

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 15

Date interview conducted: 10th April 1997
Name: Janice Dixon Cross
Maiden name: Chambers
Mother: Ethel Dixon of Snettisham
Father: James William Ward Chambers,
a builder of Dersingham.
Paternal grandmother: Potter

NOTE: MANY PASSAGES AND WHOLE SECTIONS MISSING

Janice's mother lived with her father who was manager of Bin & Everett at the granary at the railway station.

Janice's father's cousin, Mrs. Bird, was wife of a family butcher. Two brothers (Birds) married two sisters (Chambers).

At what stage did they have the Temperance Hotel? My father lived there as a child with his sister Hilda who became Mrs. James Jackson. She married Jimmy Jackson, a farmer.

Present address is The Bungalow, 48 Hunstanton Road, Dersingham. My father built it for his retirement; it was part of the builders brickyard.

I was born next door in 1933; it was called Brytcene. *Why?* Because it was a bright scene. There was a deep ditch opposite leading onto rough grass and gorse bushes, beyond that you could see the sea. There were ash, elm and oak trees.

I have an older sister Beryl, now living in Felixstowe, she married Walter Tilson, son of the station master.

Jimmy Chambers sold the big house to Barbara Day; it has changed hands at least three times since then. Alan Cross, my husband, is a few hours older than myself, his family originated from Dersingham. He lived at Drift House on the corner of The Drift on the main road with his parents. His grandfather lived on the other side of the road. His mother's maiden name was Mann. Her family lived in Heath House, Heath Road near the common, next to the Smith sisters.

Gladys Chambers married Stanley Bird; he and his brother Alfred ran the butcher's shop in Chapel Road where Scoles the butcher's is now. I remember his mother there. Mrs Boggis is the sister who lives near here. Alfred Bird lived in Station Road (Red Haze?). There is another sister, Freda.

Gladys Chambers was Stanley's second wife. His first wife, Mary Chambers, died early. They lived next to the Wesleyan Chapel. My father's ancestors (Chambers) built the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Chapel Road. They also built Foresters Hall in Manor Road and the Drill Hall in Dodd's Hill opposite the fire station. He also helped with building the wall around Sandringham House with his uncle from Snettisham; also a builder. Several generations were builders. I was last of the line of Chambers.

Several houses on Hunstanton Road near Bowdens

Aerial view photo looked at - early 1900s - only a small row of cottages (Hawthorn Cottages). The end house was occupied by Miss Tansley and her sister. The house on the hill, Bendorin, was lived in by Mrs Tansley. I don't remember it being built; it was just a field.

The Cedars was owned by Mr and Mrs Lloyd Pratt, unfortunately it was burned down. Behind that was a field (now Saxon Way) and we used to sledge there in the snow, and the Girls Life Brigade used to hold garden fetes there; I was a member. There were Cadet, Junior and Senior sections. Gladys Bird (my father's cousin) started the Girls Life Brigade. Mrs. Francis was a keen helper. There was no Boys Brigade in Dersingham. The cadets wore berets, sailor collar and dress. The juniors and seniors had a hat with a brim. There was a lot of badge work with badges stitched onto the uniform where blue was for elementary and red for advanced. There was no connection with the Guides but it was connected with the Methodist Church. We had rallies, a national one was held at the Royal Albert Hall. We all went to Church Parades; we had our own banners.

The Primary School is now the community centre. Pupils took the scholarship (became the 11+) if successful they went to the High School in King's Lynn. If not, they went to St George's in Dersingham. Mr. Wheeler, the Head Teacher (before my time), lived in the large house next to the fish and chip shop. It's now converted into flats. Following on from him was Mr. Mason Jones. He was Welsh and nicknamed Foss. Heather Mason Jones, one of his daughters, was in the Girls Life Brigade. Mr. Mason Jones lived in a bungalow on the right of Park Hill. When I was a little girl Park Hill was an open space, no houses were there at all. We used to play there and pick blackberries as Sunday School treats. Once a year we went to Hunstanton!

I am looking at photos of boys fishing near the marsh over the railway line, Dersingham Scouts 1st Troop, 1914, in my father's time. Down Station Road you can meet up with The Drift and eventually Wolferton Sluice. The scouts camped there. My father became scout master with Mr. Keen. Most children were involved in the Scouts, Cubs etc. Fetes were held on the Pastures, latterly on the Recreation Ground. Allotments were always there. Trees were taken down at the edge of the recreation ground.

As a little girl, we walked to Ingoldisthorpe; Brickley Lane to Ingoldisthorpe Hall. Colonel and Mrs Davy lived there. We walked back and forwards to school four times a day, five times a week. Mrs Barker, still living in Snettisham, was the Class 3 teacher. She was married twice, previous name Amy Cook. The classrooms had double desks. Miss Hudson, the primary teacher, cycled from Heacham. Class 2 teacher, Miss Robertson, also came from Heacham. Elsie Crowe followed on from her. Class 3 was a much larger room with a wash basin. Mr Waring taught Class 4 and Mr Mason Jones taught Class 5 in the centre of the building. Mr Russell followed on as headmaster. There was no school uniform and no dinners were served at the school. When my son Andrew attended he had to wear a black blazer and cap with a gold badge. but it didn't last long.

My step-mother was president of the WI. My mother died when I was nine years old. I joined in 1966, it was held in the Foresters Hall. The evening WI was generally for younger people who had children or at work. Nancy Cable was President. Joan Playford was a founder member. Dot Croft and Margaret Elderkin, also founder members still attend. Rispa Reynolds, she went to a convent in King's Lynn.

During the war, there were various dances etc. Carnival Queen, War Weapons Week, and Mrs Reg Houghen had a concert party that was held in the Institute.

Mr Willis Headmaster of St. George's started Dersingham Drama Group; it went on for some years.

Pubs - Visitors of the Royal family used to stay at the Feathers Hotel. The Dun Cow (original one was covered in ivy) the second one was where Budgens is now. The White Horse was knocked down to make way for shops. now Jubilee Court, Hunstanton Road. No other shops were there at the time. Then there was The Albert Victor on Manor Road where the dance school is now.

Let's go on an imaginary walk from the War Memorial to the Post Office.

The War Memorial has been there since after the 1st World War. The Westdene Hotel was called the Temperance Hotel it was my father's home as a little boy. The houses are the same, the fields are changed with paths and hedges cut back and trees are gone. The houses are the same.

LARGE AND SECTION IMPORTANT MISSING FROM ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPTION

Any other shops along Lynn Road? Down near the Drift there was Whiskers? Shop (grocer shop) on the corner of the Drift and Drews the hairdressers (Eleanor Drew) where New Image is now. Parkers shop (grocers) was where Cranes is now, bottom of Sandringham Road. In Manor Road there was a bakery run by the Playford family (John Playford's father). There was Terrington's shop, where the pet shop is now. The present florists shop used to be a barbers, little wooden hut affair. George King (the barber) lived there in the house on the corner. There was no undertaker that I can remember. Sandringham Motors used to be Twites garage. Years ago there was a sign to say that my ancestors were builders and undertakers. Bowdens was Rayners newsagents; they had a big shed at the back.

Station Road; used to catch the train to work in the morning; again a lot of people. We travelled to school by bus. There used to be four double-deckers and two singles. So many people went by bus. The Station Master lived in the house adjoining the waiting room (where the builders merchants are now). There was a waiting room on each side of the line with lovely warm coal fires. A lot of changes in Station Road. When I was a little girl, Walter Nurse was the coal merchant, and he lived next door (in the end cottages) to where I am living now. He had his coal yard at the top of Station Hill, which is the beginning of Valley Rise, and then his chickens and beyond that the allotments all where Valley Rise is now. Going down the hill there was a bungalow where Dinky Bunn? was the taxi driver for the village. The large house was the Railway Hotel.

Chapel Road; Temperance Hotel on the corner of Chapel Road. Near where the library is now was Lloyd Pratt's field, with a big pond, cows and sheep. This was opposite the Cedars (a beautiful house which burnt down) near the Pottery where Saxon Way starts. Where the library stands now used to be Reynolds nursery, Gerry Reynolds lived in the big house; there were greenhouses and a field. One Sunday School treat was held in that field. There was a fish shop behind his house. In fact there were several fish and chip shops all over the village. Bob Riches had one opposite the Coach & Horses. Fishers bought the Westdene (they lived there) and ran a fish and chip shop where the Chinese takeaway is now. Another fish shop where Rounce &

Evans is (originally at the back of the old house. before the shops were built). Mrs Britton's shop (a sweet shop); Britton's yard.

In the war years, at the top of Station Road, there was a large search light there. There was a pillbox in a field at the back of Mountbatten Road. The British mined the coastline extensively to stop invasions. There were metal scalpels (?) all along to keep the public out. I had a dug out in my garden during the war. One night two bombs landed on Dersingham Common (we used to shelter under an oak table) so father decided to build a brick built dug out. We had to take gas masks to school; they were tested every so often. A big van came on the field opposite to test them you went in one door and came out the other.

Tell me about the Hermit on the common. Arthur Dowdy. He came back shell shocked. Children used to tease him.

Old Hall; owned by a German named Jannock. His wife was related to my father's cousins in Nottingham. He used to grow bulbs; he had connections in Holland for one of the royals. I believe. The Hall was a private house while the Jannocks were there. Flats were there at one time, the Jeary (?) family lived there. Peter Leech held sales there. The Young Conservatives met there and there were dances and a billiard room.

In the house opposite the Coach & Horses; a furniture restorer lived there. Mr Lines the butcher (W H Lines) had his shop there. He hung himself there. Then Bob Riches had a fish and chip shop there (son of Mr. Riches the shoe repairer, John's brother), then Judges had it for antiques and repairs.

Chapel Road, opposite the primary school there is a long building. At one time the children, including me, went there for their dinners; don't know what it is used for now. Gladys Bird's husband, Stanley, told me that it was the Bird's family chapel.

War - we had a trench built in the bank of the Emblems (the Emblems is the land between the end of the playground and the house opposite the Feathers). We had to run there. There was a garden (now gone) used by children, and another house there, also gone. I can remember convoys coming through; usually a motor cyclist with a green flag at the front and end of the convoy. There would be large armoured lorries full of troops and Sten gun carriers and caterpillar tanks. The roads were of tarmac but not so good as now. I can remember Italian POW's had to walk by with hands above their heads. There was a big German POW camp on Snettisham beach; all prefabs and very high railings. Some of them worked on the local farms.

My grandfather had a pony and trap. Mr. Wilson Fife (?) had a horse and cart on the Glebe; he delivered coal on it. The only other horse and cart I can remember belonged to the Lincolns, they used to bring the milk round in a churn; you went out with your jug and they dipped the ladle in. Sunday treat; Bob Gibson used to ride a three wheeler bike with a refrigerated square at the front and sold Walls ice-cream; a big thrill.

Miss Peeling used to do some home dressmaking. she lived up Dodd's Hill. Dings, the carrier, from Manor Road, came on a Saturday bringing sausages. food and shoes. The other half of Parkers (at bottom of Sandringham Hill) was a clothes shop. The right hand side was groceries, the left hand side was clothes.

The Wesleyan Chapel in Post Office Road and the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Chapel Road. Once a year each one would close and share a service together. St Nicholas church remained separate.

There were about six to eight different manors: Stantons (Manor Farm), Gelham Manor (now houses), Glebe Manor, Snoring Manor and West Hall Manor.

What was the worst thing remembered about Dersingham? 1953 floods - On the Saturday night we had been out in Hunstanton and noticed the sea spray was reaching The Golden Lion. The next morning I went to Sunday school and was told the sea was up to the station. I walked down there to discover pianos, furniture, clothes etc. floating about. Alan and John Riches were in a boat trying to rescue livestock. Freak waves caused the flooding. A lot of Americans were billeted over here. Many lived in the bungalows by the sea at Snettisham. There was a tale that two of them clung to a chimney all night before they were rescued the next day. Walking down the Drift one day with my sister, we found a case of baby clothes. The Town Hall at Hunstanton was turned into a mortuary.

The Old House, where the barn is (opposite the start of Post Office Road in Chapel Road) was referred to as 'Wades House'; Mrs. Randall lives there now. Used to be Billy Walden's Barn where he made coffins.

Down Centre Vale was the farmhouse where Mr and Mrs Jackson lived, covered in ivy. On the corner was old Centre Vale and Westhall Road opposite. Their son Jimmy married my father's sister they lived up at the High Farm. The farm fields were where the estate is now, we used to take the horses there. The stables were on the pastures. Tennis courts were beside the farmhouse they were the Methodists' tennis courts. No longer green; Lloyd

Pratt's field is now Clayton Close. Balding's fields (now Mountbatten estate); the coal yard now Valley Rise estate, Park Hill now bungalows; Reynolds now Orchard Close and library. Back of Lloyd Pratt's house now Saxon Way etc. Hawthorn Field (Hunstanton Road) now flats.

What future hopes do you have for the village? I hope it keeps its small shops and its country effect.

When I started attending the WI there were 25 members. We met in the Foresters Hall. There were 50 members when I retired as President. Before Guy Playford used the Foresters Hall it was let out nearly every day. On a Sunday the Roman Catholic Church used it, as they didn't have their own church. Miss Insley left money to the R.C. Church; she was a teacher at Snettisham and used to ride a very high bicycle there every day. She was always dressed in white or cream from top to toe.

Do you remember any characters of the village?

Arthur Dowdy.

Mr Leek from Heath Road used to be called the 'every day bridegroom' he used to wear a top hat, dress coat and button-hole every day.

Southgate who lived opposite was Queen Mary's chauffeur.

The Queen opened Hanover Court and went to a Phobbies afternoon

Princess Anne and Prince Charles went to the Aviary in Post Office Road.

My father's cousin and her husband; they kept many birds. They also came to see the Drews.

Was there a resident doctor? Dr Jolley at Snettisham and Sir Frederick Willins (?) at Sandringham Surgery (West Newton). There was no doctor in Dersingham when the latter died. Dr Hansell came and his surgery was where the Sandringham Museum is now. Once a month in the Coronation Room at Church Hall the District Nurse would come to weigh babies and sell food.

There were grass tennis courts on the Pastures when I was in my twenties; Mr. Balding gave a cup.

Do you think you will retire in Dersingham? Yes, I have just retired. I worked first at the Lynn News; proof reading. Then I worked upstairs in the ladies department at Catleughs the outfitters. Then I had the children. I helped at the Foresters Hall Nursery School for 14 years. Then Court? Secretary for the Ancient Order of Foresters friendly society; before the Health Service started, the society gave you sick pay. Still a large number of villagers support it.

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham? Yes, all of my family are buried in the church yard.

What does the year 2000 mean to you? Not a lot; I don't like a lot of change. I am a traditionalist. There were four generations of 'Chambers' living in Dersingham, and I was the end of the line. There have been a lot of changes in the last 20 years; a lot of new buildings; it's now like a mini town. I used to know everybody.

Years ago there was a lot of poverty. I remember about three families that were very poor; it is not the case nowadays.

There are three residential homes in the village: The Gables, Newhaven (in Manor Road) and Rose Lodge (for ladies). Hanover Court and Orchard Close have sheltered housing. For Senior Citizens there is the over-60's club at the Church hall and the Day Centre at the Community Centre.

There was a blacksmiths shop (Mr. Blowers) nearly opposite the Albert Victor in Manor Road. We used to see him working when we walked back from school. In Heath Road, past Mere House, (The Wells) the house set back was a private school for girls. Miss Wagg was headmistress there. It was eventually sold and the Scott family had it afterwards.

SECTION MISSING TO THE END