

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 19

Date interview conducted: 20th March 1998
Name: William James Herbert Playford (Bill)

When did you first come to Dersingham?

Where I was born.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

Yes, three, a sister-in-law and two nephews.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

I suppose it was when I went to the Primary School. That was just before, or during, the war. They thought more about digging trenches on the allotments, on the Elms rather, than about teaching us. As long as you could add up and write your name that was all they worried about. The school was near the Feathers; bottom of Dodds Hill.

How many teachers were there?

About six: Miss Hudson, Miss Robinson, Amy Cook, Mr. Waring, Mr. Wheeler was there until he died and then Mr. Jones took over. The war interfered with the education. We stayed until, 14 I think we left.

What sort of lessons did you do?

You're asking a lot now, 60 years ago you know. They used to take us for nature study walks up the woods. Half the day we were digging trenches on the Emblems in case of air raid.

They laid the water on when we were at school; Docking District Council did. There was no mains water till then. We used to jump in and out the trenches when we were kids. Mother bought us a pair of overalls 'cos we made our other clothes so dirty. The first piped water they had was stand pipes which were on concrete posts and just a tap where people had to go to draw the water. None laid on to the houses. You done me now when that was done.

Where did you live?

Manor Road most of the time.

Where was your nearest stand pipe? That was a business, that was laid on for a business, the bakery, we had pump water. Eventually they came along and condemned that. Now you got to have mains water.

Your parents were running the Bakers Shop.

Yes. When we left school father soon had us into harness.

We did all the odd jobs until we got old enough and enough experience to make things and bake things. Then Father was ill and he retired to Jersey House (*Senters Road, behind old bakery*) which he'd lived in after they came off the cottages on the common as they called it. They always told me I was born on the common; that was where they lived. They came down to Jersey House which was a converted cow houses and hay loft and coach places. That was converted into living accommodation. Grandfather ran the business as it was then. He retired and they changed over. Father went down in the business place and grandfather and grandmother came up to Jersey House.

When did the bakery actually start?

Oh, 1906 or something. Father always said he'd never deliver bread where another baker lived. Well in those days every village had a baker. So he never went to Snettisham he went to Wolferton, Sandringham, Castle Rising. West Newton, Anmer, and that was as far as they went.

It was delivered on a horse and cart. It was mainly bread then they went into confectionery. I can remember Swiss rolls and things being 6d each. Everything was 6d and little cakes were a penny. There wasn't too many different sorts of bread, not like nowadays, granary bread and that sort of stuff wasn't thought of. It was mostly good solid 2lb loaves, weight when they were cooked. Not like they are today. You got plenty for your money in those days. Chaps used to take bread, cheese and pickled onions and sit down on the fence and eat it.

Can you remember when you got the Royal Warrant?

Grandfather got it for a time and then he gave it up because you have to apply for it and then we applied for it and we had it for, I don't know how many years. You had to regularly supply for so many years and I can't remember how many years; about 11 or 12 I think. George V, George VI and the present Queen. Which we held until I finished. Guy held it for a little while, the dates and the years I forget.

What was there for youngsters to do in this village?

We used to make our own fun on the common. We used to have a football pitch, a cricket pitch, on the common. It's all grown up with bushes now. We was never bored. We always had to be home by 8 o'clock. If you weren't home they was soon looking for you.

One of the old boys who come back from the First World War, Arthur Dowdy, stood on the letter box corner where the BMW cars are now. He stood there all day, clapping his hands trying to keep warm until one day, well he lived in the pumping station which is up in the woods which pumped water for Wolferton, Sandringham and West Newton; he lived in there. Nobody interfered with him and he didn't interfere with anyone. The police were suspicious; grandfather was suspicious of him 'cos every now and then there'd be a loaf missing. So one day a policeman in plain clothes was waiting for him and he did he went up to the cart and nicked a loaf of bread and they had him. He was harmless. *Was he suffering from shell shock?* Yes. Poor old boy.

Can you remember much about the next war? How it affected the village?

The Newfoundland boys were stationed here; in the top school. That never was used as a school; they commandeered it straight away. They had to put a new parquet flooring in 'cos their boots absolutely ruined the floor. They were, and still are, known by a number because each Christmas and birthday time we ring up one of the girls who married one of the Newfoundlanders her said to Ernie Kelly, "it's a long time since we cooked the Christmas dinners for you Ernie." Because they brought about 20 turkeys down and Father and I cooked them in the ovens for them for their Christmas Dinner. In fact their cook-house down this end was where the gateway to the gamekeepers lodge is now; they were in there as well. They ended up in North Africa most of them. They had these terrific naval guns on rubber wheels and they were at Wolferton. We used to go Sunday mornings and sit up on the common on the seats up there and watch them fire them out into the Wash at targets; they were just over here. The 57th they called themselves. They still have a parade in Newfoundland, that's Canada, every year. They are getting old people now. Nice chaps. They used to help with the War Weapons weeks. They were English officers down as far as Sergeant Major and then they were all Newfoundland boys. Most of the local boys had gone off to serve.

They went and a load of Waltzing Matilda tanks came up the top school and Gamekeeper's Lodge. There was nothing else to do and we used to go for a walk round the village and we looked up over that brick wall that is now missing from the Church Hall back to Jannoch's corner and there were these dozen Waltzing Matilda tanks. One Sunday morning, well they slipped off over night. Early one morning they went off down Post Office Road and they were gone somewhere and they just weren't here. Took them up on the common one day and must have been a Sunday, and us kids went up with them they just ran about on the common. They parked one in front of our shop and swung it round. Father said, "You want to watch out there's a big drain run under there." "Don't worry about that," he say, "any damage we'll compensate you for it." They took them up on the top the common and they went down on the

main road and back up Heath Road. And now they've cleared that common you can still see those ruts where those tanks went down. The officer in charge he was pointing up about going over onto the fen and I said if you go over there you'll lose them; they'll sink. They didn't know where they were, what the land was like or anything.

Can you remember what happened when the war finished? Did you have a party or anything?

Yes, at Park House I think; in the garage. Where Lord Althorpe lived. It was the biggest open space they could find. MP for Lynn.

You must be able to remember the floods.

Our shop window blew in. Yes we were sat there and we thought that were a lot of noise. I said I fancy a Mars bar. So I got up and went to go into the shop, there was a door from the hall into the shop. The wind was coming straight in and our shop window was gone as if someone had thrown a stone at it and it had gone into a big V and woof there was a wooden floor in the shop window and that had gone straight in; that was half inch plate glass.

We didn't know what was going on down the marshes. And that morning I had to go up Fern Hill. A chap up there kept some pigs and he wanted some food for them and I said I'd run up Sunday morning with it. We went up there and you couldn't believe your eyes. Turned and looked and see all that right the way through to Wolferton. Nothing only water, pigs, gas cylinders, mattresses anything. Little did we know there was human bodies floating about. Some they never did find for about a fortnight down at Wolferton Creek. My mother phoned first about 7 o'clock in the morning. Mum said, "Joan have you got any children's clothes." I thought my mother had a gone a bit doolally. I said, "What are you talking about?" "Wonder if you'd got any baby's clothes, little children's clothes; haven't you heard?" "I said," Heard about what? "She said "It's flooded. The tide has come right up to the gatehouse." So she said, "If you got anything take to the church hall down Station Road at Snettisham." They had lost everything. Several people drowned down there. Billy Turner from Snettisham was about the last one they found.

One thing that stuck in my mind, I think we were in the White Horse at the time, and Freddy cross came in there and he said to Billy Bird, "Your cow shed is on the water." "Those who know Mr. Bird will know the reply he gave and he said "I'm not pulling your leg. It is under water." "All right" he said, "I'll believe you; come on." Well they got as far as the railway crossing and that was that. He's cows were tied up and he had to dive in or get into the cow shed. He dived in and untied them and they brought them back up here to the coal yard until the water went down.

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

We was in the Boy scouts for a little while. Not for long I never did go to camp or anything like that.

There was no youth club or anything like that until after the war then I was too old for it.

You carried the cross in church for a long while.

What was the most important day you have ever spent in the village?

The most important day to anyone who was in Dersingham who's alive now, who's alive at that time was when Dersingham went on the sewerage. Everybody was sick and fed up with it; conditions. They got two or three emptyings a year. Those down Centre Crescent, that part of the world, by the time the lorry had been and emptied and come back again they was three quarters full again. It was terrible. A bit of an upheaval but well worth it in the long run.

Then the other time was when the sports club got the field when Prince Philip opened it. That was unfenced and I used to play cricket sometimes, not very often, and Mr. Stanton used to turn his cows and bullocks on there. You just had to put up with what they left behind.

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

Street lighting for one. When I was on the Parish Council I had so many years as chairman. There was no lights. Then there was a few.

The By-pass I suppose. That was another great improvement. Though they don't all go down there.

I'll tell you what else. Where the allotments were they built Hanover Court. Belonged to the Queen; that land.

People were all self supporting. We only had to walk round the allotments and say, " You got some nice cauliflowers there. " "Do you want one ?"

Today we got so many people in Dersingham they will continue to come. They don't really know, they will get a shock when they start to read all this. You say to somebody today "I'll meet you on Linford's Corner." They stand and look at you as if to say "Where the hell is Linford's corner?" That was named Linford's corner one night at the Annual Parish Meeting. It was proposed by Richard Ralph Stanton, seconded by Buffin (?) Lines, Will Lines really. And that was carried that it would be known ever more as Linford's

Corner; where the traffic lights are there was a shop. Roland Linford and he was a member of the trustees. If you find the minute books which should be somewhere that was named Linford's corner for evermore in memoriam to Roland Linford for what he'd done for the parish. That was after he died. He was a good tenor in the church choir. The choir was a lot bigger. There must have been 40.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

I don't know. I think we'd better leave that to the coming youngsters. The fact is Dersingham is as big as it can get now. All the farm land has gone. This was all farm behind opposite Budgens; Cow lane; that isn't cow lane now is it? Used to be that was known as Cow Lane from where Doctor Brown used to live back to the Dun Cow used to be Cow Lane. It's got past a village size.

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham?

I suppose so.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

Our Golden Wedding.