

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 27

Date interview conducted: 22nd September 1998
Name: Arthur Eric Riches (known as Eric)

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I was born here. My parents and my grandparents were also born here.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

My son, Colin, that's all now.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

My first memory is of going to school across the pastures; full of snow, terrible situation walking. I was born in No. 7 Centre Vale which is now No. 14. Mr Wheeler was the Head; school was very good.

The thing I remember is seeing the R101 come over, the airship. One day a boy came to ask the teacher, Miss Polly Hudson to bring the class out to see this airship. It would be about 68 years ago; 1930. There was a thing in the paper about it. Eventually it burned. Miss Hudson was really good with the young ones.

We use to spend most of the time on the Pastures, us from Centre Vale. In the winter we used to block the dykes up and go skating on the dykes. In the summer we'd block them up and get in our under-pants and paddle.

Occasionally the Chapel use to take us on a horse and cart to Snettisham for the day out; a treat was to go to Hunstanton once a year; it was a charabanc to Hunstanton.

The pastures were much as it is now, the cattle used to use it a lot. Mostly sheep now but then it was cattle and horses.

The Church Hall we used to call The Institute. I used to go there with Mr. Lines and help clean up. Old Mr. Lines used to do the gas fires until he couldn't because he was gassed in the First World War. Eventually he got so he could hardly walk. It was Carbide gas in the big cylinders.

We played cricket, football, climbing up the trees.

The Pastures were owned by the estate and farmed by Stanton.

We used to go down the Dersingham beach quite regular. There was a reasonable beach; there was no concrete road then. We used to walk on top of the banks all the way

down. They use to split it up into areas so if it got flooded it could not go further than so forth. They use to farm it with horses. There was a footpath on top of the banks. We'd go fishing or playing on the narrow gauge railway. They use to have shingle barges come into Dersingham. Take the shingle away from the shingle pits. The Nature reserve is the shingle pits.

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

We use to go to Chapel twice a day on Sundays. On Tuesday we had The Band of Hope. On Thursday that was Christian Endeavour. This was the Chapel on Chapel Road, not The Wesleyan on Post Office Road. The Band of Hope was against drink; they would impress you against drink, and singing hymns.

I joined the scouts when I was about 12 or 13. I went from Assistant to Group Leader. We used to hold the meetings at the Bake House (Jarvis) where the Chinese is now. Mr Fisher bought the place and let us have a room. The Scout Leaders at Snettisham came and started one at Dersingham in about 1937. Cliff Riches started one before then. He started it and his brother Claude took over and the man from Snettisham. We had two patrols; about 16 boys. We had a scout band. We just started it when the war came and everyone had to go to war. We had trumpets and a set of drums. I asked for them but they had all disappeared. We spent a lot of time on the common which was tracking. We used to go to Snettisham. Jimmy Steele had the Snettisham scouts. We used to walk down there on Friday nights with the hand cart; Mr. Chambers hand cart loaded with gear and spend the weekend down there camping. We did not worry about children then as we do now; always leaders in charge. When we started scouts we were much the same, tracking biking, knots and lashings. It did not change much all the while I was in it. It has changed a lot now. More danger awareness now.

I stayed as a scout until I was 16. I had to join the Home Guard then. You learned rifle and shooting; they had a range on the Fen and we would shoot down there. The Chalk Pit was open then. They use to have things they called *Norfolk* Protectors which were basic drain pipes; they used to fire bottles of petrol. You use to have to fire them at the wall and knock out the tanks. We were to look after the country in case the Germans invaded. The base was mainly The Coach and Horses.

The Drill Hall was the military then; we used to be there as well. The Army Cadets use the Hall now. I joined the army at 18 and came back at 21. I went to Norwich first to training camps then Lincoln, Ireland. From Dover we went to Italy. I was a P.O.W. for 12 months and came home in 1945. A lot of my mates came back; a lot didn't of course.

I didn't start the Scouts until I was married in 1951. In 1963 Mr. Lily from Snettisham used to run a pack there; we took the boys there. Then he suggested I start one in Dersingham. Mr. came in and I went as Assistant. My son was a scout. We had 20 or 30 boys. We started off at the Old Hall; we had several venues after that; the

Foresters Hall and the Drill Hall. It was a problem not having our own place. We were always looking for somewhere permanent. We had a big shed at The Old Hall for our stuff. That's when we first started collecting paper at the Old Hall; we had lorry loads of it in the big shed.

We spent a lot of time collecting money for own place. We had fetes, concerts, raffles, donations and dances at the Church Hall. We had to raise £5000 then. We had to raise £7000 recently just to pay for the new roof. Mr. Nobes was a builder. We did a lot of the brick work ourselves. We had to get permission from Sandringham Estate for the site. We had to get planning permission but they would not give it as it did not match the back of the Feathers. We wanted a prefab but we had to have a brick built one with a reasonable roof. The Official opening day; I had Mr. Rhodes to come to open it, they put my name on the stone.

We could now leave things where we found them, everything was easier. We did not need to book up, or move as we did at the Church Hall.

The guides used to have a place at Sandringham where the visitors centre is now. They came in with us. I did 15 years. We don't have parent support now as we used to.

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

When I was married.

The day I came home from the POW camp. I remember getting off the train and coming up Station Hill going past the Recreation Ground and Mrs. Houchen (who ran the taxis) she came round and picked me up and took me home. She had taken all the POWs home; she saw the white kit bag, they all had white kit bags.

My home had changed from 7 to 9 as while I was in the army my parents had moved. We had known the Americans were in Munich. We were in Munich and they came in and went out again. Next morning we saw this one American coming down the road and he opened the gate, we were free. We went Munich airport on the lorries. We went through the de-lousers and all that sort of thing. We were put on the Lancaster bombers and brought to Oxford. We had 16 weeks repatriation leave. I had worked on the Estate in the gardens. They used to make up the army pay to their pay. So mother was collecting the money while I was in the army.

What was the worst time you remember?

When I was a little boy one of the families in Centre Vale the son was killed. He came home from work and he put his motor bike on this lorry. There were five or six men on the lorry all standing up. The lorry went round a corner and the motor bike took him off and killed him. I cried my eyes out.

I remember the floods in 53. They did not affect me a lot. I was on the milk round and I did not know it was flooded until I went down the station. We used to live at the Old Hall at the time. We knew it was bad.

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

The population growth; its not a village now as it was.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

I don't want to move. I'd like a new hall; position is the problem. The Pastures are a possibility. I don't think we could raise the money. I think the village is too fragmented.

Will you retire in Dersingham?

I have already retired.

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham?

I expect to be buried here.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

I think it is overrated. Lot of people have gone millennium mad. What difference will it make? A lot of money could be spent more wisely.