DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 28

Date interview conducted: 15th April 1999
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When did you first come to Dersingham?

I have lived in the village all my life. I was born in 1932 and I am 66.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

One of my children lives in the village. One lives in Ingoldisthorpe but not my brothers and sisters. My parents lived in No. 7 Garden Cottages Dersingham; that is no longer there; near the Dun Cow which is now Budgen's. I spent a lot of my time then moving between Garden Cottages up to the house I now live in and I live with my Grandparents.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

One of the things was having to walk to school. Everybody had to walk to school. Some a lot further than the others.

Playing up on the Common with the small toys and that and no fear of being mugged or anything like that. Dinky toys. We used to go up there and play in that sand. We used to play lots of games on the Common. The other Common wasn't grown up like it is now. One is named as the Open Common and the other the Shut Up Common. *But today is the Shut up Common the bit the other side of Heath Road.* The other side of Heath Road. *The other one was the main one that looks down onto the by-pass.*

And every Saturday I used to go with my Grandfather to the bottom school near the Coach and Horses and we used to sweep up all the yard and clean out all the cinder muck and cart that up to the Shut up Common in a hand barrow. It was pulled like a hand cart. And then at night after 10 o'clock the night soil collection was done. *Because there wasn't any sewers?* No. I spent a heck of a lot of time with him. *When you say cinders now they had solid fuel?* Open fire like we have in this house now. A big open fire with the big black guard round it. Very often if you stood too close to it you would burn your legs on the metal work.

How many classrooms were there? I should think about five. Every one of the classrooms had an open fire. I think there was a caretaker early in the morning. The fires were lit for the children but at the end of the week when all the stuff was cleared out and put in a big bin and we used to go and empty the bin. No, I

wasn't paid; I was just a helper for my granddad. That was his job. Course we had to sweep up all the leaves 'cos there was a big oak tree in that school, as you probably remember, with a seat around it. That's now been tarmacked but that weren't then.

Was there a stream somewhere along there?
The Emblems; up at the top and during the war-time we used to have gas-masks on and we had to go up to the top there and go into the trenches. Because they said if ever there was an air-raid or a threat of war we'd have to go up top playground and down into the trenches for shelter. They were dug directly behind the school. They were dug for the school children. You carried your gas mask with you all the time; like a satchel. There was times when they make you go through like a little gas chamber. They brought a mobile thing to the school and you walked through it and tested your gas mask. You never went without it.

What sort of thing did you like at school in those days?
Well I think everything. I mean sport. We played lots of sport. We used to go out on what now is the football field, or Dersingham football field, we used to go out there and play out there. There was carpentry, cookery. I took part in everything I had a chance to take part in. We used to go for walks. The teacher would take so many at a time for walks. I think I thoroughly enjoyed my years at the school.

We used to cook in I think it was the chapel by the road or once was a chapel. We used to learn to cook in there and we done woodwork in there. We did gardening as well because we had our own garden there where the fire station is now going up the hill. We all use to do a little piece of gardening.

Others have told me they had to work to earn money to help out their families as they all seemed to be poor.
Well I think we all did. I worked for a lady, a Mrs. Stovell. I always remember going to hers every night after school and getting in coal, coke, and anthracite and done a little bit of gardening; things like that. How I come to work there was to get her cat from down a tree that was stuck up a tree. She came for me twice to do that and then she gave me jobs.

I worked for then Mr. Terrington the butcher down the road; Saturday morning deliveries. There was another man in the village Fred Houchen I used to go with him; he was a driver of a little tiny Austin van.

Did you have to give the money to your parents?
What little money it was, was pocket money for us. We spent it on sweets mainly. If you wanted anything from Lynn you saved up; I suppose

Woolworth's was the main shop then.

You mostly played with other boys with little cars.
Yes on the common. I remember the children quite well I played with. That was the place we used to go up there. Also riding on the shut up fen on the hills, on our bicycles. That's where we used to spend our time 'cos there weren't much else. You could do what you liked up there.

I went up on the farm as a boy after my tenth birthday. High days and holidays. There was a job for five or six boys helping out carting fodder for all the cattle, pigs and cows. There was a job Saturday mornings and holidays. Harvest time. I went there after my tenth birthday and got involved in the farm work. Course by living up here we used to play up there. Not only work up there we used to play around that area. Riding the horses and that's how I come to be involved with the farm and stayed with the farm ever since.

So all your working life you have worked with the farm.

Mr. Stanton's farm; I officially started work at 14 but I spent four years before that on the farm as a boy. I started at 14 years old full time work. I left school and I went to King's Lynn to work I think for about a fortnight. At Dodman's the boiler makers and that was 18 shillings and 9 pence a week; 5 shillings was my bus fare; 10 shillings was for my mother and the rest was for me. It was 3/9d for me. So I left and went on the farm and I got £2.50 a week. I wasn't there long before I joined the piece work gang. There was some weeks we earned as much as £10 and £12 a week.

Could you explain what you mean by Piece work gang.
The more you work, the harder you work the more money you earn. You worked the hardest you could and the more you was paid for that job. Not all jobs was piece work. Some was a standard wage. Some were put out at piece work rate. That rate varied.

Give us an example of some of the jobs you would do.
Well the seasons. I mean there was potato picking season where I joined a gang of nine women and I was the tenth person potato picking. We used to grow potatoes down the marsh and a lot of potatoes down by the station what was; we used to grow a lot of potatoes down there. Sugar beet that was done piece work; knocking and topping. Carting was always done by hand. With horses and carts. Then course as we moved on we moved onto tractors and trailers. That was all piece work. There was nine ladies worked there and I helped out. I made up the tenth - I was young boy.

When you say potato picking you mean sorting them out?
No that's riddling. Potato picking is picking them off the ground in baskets and carting them up to a hale and hailing them up and storing for the winter. Then we went on to riddling and that was sort out the big ones from the little ones. Good ones from the bad ones and stones and clods, especially down the marsh. We had some happy days down there. There was a lot of other men down there. Course a lot of that work was done with horse and carts. Carting these 'taters and they did move on to tractors and trailers.

Just going off a point; when the floods came in did that effect the work you had to do down there?
Most certainly did because that was salt water. The land was left lying dormant for some period of time. I think some people tilled theirs much sooner than we did.

So eventually they were able to grow potatoes again.
Yes. There is some woods down there that I often look at now when we walk down there that I helped to set. Mr. Richard Stanley had a pit pulled out down there. A shape of a horse shoe- a duck pit. We set the wood beyond it. *A duck pi?* A duck pit; he used to like to go duck shooting and he had it pulled out in the shape of a horse shoe filled with water. Right at the very bottom was pulled out to make the bank up when the tide breached the bank and they pulled them pits out to get the -----? to make the bank up. *Is the pond still there?* I don't know. Is it sir ? (*Yes)* The pond is still there. What stays in I don't know? That's on private land now. That belong to His Royal Highness. *(As a matter of fact it's got a little wood beside it was called Prisoner's Wood. You go right down Marsh Road and you turn right and it's on your right.)*

So you did the potatoes and what other jobs did you do. A lot was done by hand.
There was a lot of work. I did make a little list. There was thrashing. Cutting the corn with a binder, tying it up. Then you had to stand it all up, the shoves that stood there and that ripened on the shock. It was picked up and carted and stacked up. In the winter months that was thrashed out. There was a lot of hand work involved in that.

Did people have to be brought in for that particular job?
No. Because when I joined the farm there were 45 men so there was a lot of people. There was odd people come in for short periods of time, but they mainly had all their own staff. There'd be a gang go out and set up the shoves, gang cart it, and a gang what thrashed it. Took nine or ten men to thrash it. That's to take the grains of corn from the actual straw. It went through a drum - a thrashing machine. One of my jobs as a boy then was a chaff boy. To catch

the chaff to bring home and put in the chaff house to feed the horses. Nothing was wasted; when you used to catch the flights from the corn, that's the husks what's round the ears of corn, catch that. And we also used to cut chaff, cut straw up in small pieces for the horses. That's what they were fed on and rolled oats and any other bits and pieces they could get. We, as boys, used to look after our horses and give them that little bit extra.

You were responsible for a horse?
Yes. That was your job. You yoke one up in the morning, and you looked after that, that was your responsibility the whole working day. And you used that horse to do whatever jobs you wanted to do.

How many horses were there altogether?
I can't be sure, but I think about 16 when I was there.

Each man had his own horse?
No there were two teams and we looked after a team of horses. They were split in two. You was detailed each day you went there to take a certain horse and do the jobs you was allotted for the day. You probably won't get that same horse every day. But the boys on the horse and carts would try to get a good little horse that they kept and looked after. You had that job mainly every day carting fodder.

You did have other jobs like tilling the land, like harrowing, rolling, and various jobs. In the harvest time for a boy there was horse rake. Hay season there was hay turners. There was two hay turners on the farm that are not there now. Then there was turning the hay so a different side got the sun and dried out to make the hay. One of the jobs I always remember like the peas; they used to be cut with grass cutters. Two grass cutters and men stood all the way round the field and turned these. They had a short piece each to turn with a fork. Turn it away so the horses could walk round again and that was till the peas were cut and they were turned like that by hand. Men and horses, no machines; nowadays everything is done by machine; the work was a lot easier. This is the lifting, the hard work; everything was done by hand; moving the corn at harvest times especially. Tremendous amount of corn had to be moved by hand. It was all cut and bagged up on a combine, dropped on the floor, people picked it up, took it down to the Manor House and there that was dried, went through a drier, came out the other end, bagged up again, then stored up then ready to be sold. It would be sold to a merchant. Where that went from then I don't know I suppose they sold it on to the mills for grinding for food, and various other things, cattle fodder.

Did you have such a thing as hay stacks?
Yes we had hay stacks and we used to cut them when we used to use them for feed. We use to cut them with a cutting knife, a hay knife. You'd cut a section at a time so you didn't uncover all the stack so it got wet. It was built and then thatched to keep the water out. You would cut a section like you'd cut a cake, a piece at a time. We'd take off what we'd want that was then fed to the animals.

We also did, once a year, we had a big pit in the ground to make silage and we used to cover that up and then when that was winter time we'd open it up and feed it to the animals. We also had that cooked potatoes on there. We steamed potatoes and we put them in this pit and covered them over and when autumn come we go in there and dig out what we want. They were cooked, steamed and that's how they were kept. They was cooked, steamed, put in this pit, and then vacuum sealed and you used to go and cut out what you wanted, load them onto a cart and take them to the cattle.

It was a continuing round of feeding animals.
Yes, we had five barns or buildings on the actual farm all contained cattle. We had to cart to each place. A lot of them was fed differently to the others. They mainly had mangels, kale, some had different bits and pieces. All depends on their ages what they was fed on.

So the main things on the farm were cow?
Bullocks, not cows. We did have a few cows at one time, a cow herd but they were bullocks. They were fattened and they went over two years old before they were sold and they went mostly to Italian (?) markets as they were big fat animals. But now they don't go nowhere near as long; they're sold much earlier.

Sheep was another big thing; we always had a lot of sheep. In the winter of 1947 we had all these roads blocked round here; blocked from the December to the first or second week of April; very bad winter. We had to walk everywhere. Couldn't go by road so we had to go by the fields from place to place to these buildings to get the fodder in for the animals. A lot of the places were far too deep with snow. Most were shut up in barns but the sheep that were out in the fields stayed out there. We used to go and get them up in the mornings, and drive them up to the troughs to feed.

Another one of my jobs as a boy was stubbing (?) turnips. They would cut them off ground level and you went and got the little bit what was in the ground they couldn't get to and you stuck it out.

That bad winter did you lose a lot of sheep?
No. We did lose sheep in the lambing yard. The lambing yard got full of snow and a gang of us went up there with a horse and cart, made our way up there, carted the snow out of the lambing yard and out onto an open field so we could get to do our work. The sheep that were buried were alive and some of them what was outside, though they were inside they were uncovered and they died. Them what were buried that we dug out were alive.

We had pigs. We had a pig sty down in the lower yard where Richard Stanton kept pigs near Manor House near the church that's where the pigs were kept. And that finally become a potato store and then we had a big glass store for chip potatoes built.

The sheep were not only kept on the big field down by the church where they are at the moment. You can see them.
There are several fields around that area that are used for sheep. They are wet at times so they are not used for nothing else. Dykes run through there and I suppose all the dykes make their way down to the Marsh. But we also have sheep on other grass fields up on the farm. And that time of day we used to grow lot of kale and swedes, and the hoggets were put out on them. Hoggets were fattening for use for eating. *Over yeared lamb?* Over yeared lambs.

We use to have a lot of fun in that kale in them days, catching rabbits.

Another thing I did mention to the boss, I don't know if anybody know about it in the field, but when I was a young boy up the road here was a searchlight. It was to do with the war and there is a little bit of the footings left and the field is now called Searchlight High Field at the top of Dodds Hill on the Ling House Road. And as children we were very interested in that. That was such a powerful light and that was at night searching the sky for enemy airplanes.

There was also another thing there was the Home Guard. My father was in the Home Guard. My grandfather was in the A.R.P. as an Air Raid Warden and he would go out and make sure people hadn't got lights showing. You had a bicycle light with only a little tiny slit through metal. Car lights were the same. These are some of the things that stick out in my mind as a young child. Going down the hill you would very often have one of the Home Guard jump out on you and shout "Who goes there; friend or foe?" Because we used to go down to George King the barbers and sit in his hut. That was warm. We very often sit in there of a night time and course that'd be dark when you come back and they'd want to know who you was. *There could be Germans coming in off the coast.* They was always aware of that what was going on. Just find out who you were.

As we move on I spoke to Mr. Stanton about this the case tractors on the farm. When I went on the farm there was only iron wheel tractors with spikes on. No rubber tyres. You used to have to put a band round the wheel, a metal band to take it down the road because you weren't allowed it on the road with spikes on. It would dig the road up. Just a metal seat. Everything had metal seats. All the machines you used all had metal seats. They were used all day from 7 o'clock in the morning till 4 o'clock at night. You sit on a corn sack and most of the men wore an army overcoat because that was the only method of keeping warm.

There were no covers.
No covers; no cabs. Modern tractors are beautiful. We have come a long way since them old spike wheeled tractors. That was all when I joined the farm. Of course there weren't many motors. There was a few motors about, but not many motors. Mr. Stanton, my former boss, he had a shooting brake. That was nice, I used to go with him as a child to beating. That was when we were on a shooting day. You had somebody to knock the pheasants out and he took me as a child to many places. Well I was brought up in that and I've always been up in it; always been interested in shooting. The boss was showing me the day before yesterday the labour book of 1947 and he said I was connected with pigeons then and I've been pigeon shooting ever since.

When you shoot the pigeons do you eat them?
I do; the rest are sold. But we've always ate pigeons and rabbits and still do to this day.

One of the things I didn't mention to you when I went as a youngster, I went down the marshes as a bird scarer; scaring crows and pigeons off the crops. I had a pair of clappers made; a piece of wood with two pieces hanging loosely on each side. You waved it backwards and forwards. That was a big job to keep the crows and that off the seed. While I was going down there I used to see the Italian prisoners of war making the Marsh road that now is, the concrete road. They were building that; Italian prisoners of war.

Where were they living?
Down on the beach in huts down there. They were brought there each day by the lorry load and that was their job and they were building that while I was down there as a youngster scaring the birds.

One of the chappies who used to keep pigs up here on the allotments, one of his jobs, he was in the services, to take them from A to B. I was very friendly with him so I got to know about it. I used to see them cooking on the side of the road when I went down there. They'd be cooking food in billy cans at the side of the

road and all that kind of thing. There were English officers looking after them. That was how that road come to be there. It been patched many times. The only way you could go down the Marsh before that was down the Hurry Home Drift. and you made your way down there, which is now down near The Albert Victor. That was the only way down.

Before the concrete road was there, we used to go down The Hurry Home Drift, over the railway gates, over the railway lines, and then carry on down the Marsh. We had some land down there what was named Dersingham Marsh. And we also had land down at Snettisham Marsh. We used to bring the horses from Snettisham Marsh to Dersingham Marsh to shut them up at night for the next morning. *At the Alexandra Station Hotel?* No, the other way, down on the Platas (?); that's where the horses used to be. We used to take them round there at night.

It's always been marsh. The actual beach is very black mud. You had to go further up to get any sand. I've always been down there all my life growing samphire. When that's ready. But now they say you're spoiling the environment and they don't like you going down there. Yes I eat it and still do to this day. I mean the bird reserve wasn't there then. We was allowed to shoot down there. More or less shoot anywhere down on the fore-shore. You're not allowed to shoot down there you have to go by the footpath. But we could go anywhere at that time of day; and did.

I always remember every Saturday dinner time going down now what is the concrete road. The gates were shut and locked at 12 o'clock; footpath only. Dan Seaman used to shut the gates and lock them at a 12 o'clock at a Saturday dinner time. But the gates have gone, and the posts have gone.

Any one can drive down there if they go down the by-pass and turn left. They can't legally but that road was basically built to extract the gravel for the runways for all the aerodromes in West Norfolk. Well there was -------- Shingle Company down there wasn't there. They used to come up Snettisham Beach road, also the Marsh Road that was the idea. So Dersingham provided the shingle for the runways.
Yes.
Do you remember Hodges Lorries?
Hodges Lorries yes. Well I knew Mr. Littleboy (?) used to drive one. There was one time there you couldn't get over Dersingham Station because that was sheer mud. And they built the road, that was a track and then they built the road and that opened it up for everybody.

So presumably the road was built about 1942 wasn't it?
I would say somewhere around, yes you're probably right. The actual road did not get washed away in the floods but further down did, near the bird reserve. The concrete all tipped up, it got undermined. And in the 1953 floods that came over and right up to Dersingham Station.

In the film which you can see there's a picture of a straw stack which has floated across the concrete road, and next to the straw stack is the remains of a potato clamp?or Hale? which had been completely washed out.
We had cattle down there and it washed them out and took them up into Lambert's ----------? And that's where they were in the middle of that. Well it was busy. The cattle had to be fed they were still down there. They used to row the fodder down in a boat until the water subsided and they could get to the wood the cattle were in.

It was under water for about a fortnight?
Yes, they carted the food as far as they could down the marsh and then off loaded it into a boat and then they took it from there to feed the cattle. What crops there was destroyed. Well it was September so there wouldn't be a great deal of crops on the land.

The Sprayer? Have we mentioned the sprayer?
Yes, going down the Marsh. Mr. Stanton's saying he used to grow a lot of strawberries down the Marsh. We had a great deal of fun down there. Billy Andrew's the local shop used to sell a lot of our strawberries. That was on the end of Post Office Road. There was a lot of us connected with that; men and women. We had some happy times doing that. It was a lot of work cultivating up the centre of the rows, chopping the weeds, quite a bit of hand hoeing. They took on a lot of staff to pick strawberries. They was all loaded up and sold.

I put a little down about living up here at Dodds Hill. When I moved in here there was no electricity. There was a hook in the middle of this ceiling, that was where the paraffin lamp hung on. And I always remember my granny overfilled the lamp, the table in the middle of this room was a pine table and you would have paraffin on the food. We used to get the water from the well as many other people; that is now capped so the children can't fall in it.

On Friday nights Mr. Bradfield's van come down as far as the Coach; he still does run the shop in Heacham. Well he used to have a mobile van where we got the paraffin from, lamp wicks, and all our bits and pieces. We used to walk down the hill, course he always used to sell chocolate and all so we would get a bar of chocolate if you were lucky. We had a lot of candles. In that corner and

that corner where you are sitting was a built in cupboard and that's where spare saucepans, candles, lamp wicks, was all kept in there. You did have to have a good store of things especially if the weather was very bad. You couldn't get out so everybody lived like that. They had a good store of spare things, spare food, spare bits and pieces.

I remember when we first came up here our first born used to sit in the high chair and he was tied in with two yards of lamp wick. You would buy about two yards at a time of that. My grandparents had that in stock.