

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 16

Date interview conducted: 14th January 1999
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My friends call me Wid

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I was born here in Chapel Road . We moved when I was 4 years old to Manor Road, now I'm in Glebe Close.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

My husband and my son, when he's home. I have a cousin who moved to the village from the London area and another cousin who has died.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

One of my first memories was in Chapel Road living with my Grandma and Mum and Dad. There was a horse and cart kept at the end of the row of cottages that belonged to Mr. Wilson who was the coal man; one of the coal men in the village. I remember long back gardens with chickens, rabbits. I can remember sitting by the kitchen range and watching chicks hatch out in the little oven at the bottom. Most people kept chickens or rabbits.

I remember when my father had to go off to war and I can remember walking down Station Road with Mum. I remember it was very sad. I was only four and didn't know when I'd see my father again. I can't remember Mum crying. People did not show their emotions to children in those days. I can't remember all through the war when things must have been really bad and we did not know what had happened to my father I never remember being scared. She used to say it would be all right. People put on a very brave face.

We had all the excitement of the evacuees coming. We had to have an evacuee. I was an only child and this child staying with us, we were like sisters really. She was awful when she came, She was from the East end of London and came from a terrible background. Mother was so patient with her It was a sad day when she eventually went home.

The evacuees came to school. We were packed out at school. On one of my school reports, number in Class 63. I was only five to eight when they were there but most of them settled in well. Looking back on it how strict the teachers were on those days; there was no emotion or feeling or it didn't

seem to come over that way. I can remember a little boy, and he used to come back to the village, his name was Billy and he used to wet himself because he was frightened if an aircraft went over, But he would get into awful trouble at school and the teacher would not let him go the toilet.

We had those double desks and once you were in you were in. You couldn't get out because you were in a long line perhaps ten in a line .

You had a literacy hour and a Maths hour and that was the morning done. In the afternoon when you got into the big classroom which was Mrs. Barker who died not too long ago. We had to knit socks for the soldiers. I can remember we had these sets of four needles. I can see it now in her best copper plate writing on the wall how to turn the heel. We had to do four and half inches of knit 2, purl 2 ribbing. The boys were knitting as well and they had to do quite a lot of work on the garden. The vegetables were used and chickens were kept there as well on the garden at the back. They were happy days.

The outside loos were pretty awful. There was no surface on the playground so if it rained it was all red mud. Everyone had welly boots If it was wet you went in your wellies and you sat in your wellies all day. We walked home at lunch time. I can remember we had a library there and village people were allowed to use it after school on a Wednesday afternoon. Two girls were in charge of the library; I was one. Celia Barnard was the other girl and we used to run the library although we were only nine or ten. The Mums and Dads used to sort the books and the tickets, The Library van would come and change the books.

I went to St. George's for one year after the war. I didn't pass the 11+ so I went up to St. George's and there were several of us who took the exam again and I went to the High School after the year. I learnt many useful things in that year. It was a very happy year. If only secondary schools were like that now. All the girls had to learn how to change a plug, how to change a fuse. All the boys had to learn how to cook with Miss Fife who was a huge Scottish lady. The music was really good and the English teaching. I was not as happy at the High School.

We had lots of evening things going on in the village. There was the Girls' Life Brigade which was well attended. I joined up and I was about five. Mrs. Bird who used to live next to the Chapel she ran that. We did all sorts of things. We weren't allowed to go camping but it was similar to the Guides. We did a lot of singing and games. When Mrs. Bird retired that was the end of it sadly. Then there was JMA ran by Nurse Earle. That was a

Juvenile Missionary Association. We used to do fund-raising and sending off to foreign countries. Nurse Earle had friends who were missionaries; one in particular Nurse Johnson, she would come home from Africa. There is a window in the Chapel dedicated to her. We were awarded a medal if we collected a certain amount of money; I think it was £5. She would bring lantern slides to show us. We used to have lantern slide evenings at the chapel as well. All sorts of people came with lantern slides to show the children.

We had a youth club as well; that used to be in the church hall. Then we had films come; a cinema in the Foresters Hall once a fortnight and we could have our crisps. I can remember we had the Red Shoes and lots of the Walt Disney, Snow White, Bambi and the Pathe News. Mum was always interested what was on the Pathe News. It was just after the war I think.

I was allowed to cycle around to the Chapel in the dark with a light on my bike but you had to be in at a certain time. When Mr. & Mrs. Houchen used to run dances every fortnight in the village hall you knew you had to be home by half past ten. So you were home by half past ten.

We had jobs to do at home; shopping mostly. We had a kitchen range and Christine, the evacuee, and I used to blacklead it on a Saturday morning. You always cleaned your own shoes. They were cleaned every day before you went to school. You only had the one pair of shoes. The shoes were mended at Mr. Riches. There was quite a queue there sometimes to get your shoes mended. Most children had a best pair of shoes. Really for Sunday. Everyone dressed differently on Sunday. The highlight of the year during the war was when clothes were on ration. On Chapel Anniversary everyone had a new outfit; hat and dress and new shoes and white socks.

You either went into Lynn to buy them or the carrier would bring them. Mr. Ding in Manor Road was a carrier and Mr. Plume who came round from Catleugh's which was a big shop in Lynn. He came round and if you needed anything he would come the following week and bring you a selection. He came in a van. Mr. Ding started off in a horse and cart and then he had a van. He would bring people's shopping home.

We kept in touch with our evacuee for a long time. Joe Jackson who now has a farm he was an evacuee. He was adopted by the Jackson's. Several other children stayed on.

What was the most important day you have ever spent in the village?
The day my father came home as far as I was concerned. That was the best

day. Some were fighting in Europe, some in the Far East, some were prisoners of war, so they came home at different times. My father had Malaria very bad and kidney problems. He had to go into a fever hospital before he could come home. He made it before VJ day.

We had a concert a VJ concert; there were great celebrations in the village. The children did not really understand. We didn't really understand about the war. There was no television. We always had to listen to the six o'clock news. I never remember feeling really frightened.

What was the worst time you remember?

The floods, the night of the floods. We were at a dance in the village hall and someone said everywhere was flooded; people went home early. It came nearly to the station. The saddest thing was the following day we went down. My father was a baker at Snettisham and he used to deliver to the people who lived on Snettisham beach. Of course many of their homes were destroyed. I can remember walking down Station Road here and seeing poor cattle dead. I can remember this tree and all baby clothes hanging in this tree. It was the worst thing I had seen in my life to see dead things.

They had a prisoner of war camp down on Snettisham Beach. After the war there were-- they called them DP's-- an awful name really, Displaced Persons from all over Europe, they were put in this camp. My father and I used to go down and deliver bread. I can remember the awful smell of this stew stuff they had . Any bread or cakes that were not sold would be taken down there. We would go down in the van and deliver it. They were so sad and badly dressed. Some settled in the area.

The other big thing for the village was when the Americans came. They used to drive through and we used to call out "Got any gum chum?"

One night we had a knock on the door. We opened this door and this gentleman he looked so sad and he said, "Can you tell me the way to Bircham?" My mother said, "It's a long walk from here to Bircham. Why do you want to go to Bircham?" "My sons in the Air Force and he's got himself into some kind of a trouble. I must get to him." My mother said, "You can't go tonight. You had better stay here". So he came in and had something to eat and stayed the night. Next morning we got up and he'd gone. Mother looked round. Nothing was missing. We didn't think any more about it. We always had the day for doing the bedrooms. The sheets had to be changed and the slip mats shook. As she picked the mat up there was a 10/- note underneath and a note saying Thank you very much. Ever

so many years later my father was out in the garden one day and a car drew up and a gentleman got out. "Could you tell me if the lady who used to live here during the war still lives here; Dad says yes. It was the gentleman and he'd come back. He'd sorted his son out.

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

All the building. Once the building started the village changed. We lost a lot of shops. It was a very busy village with lots of shops. Greengrocers, wet fish, fried fish shop, butchers all sorts of shops to choose from; electrical, hairdressers and barbers. You could live here without going out of the village. We used to collect milk from the dairy in a little jug. It was one of the things our evacuee could not come to terms with. "I'm not drinking milk from those dirty old things" she said. I won't tell you what she said when she found out where eggs came from. She really did not know.

Parkers Stores had three separate departments; grocery, hardware and then the drapery section. You could get your corsets etc. It was a big shop Plimsolls for school.

Everyone knew everyone. You would never think of walking past someone in the street without speaking to them.

You can't really call it a village any more. People don't work in the village any more; years ago people did. They worked on the farms, in the carpenters, in the nurseries.

It was difficult to get a job when the men came back from the war and they weren't well. A lot were not well. My father used to get Malaria on a regular basis. Many had awful memories.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

I can't see it will be very much different. I think there might be a few parties but I don't think it will ever be the same even going back to the Queen's Jubilee. We are too remote from one another. I feel they could do something more with the Institute Hall they have got to have access for people in wheelchairs.

There should be halt on building. We now have a decent surgery. Although we had family doctors who would come to you rather than we go to a surgery; more than they do now and not so many years ago. They would pop in to see how you were. The doctor did not have a day off; they would always come. You would not go if you had a cold.