

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 23

Date interview conducted: October 4th 1999 (second interview)

Name: Peter John Reynolds.

I was born at Roseneath on the 14th November 1921.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

My mother lives there in Post Office Road, and I have a cousin living there.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

My father was John Charles Reynolds and my mother Gladys Hilda Louise. Father was the eldest son of Daniel Reynolds who had built himself a business in the village from being a small holder, market gardener and coal merchant. He had a shop in Hunstanton. He developed all this from starting originally as a agricultural labourer. He was a fairly hard man in his way. Grandma was a Riches from Dersingham. There are three clans of Riches in Dersingham. There's Riches in Dodds Hill, there Cliff Riches family, my grandmother's Riches family have more or less died out. She kept the shop on the corner of Post Office Road and Chapel Road. The house has been pulled down when Docking Council bought the whole lot and pulled it down and built the retirement bungalows there.

Father had the nursery business known as Roseneath which, when Docking built the retirement homes, they used the house for the warden. He had that with green houses and that sort of thing. He grew tomatoes and cucumbers and flowers for sale; in the spring he imported shrubs and roses from Holland and in the winter forced bulbs imported from Holland. Mother was born in Sandringham at the Double Lodges. Her father was a gamekeeper on Sandringham Estate. Her name was Martin.

My very earliest memory is coming past the church being pushed in my pram having visited my great uncle Riches who lived in the arch way cottages, Manor Road; he was a retired Gamekeeper. I still have the vivid memory of a white barn owl coming over the pram bawling my head off and mother trying to comfort me.

There's a photo of me in the greenhouse with my parents taken a few weeks after my second birthday in November of 23 and there you can see the interior of the greenhouse the old fashioned construction as it then was with

Chrysanthemums in pots. Father and Mother there with my little toy railway engine, bright red with wooden wheels and my stuffed dog. I loved it very much. It survived until I was about 50 when I married my wife.

Growing up in the nursery I remember just outside the back door there was a little piece of grass that mother used occasionally for putting out the linen and on that there was an apple tree. The variety Lady Sudeley and as a kid the first thing I would climb was that tree, getting up in the branches.

There was keeping my pets. I had a big white rabbit called Joe.

We played with other children, my cousins used to come and play. There were three families of Reynolds related in Post Office Road. There were other Reynolds close by. Beyond the house there was a paddock and in the paddock was a pony who had in his time been the means of transport from Dersingham to Hunstanton; pony and trap. Vegetables used to be taken up there every morning to the shop and old Tommy the pony he was retired then and used to go on the field there. It was behind where the library is now. There is still the walnut tree there now. The big ones had gone.

In the church magazine I described how I used to go to school; down Centre Vale, across the pastures to school, or sometimes around the road past the Tithe Barn. I came home at lunch time. In the evenings it was not unusual to help father out in some way on the nursery; emptying trays stacking boxes. You got your pocket money. One of my jobs was to feed the chickens. I refer you to articles in Church magazine. One helped the family out. I went to the Grammar school in Lynn. Then I would work in the greenhouse pricking out seedlings. As father got older he got less able to do things and I took over the stoking of the boilers. Go out at night, have a few drinks and then get back and go down the stoke hole There was one night I remember I was down there stoking away about half past 12, 1 o'clock in the morning, I'd had a very good night out, still in penguin outfit, black tie and dinner jacket, and the local bobby came down with a torch to find out what was going on. A coke fired boiler to keep the green houses warm. You used to get lovely fumes from it.

Mother died when I was 10. We had to help father out. We were looked after very well. Father was one of nine children. An unmarried sister came to help out. Later on we had a house keeper. Even later than that father married the house keeper.

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

The development of houses all round the place; Centre Vale, Centre Crescent and West Hall Road were all fields in my time. They were the fields of the farm

Jackson had, which is the old house down Centre Vale. Also he had a field next to our house on Post Office Road which eventually my father bought. It was on the west side of Roseneath house and it had a black wooden gate which was immediately opposite the entrance to Centre Vale. The Old Hall had gardens and father bought land off the Old Hall when that came up for auction. The Old Hall was run by one Jannoch who was a German. He specialised in growing white flowers for the London market. He forced Lily of the Valley. It was a technique he brought with him from Germany. Another technique he bought with him was forcing white Lilac. Lilac trees grew in the open and he pot them up, lift them, and bring them into sheds, heated sheds. Put heat on and they'd come into bloom with very pale leaves and foliage but very white of course. The flowers would be cut and stemmed and went off to London via Dersingham Station by the rail. He lived here many years. During the First World War he was thought to be a spy and signalling to the Zeppelins particularly after the bombing of Dodds Hill.

They had land that extended down Post Office Road and in fact came right down to Centre Vale from the Old Hall. Eventually it was sold off and he died and his sisters kept the place on. They didn't do the nursery work but lived in the Old Hall. Then the land came up for auction. They put on their land opposite his (my father) green houses in Post Office Road they put a copse of fir trees. There were already two big elm trees; they planted a copse of fir trees. They told father they would grow up and keep the sunlight from his greenhouses. Father was equal to that he was a damn good shot with an air rifle; he had a BSA air rifle. In the spring he would stand within his own grounds at the gate of his nursery and as the leading shoot on the fir trees got up he would put a pellet into the base of the shoot, 'cos he was a damn good shot. Those fir trees never got to any height. They are not there now, there's all houses along there now. The elm trees have gone. I can just remember when Post Office Road was grass with two tracks, cart tracks down it. That was before it was tarmacked. The south side there was an open ditch along the road. Now its all filled in and drained. All piped in.

Mecklenburg Cottage that was part of Jannoch's. There's a little cottage there that was the donkey stable. Father tells me when he was a lad it was part of their 'beggerment' games they could get up onto the roof of that and put a turf over the chimney.

I can't remember the little cottages on the other side. On the other side of the road there the house that recently been put up by a Doctor Campbell called the Chestnuts. It's been done up now but it backs onto the grounds of the Old Hall, that was two cottages and was where my father was born. Recently a member of the family has a family tree, Reynolds family tree. There's a paragraph there.

Grandfather, entrepreneur, Daniel Turner Reynolds, arrived in Dersingham with just the clothes he was standing in and his sole possessions carried Dick Turpin style on a stick. They have done research and found he came from Saxhamwell Thorpe near Norwich. And lived with his family there until 1793. That's my Great, Great Grandfather.

It was obvious the building had to be done; people have to live somewhere. We have a few niggling thoughts. That was a field, that was where we played. There still a bit of ground left for building.

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

I suppose from about 14 I was a member of the Dersingham Football Club. And then before the war they shanghied me; I think I was the only one that could write, into being secretary. I did two or three years as secretary I joined the RAF during the war.

What was the worst time you remember

The worst time. It was fairly tough at the end of the twenties. I remember it was tough for my father in the business. I remember going round with a basket trying to sell tomatoes at 6d a pound from door to door and Lettuce for a penny each. That sort of thing because of the depression in the twenties. I would then be eight or nine. The village was affected by it. There were children in the village, I can remember one family, one boy particularly who used to go to the village school he had no shoes or stockings; he used to go bare foot. There wasn't work. That fellow is now dead, had quite a distinguished war, finished up with(-----???? a pilot????) Times were hard.

We weren't physically affected by the floods.

I was away from 41 to 46; father managed the place. He had one cousin worked for him. I found when I came back the greenhouses were in a poor state. They were the old type greenhouses built with wooden rafters, the glass was puttied in and held in place with little brass springs. And over Dersingham so my father said during the war the American bomber fleets used to assemble and mill round and form up into formation. The vibrations from their engines so rattled the roof that the putty came out of the glazing, the glass used to chatter. So they all had to be done up again after the war. It was just the vibration from the engine noise.

People slightly older than me joined the Territorials. Most of them, the elder ones of them, went in the army were lost at St. Valery in Normandy. They were the Norfolks. Some of them about my age went to Singapore. They had a rough time. Some were killed out there. One of my cousins he was in Singapore, he

got away to Java and died in 'Jap' camp in Java.

Norman Towers the butcher, he was employed by what is now Scoles Butchers, when Bird had it. He was in 'Jap' prisoner of war camp; came back after the war and ran the business. He did not live much beyond 50.

Do you know anything about the old Chapel here in Chapel Road?

Yes that was one of the Wesleyans. There was Lloyd Pratts land. He had both side of the road. The chapel eventually joined up with the one in Post Office Road. That was sold off and used for a store place for a while. There was the Eberneezer Chapel opposite the Primary School. People went to Chapel or Church and there was quite a distinction; there was a social division. Some of the small farmers went to Chapel the big farmers didn't.

The main farm in the village was the Stanton's the biggest farm. Stanton's were always great upholders of the church. On Sunday everyone paid their religious observances.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

What I would like to see is the melding of the interests of the incomers with the old inhabitants. The old inhabitants are now swamped by the incomers. The old way of the village is almost completely gone. And that is true of Snettisham too. I can't see it happening but it's a faint hope. The old ethos of the village is gone. There's been a complete change in the way people look at things.

What are the biggest differences with the way you used to live?

Well you hadn't got the easy transport out of the village. Another thing too the village was much more insular as a group. When I was a kid i could tell you whether someone came from Dersingham or Snettisham. The accents were different. That went for all the villages, Docking, or Wells. You could tell somebody from West Norfolk or Norwich.