

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 25

Date interview conducted: 3rd March 1998
Name: Frederick Peter John Reynolds (Peter)

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I was born there in Post office Road, a house called Roseneath 14th November 1921.

Where do you live now?

At the moment the Round House, Lynn Road, Snettisham. I have sold it but I am living here at the moment. I shall be moving into a bungalow being built in the middle of the village called Malt House Court.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

Yes. My brother Charles Alfred Reynolds lives in Post Office Road and there's several cousins and relatives living in Dersingham. Derek Reynolds lives on Lynn Road next to where the old White Horse pub was; he and his wife and family are there. A cousin's widow lives on Huns'ton Road; that's Mrs. Anne Reynolds wife of the late E.W. Reynolds. I don't think I've got any other relatives left in the village; they've all moved away.

My father was one of 14, my mother was one of nine. He was born in the house, I don't know what it's now called, recently been sold, just on the north side of the Gamekeepers pub. It was two cottages standing in a row at right angles to the road inside a walled garden; that's where he was born.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

From Roseneath, at Post Office Road, my father had a nursery garden there. Of course the obvious memories are of messing about in the greenhouse in the garden. Then of course going to school as a youngster in Dersingham Primary School; I suppose it was Dersingham school then. There was no other school, which is now the village Social Centre.

Did you have relatives who lived close to you there at Roseneath?

Oh yes. At one time there was 3 families of Reynolds living in Post Office Road.

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

Well I have yes. Going back before the war I was secretary of the Dersingham Rovers Football Club. Never in the scouts. I've been a member of St. Nicholas Church ever since.....well I was christened there. Confirmed there. Been in the choir there. Married there. And I'm still a member of the church and a sides-man there. I write bumf

for their church magazine.

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

When I got married. It was a reasonably fine day. I was living here then. My wife was also living in Snettisham. Went to Dersingham, because she's a member of Dersingham church too. We went to Dersingham to get married and then departed to the King's Head, Bircham for the wedding breakfast with our guests. I didn't marry till I was over 50. I'm my wife's second husband; her first husband died. He, Arthur Pearce he was. He ran the garage at the corner of Post Office Road and Lynn Road.

What was the worst time you remember?

Perhaps the most traumatic time was the flooding in '53. It didn't affect the village so much as it came up to the railway line. Didn't come inland at the railway line but that was probably the most traumatic time.

Do you remember the night?

Yes I was in the White Horse Pub and somebody came in and said the sea had broken through. We went down to have a look and it was pretty horrible standing at the railway station looking at the water raging. Haystacks and bits of -----? and lord knows what coming up. The aftermath when we were searching the marsh for bodies. One particular memory is there was a great chunk, this is in the aftermath, on the way down to the beach there was the Decoy , the Duck Decoy, Lambert's owned it. Just on the south of that was a very broad dyke, very broad, big edges, it was all reeds. Well from that a huge lump had lifted out, a huge lump of -----? which is reeds, a mass of roots and reeds floating on the water, lifted up and floated out. Been carried up the marsh and dumped on the marsh somewhere below, west of Centre's Drift. Somewhere about the size of a naval destroyer laying on the marsh. Had to wait there a couple of years while it dried out, then they burnt it. That was one of the standing out memories. Also memories of finding a body. That sort of thing.

Do you remember much about the war as it affected the village?

I was away most of the war. I was away abroad in the R.A.F.

What about the railway closing down? That's a fairly recent event.

That made no difference to me. That happened while I was still living here at the Round House. I very seldom used the railway anyway except as a child; used to go up to London to stay with relatives. You could get on the train at Dersingham, get out in London. *Really. There was a route straight through to London.* Oh yes, in fact there was a route straight through to Birmingham. In fact I think, I'm not sure, the Birmingham one continued on to Liverpool. You didn't have to change. You could go through King's Lynn, change from the London North Eastern in King's Lynn to the Midland Great Northern in South Lynn and then get from there right across to the West Coast. The main line ran from London to Hunst' on. And then at Heacham there was a junction. The line ran from there, from Heacham through Sedgeford, well some

distance from Sedgeford. It was called Sedgeford Station. Stanhoe; that was a station again about a mile from the village, and through to Burnham and Wells where it joined up with a line from Wells to Fakenham.

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

Housing development undoubtedly. The way that, initially Centre Crescent at that area had been developed on what had been Jackson's smallholding farm. Which as a young man, just out of the forces, was offered to me by Jackson Junior. He offered to sell it to me for £2000 and I didn't take it up because I had other commitments. Perhaps it was a mistake because it wasn't too long afterwards when he got planning permission and sold it for a nice price. There's that; that was the initial thing. There's now of course what was Balding's Dun Cow Farm houses all over it and going up in a big way. They're the biggest changes I think.

The other changes, are the incoming of people from way outside the village which to be quite Norfolk and insular and that people are coming from outside particularly a lot of retiring people. Now, though I was born in the village I go into the village and I suppose one in three, or one in five is about the only people I recognise. Mind you age is telling; I'm getting on.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

Have you any thought on that?

Not terribly no. After all I've lived here for 30 years; in Snettisham. I retired here. I used to work in the Evaluation Office in King's Lynn. I got promoted and posted down to Hertfordshire; subsequently to Buckinghamshire. But I never left, I always kept, at that time I was living here in the Round House. I never got rid of the Round House. We kept that going then came back to it when I retired in '83. I don't expect to be buried in Dersingham if that's your next question; I am going to be cremated and My ashes will be scattered in the parish because I still own a small area of land there.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

2000 years after Christ was born and that's what it means to me; the history of the church. *Do you have any views on the celebrations likely to go on?* I haven't seen much about them; what I have seen they seem so secular and nothing particularly religious. I think it's a bit sad. *What do you think about this Millennium Dome that is proposed?* It looks like a load of rubbish to me.

What would you like to say to someone in Dersingham in a 100 years time?

I think the answer to that is Don't be frightened of it.

Have you any photos or cuttings of Dersingham that might be of interest?

No, I don't keep those sort of things. You might like to get in touch with George Porter who lives in or near Brighton, but he's written a little book about growing up in West

Norfolk. He wasn't born in Dersingham but he lived with his parents and brother and sister in the last house in Lynn Road at the edge of the common. I don't mean the two keepers houses towards King's Lynn.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Have you had a word with George Clayton or Reg Eastwick? They are both born in the village.

George at one time had the builder's workshop that was the Smithy and coach builder's place that was on the corner of Post Office Road and Centre Vale.

Reg was born in one of the houses in Post Office Road near to that. Reg is a very skilled craftsman; an excellent bricklayer, a craftsman. You can get a photograph of Reggie's father, or research for it, from the photograph of the lying in state of King George V at Sandringham where some of the estate workers were standing formal guard around the coffin. There's a good photograph of Reggie's father, he was one, a carpenter on the estate maintenance division.

There's also a photograph, the same photograph of George Standaloft who's also in there. His son George still lives in Post Office Road.

Somebody else who might give you stories on Dersingham is Betty Lincoln who lives on Station Road. She was born Betty Walden at the Smithy. I don't know if she was born at the Smithy but she lived there as a young girl.

What about Dick Stanton? Stanton's have been in Dersingham for 200 to 300 years as farmers.

Can you think of anything about the old buildings about the village? You mentioned the one your grandfather had.

Oh that's now been pulled down. Surprising the way costs have gone on since that was built in 1885. All the carpentry work cost in the region of £100. I don't know what the total cost was but grandfather, who I don't remember, he died before I was born, my paternal grandfather. In fact only one grandparent can I remember was my paternal grandmother who had a little shop in that house. All the others have died before I was born. My mother's parents died years and years ago. Mother's father, she was born at the double lodges at Sandringham which one of the two houses I've never found out. Her father was a gamekeeper on the Sandringham estate and then went down to Sussex and then eventually to Surrey where they had a greengrocer's shop. I don't remember any old folk in that side of the family. I do remember my paternal grandma but my grandfather died before I was born. He must have been quite a remarkable man in his time. He built himself up from a farm worker to have a market garden on the corner of Post Office Road and Chapel Road. He had a shop in Hunstanton, a greengrocer's shop in Hunstanton. At one time he bought a little small farm in Sedgeford which he wanted

my father to run. My father said no he had his own business then and he wouldn't do it. So they sold that again after a few years. Quite a remarkable man remembering this was the turn of the 1880s, 1870s through to the 90s. Certainly, to build themselves up. He also had a coal business too. I never remember him. I gather he was a hard case, a hard dealer; I suppose he had to be.

You mention when you were younger you went to Fern Hill spotting aircraft was that?
The Local Defence Volunteer thing. When the war broke out I was what, rising 17. Everyone rushed to do something and I joined Civil Defence for a while. As a sort of messenger whizzing around on a bicycle if needed and then, after Dunkirk time there was a call for the Local Defence Volunteers so I jumped into that. One had an arm band that said LVD and no uniform. We didn't have rifles, walking sticks or whatever. We used to have a shepherd's hut up on Mill Road, beyond Mill Road, beyond the Mill House, on the road that led to Ingoldisthorpe, between Mill House and Ingoldisthorpe chalk pit, had a shepherd's hut there where we were supposed to watch out for parachutists or anything going on, whatever. Nothing ever happened except we used to pinch an odd bird out of the hedgerow. Then eventually that got transferred into becoming the Home Guard. And so I became in that until I joined. I volunteered for the Air Force and went away. I was away for, I suppose I did come home on leave once, the first year in the Air Force. Then I went abroad without coming home on leave. I was away for four years or so before I came back. Came back in '45 I suppose. Posted down to Suffolk and had a very cushy number down there. There were six of us on an Air Force transmitter station at an Air Force base. Doing the work of about three. It was at the tail end of the war. The panics were over. So we used to organise ourselves unofficial leave. Three of them could get on with the work and we shared it out.

You have written several articles for the Parish Magazine and I was interested that you were saying about driving the sheep down to the marshes.

Oh yes, that used to happen twice a year, sort of thing. The road from, I suppose you could say what is now The Gamekeeper's pub the road from there down to Linford's Corner would be blocked nearly completely with a moving column of sheep. You had to keep your gate shut otherwise they were in your garden. Although the men who drove them down used to run ahead and sort it out. You still had to be careful. Nowadays nobody bothers. The front gardens haven't any fences on and then the bullocks used to come down sometimes, driven down to the marsh for marsh grazing, and you'd get a mob of bullocks charging down.

Were they grazed in the fields at the back of Dersingham?

The bullocks were probably kept in yards at Stanton's, somewhere on the grass, but the sheep were always, the main grazing area was on the area between Dersingham and Anmer, on the way to Ling House. They came down passed Stanton's farm, probably down Shernborne Road. They were probably assembled on, up by the two shepherd's cottages on the road that runs across part of the old, I think it is part of the old Icknield

Way that runs from Shernborne, Lower Green Road that runs at the back of Sandringham. There are two cottages up there, one was a shepherd the other was another farm worker. They were assembled up there and then driven passed Dersingham chalk pit, Dersingham Carrstone pit, down to the corner where Chapel Road meets Shernborne Road, down Chapel Road, across the Main Road, past the railway station, and onto the marsh which was cut up into various fields by ditches. Because that was all changed, the layout of the marsh was changed in the early part of the war. People called the War Agricultural Executive, a government body, had it drained and squared up. Instead of odd shaped bits it became rectilinear and that sort of thing. A pumping station put in to drain the water and a lot was ploughed up for food production. Grazing became diminished. I wouldn't say ceased. It still went down a little after the war but then farming changed and there was not so much money in sheep and that was that. Stanton's still keep sheep. One of the farms who still do.

You mention the carrstone pit and chalk pit.

Oh yes, the parishioners had the right to take stone from them; they still do. The carrstone pit, the last time I was past there, it was grown up with bushes and rubbish. As you go out of Dersingham up, Shernborne Road, it's on your right hand side just before the cross-roads. Continuing on towards Shernborne the chalk pit is now very much grown up with blackthorn and bushes but that's on the left hand side. The carrstone pit when I was a kid the upper layer of it was a very soft sand, carrstone sand, and the stone was in the bottom part. Never really hard stone there, mostly sand. It used to be full of Sandmartins nests. The chalk pit you had crumbly soft chalk at the top and as you went down there was hard chalk you could cut into blocks as building blocks. In fact there was one house in the village, a bungalow in the village is still there, was built by a chap named George Lee for his parents. It's on King's Lynn Road; George built this by, with his wheelbarrow or little truck, push hand cart thing, He'd go and get carrstone or sand and he'd go and get blocks of chalk, and he'd make up concrete blocks, I think he bought his tiles. He built this bungalow for his aged parents, reputedly for the total cost for materials of £90 and his own labour; it still stands. Last time I remember somebody said someone had bought it for £25,000 but that's some years ago.

You also mentioned the coast and the old jetty.

The shingle; the big shingle bank that ran along the coast between Snettisham and Dersingham. Dersingham, the parish doesn't go down to the sea, it stops short of the sea. Snettisham Parish runs right along and joins up with Sandringham or what was then Wolferton Parish that have a common boundary along the line of the River Ingol where it runs out to the sea. The shingle pits were there, the shingle deposits were all in Snettisham. They were worked by several companies. The last one I remember was a shingle company called Etna Stone and Shingle and they had a grading link station where shingle was taken from the pits and put through this grader which stood just about where the road from Snettisham comes down towards the beach. Then from there

was a light railway track just laid on steel sleepers southwards along the edge of the pits, between the pits and the shingle banks and the sea. A jetty which ran out to sea just north of the outfall of the Ingol. It ran out for a way wooden frame, wooden posts, the railway ran along the top of it, and it ran out to the edge where the Ingol runs through. The Ingol, when it goes out to sea, turns and runs northward almost parallel with the coast for a short way. This is in the sea wall and the bed. The pier, or jetty, went out to the edge of that and barges used to come up the track of the Ingol if you like and they would load them with shingle and go across to Lincolnshire or wherever. They were like sand barges I suppose. Some had an auxiliary motor, some just sail. Mostly they used the auxiliary motor to get them further out to sea, then they put the sail on to get across the mud banks then. They used to run quite regularly; two or three times a week going across. I suppose they took the stuff to Boston or somewhere there.

I heard they'd used some of the material to build the local air field; I'm talking pre war. During the war the whole area, all that shingle bank, there were shingle banks there 20 feet high and it was all taken. Some of it finished up in the base of the runways at Marham airfield. Lorries were running constantly to and fro taking it up as base for concrete. After the war it was worked out. Work was stopped for fear of flooding. The shingle bank was so weak that the sea might have come in as it did in '53.

Did the lorries use the track out to the coast?

They went from the grading machine up and down Station Road at Snettisham.

I was wondering about the concrete road.

There were old concrete roadways along yes. That was mainly not so much for loading the lorries that took stuff out but that was for loading lorries that ran internally of the works. Bringing stuff from where it was dredged up by the digger and taken into the grader. Of course there were vast lumps of those old concrete roads standing on edge after the '53 floods; like bits of jig-saw.

Do you have memories of Royal connections locally?

No except as a neighbour of Sandringham of course. I remember going to watch the procession as King George V's coffin was taken down to Wolferton Station. I've also got a memory, I can't quite place it, it may have been King George VI I've a very vivid memory of a funeral cortege which I thought belonged, I put it in my mind to George V but when I was writing an article about the George V cortege I went to Lynn library and checked up on the local papers of the time and found there pictures and so forth what I'd got in my mind wasn't mentioned so I must have confused two occasions.