

DERSingHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 18

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When did you first come to Dersingham?

I came to Dersingham on 28th Sept. 1933. I was 17.

A long time ago. Did you live where you live now?

No, I lived across at Manor Cottages, the first cottages going in opposite the Institute, with my parents.

Had your parents lived here always?

No; we came, that was the first time we'd been you know come to live in Dersingham. We came from Harpley, but we came with Mr. Stanton because my stepfather was growing old, gardener at Stanton's. They lived Harpley and we came with them to Dersingham.

Where do you live now?

I live in Centre Vale at Number 14.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

No, not now my daughters, I got two daughters, they live away in different places. One live at Hunstanton and one at Norwich.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

My very earliest memory was on the Saturday after we came here the church bells were ringing and my mother said to me, " I think there must be wedding". And I went to the back gate and looked and there was a wedding. And I stood and I watched Mr and Mrs Wallace come across from the church to the church hall for their reception. That was the 30th of September and Wallace and I we always remarked about it.

I used to have to go to pick up the milk at the farm every morning before I started work in Lynn. *You had to pick the milk up in a jug?* No, my step-father used to take the milk can up and put it in the dairy and after the cows had been milked the cow man used to put the milk can a, what we called a "milk kit", a can that had a lid on. We used to fetch it before eight o'clock for breakfast.

Did they also have a milk round?

Yes I think so, yes. I'm just trying to think who came round; I know Lincoln's used to come round because I had them after I came down here to live. But I cannot remember if there were any other because we always had our milk from the farm. And going up there, I don't know if anyone else has said or thought about it, but going up the church way to the farm there were trees in the church-yard and I'm talking about big trees. I don't know if they were elm trees but there were quite a few. Eventually, I think they must have been elm because they were taken down. So whether they eventually got Elm disease or not I don't know. But they were big tall trees, you know proper trees in the church-yard up that wall right the way up to the North Gate.

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

As I said we came to live here in the September. In the October I joined the church choir. My brother had joined a week or two before me I joined somewhere about the end of October. I stayed for 58 years; I only recently left when Rev Jardine came. I thought I'd better see him in because I'd had seven vicars and I thought well I'll see him in. My health began to deteriorate and I couldn't keep up to go out in the evenings, in the winter time; the choir practice and that. I thought well the best thing you'd better do is to pack up. So I said to my husband one day, "I'm going to finish with the choir." He said, "you must please yourself what you do." He still carried on obviously. So that's when I left. I did say to the vicar I would have liked to have done 60 years but I didn't think I could. I thought I (-- ?) I was a soprano, I still am actually but the latter part of the time Mr Bell, who was choir master, asked me would I sing alto. I did, I learnt it. Fortunately I got a piano so I could sort of learn it at home. But in the end that did something to my voice; I don't know what. I asked Doctor Shaw about it and he said, "No, I'll give you a notice." He said that the voice box is like violin strings or something. If you use it wrongly it will gradually spoil itself. So I had a note from him and I went back to Soprano. I couldn't get down to the low notes. I had to stop I was straining my voice. So I had to give this note to Mr. Bell. I said "I'm sorry but I can't really do it." I couldn't spoil myself and make my voice go.

I met my husband in Church. When I first met him he was pumping the organ. He had been in the choir. Because he came to church. He did go to chapel. His mother was a Salvationist. He used to go to chapel in the morning and walked to Snettisham in the afternoon to the Salvation Army. And she always said while they was in her charge they would go where she went. When they got old enough to please themselves they could go where they liked. So when my husband was 12 years old he thought one day he would go to church to see what church was like. And he went and funnily enough he chose the Sunday that they had a litany. You always had a litany on the first Sunday of every month we had a litany at that time. He just said, "If they going keep a

doing all this kneeling I'm not coming here any more." He said, "I'll give it another try." Of course he got that was ordinary morning service and he stayed. And then the year after that the Reverend Oliver came and the year after that they had the bells re-hung and he started bell ringing at 12. And he was only tiny when he was young and he had to stand on two boxes to reach the ropes. But he stuck it and he was a bell ringer for over 60 yrs.

That's how I first met him because the ladies -- we had about 60 members in the choir then. Mind you they didn't all come at once. Good job they didn't. But Jack Burney (?) who used to be here he was a bell ringer he stood at the bottom there rather up at the top looking through the bell tower. He looked through there one Easter Sunday and I think he said he counted 48. The first ones were going in the top store (?) before the other ones were getting out the door.

The War did away with the choir as much as anything. The changes in the choir has been tremendous; We used to go to all the festivals at Norwich. Well I went to to, every four years they were. They had one at St. Margaret's every year. There used to be about 1000 voices at Norwich. What we used to do, I'll tell you one because I know a lot of people know it. That Zadok the Priest, you the Queen had it and we sang that. The books are still in the cupboard in the, Mr. Roye who was organist, he was very good. He used to say we was, 'cos Dr. Statham (?) of Norwich Cathedral used to be the conductor for the things we had. He never went to a choir masters meeting that they used to have. He used to come we had to sing a lot of stuff unaccompanied. And he'd come with his, I can't think what it's called, you know, his tune book; he'd come out there and he'd set that then he'd run round the back, I think I'm right, and I always remember him saying once, "Now that's how I want it and I'm sure that was how Dr. Statham would want it." He hadn't known whether Dr. Statham would or not but he was dead (-----?). That was how Dr. Statham, when we used to go to rehearsal, that is how Dr. Statham would do it. He knew what he was doing. Not being derogatory but anybody else we had, but we never had another organist, 'cos he was organist as well as choirmaster, have never had anybody else like him; not in my experience. I mean even today I can remember how he taught and when I been into church I'd known exactly what he would want to do. It stuck after he got it into you.

Some of the photographs show the W.I. at the time. Now I believe you weren't actually in the W.I., or were you?

I came to Dersingham in the September, October I joined the choir, and in the November I joined the W.I. with my mother. It's the same one I still belong to. I been a member now, well Mrs. Boggis she joined as well in the January in '34 and a year or two, her and I, the county gave us, it's on my sideboard, a plaque

for being 60 years in the W.I. So we were the only two who'd been 60 years in the W.I.

Are the things the W.I. do now any different?

Oh, yes. It's not anything at all, well when I first joined we had 128 members. And then they, Mrs. Willis started evening W.I. really especially for the women who went to work. Well then gradually they took a lot of our younger members from our W.I. down to the evening W.I. and from then on, we keep getting new members but then of course being elderly we get some who die so our Membership now is somewhere around 40.

They have a lot of outings now, was it all flowers and jam making?

Oh, no. I don't know how the W.I. got to that. 'Course during the war they made jam. Pounds and pounds of it and fruit and all that sort. They still make jam but that's not the same. Now we don't have the demonstrations like we used to for the simple reason that the W.I. can't afford the demonstrators. I learnt a lot from the W.I. I used to enter exhibitions, both Norwich and King's Lynn. That's not so many years ago. I think I've missed the last two exhibitions in King's Lynn 'cos I haven't felt I could out my mind to it. But I mean I got bars up there and certificates. There's no competition but they judged them out of 100. If you got 100 marks say you'd get a first class bar and all that sort of thing. And now they don't give anything like that now. They just put stars on. I think the cost is too much.

One of the things in your photographs are the concerts you used to put on.

Well that was during the war. Mrs. Houchen, Mrs. Reg Houchen, I'll give her name because there were several Houchens, she was quite good at putting things on like that. And she asked several people if they'd, I don't know if anyone had asked her if she'd do it, but she invited several people to a meeting to see whether they could do something for War Weapons Week, in the first place, War Weapons Week. We went to a meeting, I was interested and we had a meeting and she, we got together you know. We had these rehearsals and we put this on, and she called it The Dersingham Premiers. That was the first concert party they had and we really had fun. And we had good times. And we had hard work because we used to practice. And they really did. I mean the girls, 'cos I was older than the girls, I mean I was married, and I'd got a baby. My husband used to stay at home and look after my daughter while I went out. We used to go all round the different the villages and do these concerts; for War Weapons, that was what it was for.

How did you get all the costumes around the villages?

We made them. Mr. Reg Houchen was a bus proprietor; he had a bus. They only had the one bus when they first started, so we used to have his bus. 'Cos

she was the (-----?) and he went round and he, oh he helped, he was great. His sister-in-law, Mrs. Evelyn Houchen, she was the pianist. Yes we used to go round in the bus to different places. We used to carry cases I've been coming down this road, course it's not like it is now, because it was only a lane, I've been coming down here one o'clock in the morning; coming home from a concert.

There's also photographs of what I only knew as the burnt out house.

Well Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd-Pratt lived at The Oaks and their son. That was a big house. They had beautiful lawns at the back, went right to the fields. We used to have fetes up there. Lovely fetes we had there, different things. Church fetes and Village fetes. Whatever was going on, and wanted to raise money for he'd put on. He was a very generous man. I don't know who lived there before but they lived there when I first came. He had fruit farms out Wisbech way. I don't know too much about his business but they were money people. They had the one son. He was an adopted boy, Brian. He never was married. He got interested in playing croquet as he got older. And he went out to South Africa and he was murdered out there in South Africa. After his mother and father died, because Mr. Lloyd Pratt was a big church man. He was a church warden, and there is a plaque to him up in the Lady Chapel. On the wall there's a plaque there because he paid for the first microphones. The very first ones that we had there.

Can you remember when the house burnt? What effect it had on the village?

I can't really. I think it must have been in the 60's. I didn't know anything about it. It happened in the night. It wasn't till the next day my husband came home and he said, "The Oaks has been burnt to the ground." We didn't know anything about it. Somebody evidently saw it. There was a groom's house there. There were two cottages, there was a groom's house where the pottery now is. That was the pottery, it was all part of it. All where the doctor's surgery is that was all The Oaks. Where the road goes up there, well that was the house. There was a wall went across there and that was the house. There was a big double gate there and some trees and all that. Right next door to the other house, I can't remember, where Cliff Riches used to live, I don't know who live there now. They went right back to, well I suppose where Pell Road and that is now. He had all sorts of things there; Church fetes. I remember we had a big Sunday School, 'cos I used to go to the Sunday School teaching, me and my daughter, and we used to Sunday School Teacher's Meetings in Lynn. He had the Sunday Schools, you know, all come up there for a big fete do. There was lots going on up there. Obviously when that got burnt down that stopped. That was it; but that was lovely.

What was the worst time you remember?

The war obviously. I mean my husband didn't have to go to the war. I mean that was another funny thing. He was working on a farm in those days so Mr. Jackson, who he worked for he kept getting him off. Of course he was working on a special thing. My husband said, he said to me, "I don't think they'll have me". 'Cos they wouldn't have him in the Territorials before the war because he got, well we always called it a murmur, a heart murmur. Anyway, eventually he had to go to have a medical and course he put his name down to go in the Air Force. His brother was in the Air Force anyway. So he had to go to Cambridge for his medical. I shall always remember the night he came home off the train, came off the nine o'clock train. The first words he said to me when he got in the door, "Well you got an old crock for a husband." So I said "Whatever do you mean?" He went all through the oral exams and all that and didn't have his medical till last. And he said, "by the time I'd finished there were about six doctors round me. I thought I was going to die in the process. He said, "The head Doctor, he said to me, Now get dressed quietly and be careful what you do." He said "Well what's the matter?" He was grade 4. He said "You won't be able to go in the forces." So he said, "What about the Home Guard?" Because some soldier had been coming around to find Home Guards. My husband had gone to Cambridge that morning and I said to him "Well he's had to go to Cambridge for a medical so we don't quite know what's happened, whether he'll pass or not." So this soldier said to me, "He'll pass. They'll pass a brass monkey". Of course he didn't pass.

I'll be quite honest he worked Saturdays and Sundays on that farm cattle feeding and peas and all the rest on it. He worked a jolly sight harder during the war than his brother ever did in the Air Force. His brother was in the stores and he never went out of the country nor did any (?) else. And I used to say, "Why don't they let George go and they can put you in the stores." Because he really did want to try and help. Being the man he was he settles himself. He said working Saturdays and Sundays was his war work. But I'll tell you something else he got he really got jeered about not being in the forces. But he never said a word; he let them get on with it. I still got his card upstairs.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

I don't know 'cos let's face it I'm at the age now when I haven't got a lot of future not to come. Let's face it, I'm 81. I don't think, I'm living now from day to day and I don't know. I can't do a lot but had to give my work up what I done. I have done a lot for the village. Bit I've had to gradually give it up. I haven't been able to do it. I don't feel that old but my body is feeling old you see. And I mean looking ahead I'd like to see the Millennium in; whether I will that's not in my hands.

I don't want to see any more building done in the village because when I came

here there was nothing much. My husband used to tell me that him and his brothers would lie in bed in the evening and they knew every house in the village and who lived there. They used to make it a game. The time before he died, before he was ill, he didn't know many 'cos all the village people, what we call the village people, had gone. And I mean when I try to think now there's not many old village people now. You know what I mean, they are all village people but the old village people that I knew when I first came to the village. It's much, much bigger.

You see there was nothing down here. There was only this row of cottages here. That was fields across there. That was all fields at the back there. Trustees had a little piece on here and there was just this road and of course there was all trees down there. And there was a garden over there, belonged to where that bungalow is. Of course behind there was Mr. Jackson's fields. I don't know whether they belonged to him, or he hired them. There was a trustees piece there and they was farmed, they was arable. The Meadow got ploughed up during the war. Right down the bottom there; there was an old building there what they used to call The Hovel. I don't know why they called it The Hovel. That is on the very old maps.

The church you see, and then you used the Pastures and of course even now the Pastures are like they were then. I mean they're the same shape but there was no sports field on there. There was no path down by the hedge. There was one across the middle over the bridge and there was one on to the church hall. It was a nice Pasture. I mean my husband used to come and meet me before we were married, in the dark in the winter. He'd meet me near the Church Hall and we 'd come across, because his mother lived down this part of the valley. She was born down here. Believe it or not he knew every bump and hill in that pasture, coming across that path, he did really. We'd come across in the pitch dark 'cos there were no street lights nor nothing and we had a torch. And there used to be cattle on there; he knew where these blessed cattle were. He must have got cat's eyes or something. But he did; he knew. He used to say he 'd get hold of my arm and he'd say, "Now walk straight there's a bump there" or "there's a dip there". It's not like it now because there's bumps and dips all over the place. People walk across there in the dark without getting your feet wet. I don't know what happened to it all.

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham?

No, 'cos my husband is cremated and he always said I don't mind anybody who's listening might know him. He always said I don't mind what they do with my body when I've gone because I shan't be in it. You know he was a Christian. I used to say you are a better Christian than I am, and he was. His church was his life; he didn't push it to anybody. For instance he was a big football man. He

played football for 16 seasons. He played cricket. At the end of the time he played bowls. When the football club used to have photographs taken, usually on a Sunday morning, he wouldn't go 'cos church came before his photograph. That's what I mean. And he wouldn't give up church for anything unless we were on holiday. He always went to church.

So he didn't mind where his body was. Do you feel the same?

Well yes 'cos I said to my doctor, because I'd left his ashes up at the crematorium; his name is in the remembrance book. I had a thanksgiving service for him in church after he, you know, the following week because I knew people who wanted to be there wouldn't get in the Crematorium anyway. And my daughter said, "Well we'll have Dad cremated." I said, "I'm definitely going to have him cremated. I'm going to leave him up there because I got nobody to look after graves."

I got two graves in the churchyard myself; my parents and my brother and I can't look after them. And he didn't mind what 'cos he wouldn't be in it he says. So I said to my daughter, "Well what's going to happen. Am I going to end up here with Dad?" She said, "Yes. That's where you'll come when anything happen to you." So that's where I'll go. What they'll do about a service I don't know. I have already made arrangements and paid for my funeral; for their sake really. Because I mean they don't live in the village. My daughter said to me some time ago, "Mum have you thought about having a pre-paid funeral? Does Mr. Lincoln do one?" I said, "Well I don't know. I hadn't thought about it". She said, "Would you ask about it? Would you mind?" I said, "No, I don't mind." So I did; so I have done that and they know. What I like about it they plant a tree somewhere. Whether they'll have a service in church or not I don't know. I should imagine they will.

You sound as if you've had a happy life in the village.

Oh, I have; yes I have. And I certainly had a happy married life. I mean we were married 54 years before my husband died and I really have had a happy marriage. We had a story book marriage; truthfully we did. We never had a row the whole 54 years. We didn't honestly that's the truth.