away about five years. My nearest base was Foulsham, just through Fakenham. Then from there I went on to the Mobile Signals Unit and we travelled around the country living in tents and then we went on manoeuvres. We went on the D-Day landings and went from France, to Belgium, Holland, and Denmark, I was a driver. *So you never actually flew?* No, I was with the Mobile Signals Unit; communications with the front line for the Air Force, at Uxbridge. It was all Morse code then.

*You were unmarried then you came back to Dersingham and was that when you moved into this house.?*

No, I went back to live with my mother and father for about a year and I worked on Sandringham Estate and then this Post Office job was going so I took that. The bungalow I'm in now came up for sale and I'd already bought some land at the back of the bungalow. We only got about £85 demob money plus what we saved a little. *How on earth did you buy a piece of land?* We bought this land for £350; I made an allowance home to my mother in case I got killed and she saved all that for me so I got to praise her for all that. It was five to six acres. *So that is the land behind your house.* Yes, and then I bought this bungalow for £600 when I had the chance of it I had to go up to West Newton and see my future wife. *Had she got any money in the bank?* They wanted a deposit. The

land was £350 and it was £950 altogether. *How many acres have you now got?* I've only got six acres now. I had when I was a -----yearold? I had about 140. I had this behind right down to the by-pass, some more land up Sandringham, on the Sandringham Hill allotments, over the back of the Emblems. I been ---hire them off the estate . Just farmed it. My own combine and everything.

*How did you combine doing that with being a post man*  
16 hours a day, they was long hours.

*Tell me how your day built up then.*

When I came off the post round I use to start at six; I came home about half past 9 or 10; had my breakfast and my wife would have fed the pigs and the cattle. Then I'd litter them down and go either ploughing or whatever had to be done on the land. The post round was a mainstay.

*Was it hard making a living out of farming in those days?*

Well it was. I didn't have the best of land. I had a lot of spread about land and troubled a bit with the pheasants. I was surrounded with woods and they would damage my crops. *You weren't allowed to shoot them.* No. they were off the estate land. I had pigs and chickens and cattle.

I hired some of Baldings land where the picnic area is now. *Where did your land go next to the Baldings?* The railway line was in between, where the by-pass is now. I went down to the railway line and Balding's land was over the railway line; the Drift was the end of my land. Then it went back down towards the Fen. I kept it until I was 65 then I finished with the land and just kept my own five to six acres.

*Is any of your land now built on?* No, it could be built on when they finished building over there. *So there would be room for some houses just behind you.* Yes.

*Do you know anything about Decoy Farm down Station Road?*

Yes Mr. Lambert; well, he farmed about five or six hundred acres and he was good to me. He helped me in different ways. I had some of his waste corn and beans for cattle feed. He's sub-let his land now. Most of it in the village had been built on.

*Down Station Road, opposite 25a are some large buildings. What is that used for?*

That was his corn storage, from the marshes, down the marshes, over the line. He had corn dresser. He'd clean it up, store it and then sell it in a later date.

*There is now a notice gone up outside for planning permission for 7 dwellings. So is all that farm going to go?*

Yes I think so. Eventually the buildings and sheds perhaps down the marshes where his land is.

*The whole of this village seemed to have been made up with farms that have been sold off.*

All down Centre Vale that was all farmland; Mr. Jackson farmed that.

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

No. It was just night and day farming.

*What can you remember about your Post Office round? Where did you go?*

From the Post Office, Lynn Road, Manor Road and all the side roads up Dodds Hill and right up to Field Barn which was about two to three miles - just two houses on a bike. Nearly every day there was mail and we went rain, hail or snow. It was a healthy life.

*Did you get to know the people who lived in the houses?*

Yes, Very well. One lady who had sugar diabetes said if you find me collapsed give me an injection. I said I'll try. Never did. I used to call and shout if she was all right. I worked with Edie and Cliff Riches. I used to do relief if there was holidays.

*Where did you meet your wife?*

Well I worked on the estate with her brother. And that's how we first met. She was in the Land Army, so that was a big help. She was at Burnham Market, that way.

*During the war most of the farms were run by the women?*

Yes, there was a few men but they were all called up. Women had to take their place. I think she enjoyed it; hard work but she never did mind hard work.

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

Dogs on the post round. I was bitten two or three times. When you go to the door with a bag on your back they always, you know.

When the road was covered in snow I got knocked off my bike by a car. There weren't many cars but the roads weren't treated with salt then. It was one sheet of glass. It was a struggle when it was deep snow we used to leave our bikes and carry what we could and then go back and get another load. We had to walk everywhere then.

*The worst one was '47?*

Yes I think so. It was deep snow then. In 47 I was still working on the Estate. It was 48 when I went on the post round.

*The floods must have affected you.*

Yes, I had my pigs down the Drift in a tin shed, and the police told me to move them so I moved them to Mr. Southwell's near the Feathers Hotel. I kept them there as they thought the tide would come over a second time as the bank was broken. But Mr. Bird down the marshes his cows all got surrounded with water. A man by the name of Fred Cross bravely went down and broke the gates open and got them out and got them saved onto the high ground. *Were any killed?* No I don't think so he done a good job

*The water did not come up to your land.*

No, the water did not come over a second time. They had to treat the land with gypsum to get the salt out of it. They spread it like artificial manure. It takes the salt out of the land. It was two or three years before it was useable and they pulled it round again.

*Did you make a lot of use of the trains?*

Yes, we had to in them days. We used to go to Lynn or Hunstanton by train. When I grew sugar beet that had to go by train. We had to cart it down to the station. We fork shovelled it into trucks. It was hard work growing sugar beet then.

*Then it went to the factory in Lynn. Did they leave trucks standing in the yard?*

Yes, had a ticket for a truck and the station master, Mr. Tilson, used to order it and have it stood in the side. I used to have to load mine Sunday mornings as soon as it was daylight. Then they'd connect it up and take it on the train.

I had a retired man used to come and help me three or four days a week, Mr. Howe; a very nice man. Well we used to have to plough it out, knock it, top it, put it into a heap, cart it from this heap down to the station. It was very hard work then. *Can you remember what you got for a truckful?* £5 a ton, that was a ten ton load be about £50. *Did you ever go to Lynn to see what they did with it?* Yes, I did go once. Well they wash it off the trucks, powerful hoses and it goes down and all the soil washed off. Then that's shredded and then it goes up and it's boiled. They get the sugar out, it goes in these flumes, I think they call it. You used to buy the pulp for feeding the cattle back again.

*What else did you feed your cattle on?*

Hay and straw and corn that I grew. The most cows I had was between 60 and 70. Pigs I don't know, any amount. You could buy a cow out of the market for about £5 to £10 each. You'd lose several because they never had the attention before we got them. A lot of them used to die. I always sold them as store cattle. I bought them as calves and sold them on as store cattle. They have got to be finished off, to be fattened.

I used to fatten the pigs, most of them. We used to go to Lynn Market on a Tuesday and Swaffham Market on a Saturday with the pigs. We went on a little car and trailer.

*So what happened when the trains stopped? Did that have a bad effect on the village?*

No, 'cos there was plenty of lorries then. The lorries would go right up in the field and cart the beet. Then we had more transport of our own then. Used to go to Cambridge sale. They had a monthly sale there and I could buy implements there and bring them home. *It was better for you if the trucks came right to the farm. You did not really miss the railway?* No.

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

All the houses going on where used to be cornfields. Well that thing has got to come with the population growing. They say if you fly over in a helicopter there's still plenty of land for farming. They could eventually build houses here on my land.

*How many children have you got?*

One son, he lives in the village, just started in business on his own, a carpenter. I have already handed my own land over to him.

The cars are getting that thick again. They put the by-pass in but with the extra houses that put in more cars. Before the by pass it use to be one stream of cars. They done a good job, but it's getting busy again now.

*When you was a little lad can you think of anything that was a treat?*

We use to have Sunday school outings. We use to go to the Mart. We go on the train. There was the Wall of Death, the Cakewalk, the Waltzers, the Galloping Horses. When I went the wall of death had a motor cycle and a sidecar with a lion riding in it; they would ban that now. We used to think it was doped. There was the swinging boats and steam yachts. They were three pennies a ride.

*How much pocket money did you have?*

Not very much.

I was a little boy going to school when the electricity was put on. We had three lights and a plug put on in the wall. We was all given that.

Our first tractor was an open one that I bought at Cambridge sale. It was well worn. We sat there in the open for hours on end.

I've got a few chickens now. And greenhouses and I sell some stuff at the back door. I sell hay and straw as well.