

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 29

Date interview conducted: February 25th 1999

Name: Beatrice Mildred Roper. I was Riches before.

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I've lived in Dersingham all my life. They call me Betty. The only person that called me Beatrice was my school teacher. I used to hate it then.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

I've got three sons. He got married and he live down Viceroy Close, my youngest one. The other two still live at home. My sister, I had two sisters and a brother. My brother live in the village. He live in Wallace Twite way now. I've got a sister on the main road and my other sister died. The sister that died she had 4 children and two of them live in the village. We're still village people.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

On a Sunday night if we'd been good all the week they used to take us up the common. In them days there used to be see-saws on the common. On a Saturday afternoon we had an old pram and we used to go up the wood and help Mum and Dad saw the wood down ready for the copper on Monday morning. We used to light the copper.

In them days we never had no washing machine well nothing electric really. We used to light the old fire and boil all the washing up in the copper on a Monday morning. We always had coal for the fire. We used to use wood and burn all the old rubbish. old papers and that. In them days they didn't save paper or cardboard boxes. In them days there was Persil, Rinso. We used to burn all that; anything what'd make the water boil. We used Persil or Oxydol. Soap powder no liquid. Before hand we used to have to get the pails and go up along the road and out the front. There used to be a tap on the side of the road. We had to get all the water and carry all that back. Then after the washing was finished we use to empty all the water on the garden. That used to grow lovely and every so often Dad would dig it all over. We use to grow lovely celery and stuff like that. Everything went, all the old bits of vegetable, everything went in the garden. We didn't have dust bin men then. We weren't allowed to work much on a Sunday, Dad used to get it all done on a Saturday.

I lived in Century Villa along the main road. There were houses on our side of the road but on the opposite side of the road there were two fields. Hawthorn Drive was always there but there was no flats; there were two fields, Cows on

one field, conker trees and there was a big pond. They built the flats on top of the pond. The flats opposite the paper shop. The paper shop was there in a smaller ----- that was always there. They sold papers. There was only about five books a week. There used to be Home Chat, Home Notes, Home Companion, Woman's Weekly, and Sunday Companion. Daily papers there's The Herald, oh I can't remember. The Radio Times used to be tuppence then.

Thaxters was there. There was a little bungalow and Mr Thaxter's mother lived in the bungalow. As time went on he had his mother's front room and had a little shop. They used to sell fruit and vegetables. Then eventually he got bigger and bigger. He bought the bungalow across the other side of the road so then his mother went to live there, her name was Mrs. Tomlinson. She used to live across the other side of the road. The bungalow was pulled down eventually to make the shop bigger.

There was Rankins. Mr and Mrs Wyer lived there, that was another little shop. That was where we used to get the paraffin for the paraffin stoves. We used to cook on the paraffin heaters as well.

We had a big old black lead kitchen range and used to do the cooking all on the top of the stove. We used to have a coal fire; that was when coal used to be five shillings a hundred weight.

My dad worked on the roads. My Granny and Grand dad they all lived up Chapel Road.

So the Riches have been in ----- that's why I wonder why there hasn't been a road named after ---- there's been loads of Riches in the village and there's never been a Riches in the roads. There was Riches down Centre Vale, Eric Riches his dad and my dad were cousins and they were all cousins, distant cousins.

We used to go up Granny's every Sunday morning; she used to do cooking. She used to live opposite the chapel. We used to go there because we weren't old enough to go to the church. We used to go to the chapel until we were so old and then we used to go on to the church. In them days they used to have horse and cart and we used to get the water ---- there used to be well water ---- and the well water was lovely to drink; much better than our water is now. Granny used to get the pail and get the water from out the well and we had a drink of water. I think the kids drank more water then than they do now.

There was a row of houses opposite the chapel and the well was round the back. There was four or four houses in a row and they all used the same well. The cottages are still there. She used to ---- in their days they used to work up

Sandringham They had a little pony and trap or horse and cart or whatever you called it. There was hardly any cars. Granny was in the Royal kitchens. Granddad worked there as well.

We weren't allowed to go very far. We used to play on the cricket field they call it the recreation ground now. We always played there when we came home from school. We had to change all our clothes, shoes and everything, put our old'uns on to go out to play. We always had a different coat on to go to chapel. I being the youngest one of three girls I had the let me downs; we used to let the hems down. The shoes didn't cost very much, only about 2/6 a pair. We use to wear plimsolls but we always had to have shoes on when we went to church.

We done sums; they call it arithmetic now. Geography, woodwork and needlework. One afternoon we had to do knitting for the Queen's Guild. We used to make organise blouses. We used to knit socks; big long ones. We sometimes used to stretch 'em and take them to the teacher 'cos we used to get fed up. We used to stretch'em and make them look longer. When you took them up to her she used to pull'em out sideways. "Nother two Inches " she used to say.

We used to do P.E. and we used to go on the park; we used to go on where the youth and community centre is there used to be a big tree there. There was a seat all round the tree. We used to sit there and used to take it in turns to go across ---- the teacher you know in The Feathers yard that had always been there. We used to have to walk along by the houses and go in that little gate where all the animals (?). Nearer towards the church. We had to walk down there. We all had to take our bats and balls. We played rounders, the boys played cricket.

There was a place what join onto the Feathers car park where we do our cooking. We used to go down the alley way at the side of it. Just inside the door was a big pantry where the old cookery mistress used to keep all the things. In them days you had to take your own food, take all your own ingredients. The only thing I can remember the cookery teacher give us was old powdered milk. But that used to be nice to eat; we'd sometimes pinch a little bit when the cooking mistress weren't looking. It used to stick to the roof of your mouth. The powdered milk. We used powdered egg as well. We didn't use to take proper eggs to school. I can never remember taking proper eggs to school; that would be powdered.

How old were you when the war was on?

I can remember listening to the wireless. We never had television we had to listen to the wireless. The news 'ud come on and we'd have to keep all quiet.

The news was what -- old Churchill. Then they said that the war was over. I think we did have a party in Dersingham. In them days there used to be The Oaks --- LLOYD -Pratt--and we used to have lovely fetes and that. My sister was a carnival Queen. They all had to dress up. We dressed our bicycles up. Most of the village took part -- lot more than they do now. The W.I. used to go there a lot.

We didn't go out very far. We used to go on the cricket field in the evening, but we had to be home early. We had to be in by 8 o'clock. Sunday afternoons we used to go up Mrs. Stanton's; old lady Stanton's. They were up Shernborne Road. She had a room there we used to call Bible Class, where Gordon Brown live, we use to go there and have Bible lessons We used to have a party once a year in the church hall, you know a church party, bread and jam and cakes. We used to hurry up and eat the bread and jam while the cakes were coming round or you'd miss out. The church people provided the cakes.

I remember the cinema in the Forester's Hall; that used to be a shilling to go in. They used to have them once a week; black and white films, Laurel and Hardy and Old Mother Riley. We used to love watching them. There was Arthur Askey and Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope. They was all funny films they never had no horrible films. Not like they do now, murders and things like that. We was only allowed out for an hour. All the kids had strict parents really.

When we used to come out of school, one day we'd come along Manor Road. There used to be a dyke along Manor Road, right from The Feathers right to Manor Road. We'd put a leaf in at the beginning and we used to watch the leaves go all the way along the dyke till it got to Manor Road and we was nearly home then.

When the violets and the snowdrops and that were about we used to go in the Old Hall and pick snowdrops. They've built over them now. Up Sugar Lane there used to be running water to the lane, all down the edge there. We used to pick violets and come back down Fern Hill. It was like a little spring. We used to put the violets in a paste jar. 'cos years ago we used to save every jar. We didn't throw nothing away not like they do now. William Whiskers just lost his mother and he said when he looked in her pantry she had about 50 paste jars cleaned and washed. Jam jars. She never threw nothing away. She'd kept them all these years.

The only things I remember in tins. We used to have eggs perhaps one Sunday. Another Sunday we used to go to King's Lynn 'cos we used to go on the train. You could put your pram on the train. We used to go and get lino and things

like that off the market ever so cheap. Bacon joints - David Franks (?) in them times. We used to come back on the train. It didn't cost much; about a shilling on the train. It was a day out. The train stopped at Wolferton, Wootton near the Black Cat. You know where Strikes is now the train lines were at the side there (*That ran to the Docks and then mainly into Lynn.*)

If we took the pram we couldn't sit down in the compartments we had to stand in the guard's van. The guard would help you put the pram on the train then you just stood there. There was a corridor I'm not certain they ran every day. Maybe only certain days the train ran. Then we had to walk all the way up Station Road home again in the evening. It used to be morning and come home again in the afternoon. (*What did you do about lunch?*) We had fish and chips and shared them; sat in the park and ate them. Opposite where the Post Office is now was a Fish Shop, Bands Fish Shop I think it was called. We used to get Fish and Chips and we did not have to walk very far. There weren't traffic lights and things like that. We didn't have to worry about traffic lights.

There used to be someone come round collecting jars. Penny for a pound jar; tuppence for a 2 lb jar; we didn't waste anything.

How did you feel about the railway closing?

We couldn't go anywhere. We couldn't go to Hunstanton we couldn't go anywhere 'cos we hadn't got no other transport. We got a bike. There was buses but we hadn't got any money to pay for it. When we used to go to school it used to cost us a penny. If we got on at Linford's Corner and got out at the Coach and Horses the school's right on the opposite side of the road. It used to cost us a penny. We used to come to dinner 'cos there was no dinners at school then. We used to walk home across the fields and back. We only went on the bus if we had the money. We only went on there if we was late. A penny was a lot of money. I used to get threepence a week in them days.

What would threepence have bought you?

We used to buy sweets. We used to save up especially say in the Mart. To get to the Mart we'd have to save up enough money for the bus fare. The rides would be 6 pence and a shilling. They had a children's day. They still had the bumper cars, roundabout with all the horses going up and down. They have better things now. If we didn't save we didn't go. We had to do jobs; taking it in turns to do the washing up and dusting. I used to go and clean the little old lady's brass. She used to have a table full of brass. Saturday mornings; sixpence I used to get every week. When I was 11 I used to work for The Feathers Hotel. I used to get 7/6d a week. I had to work all the week and go back after I leave school. I used to go there night-times and help put the children to bed, bath the

children. I didn't have any responsibility of the children on me own, the mother was there. I only used to help. The worst job was I had to bike home in the dark. We never saved up enough money for the batteries for the back light. They used to have dynamos but I couldn't afford one of them. We had an old back pedal bike which is more (----?-----) now. One of them bikes you pedal forwards and then to put the brake on you pedal backwards.

I think we were 14 when we left school. I went to the paper shop. I've been there ever since. I've seen some changes. We only had a little tiny shop. It'd expanded. Only one used to work in the shop then. As they brought out new things they got more and more staff. The woman in the shop, Mrs. Rayner then Mr. Dilkes bought the shop, Mr. and Mrs. Dilkes used to work in the shop. They used to have a betting shop at the back, at the side. Mrs. Dilkes used to help me serve in the shop. We didn't get crowds like we do now. The betting shop was betting on the horses.

Was there any unemployment then?

They used to work on Mr. Stanton's farm. There used to be Lincoln's farm, Betty Lincoln's husband used to have a farm over the station. In them days when the peas and all that were ready there used to be pea picking. We used to go picking beans. In them days the kids were allowed to go. We was allowed to go pea picking. We always seemed to have a holiday when that was going on. We didn't have so many holidays as they have now. My dad used to have an allotment down Station Road, nearest the road, we used to go down there and help him night times. There used to be a *CAP(?)* at the bottom and used to get a lump of cauliflower, carrots. He'd get what they call a shiv? well its a penknife. He'd get his Sheathknife? out and just peel a carrot and we'd eat that. Eat it raw.

The paper shop just sold papers and sweets. Thaxter's started up the vegetables further down. When they extended the shop they started selling some food. There was Mrs. Wyer, she used to sell grocery; where Rankins had it. There was Thaxter's. There was Rowley Linford he used to sell grocery on the corner where the fish shop is now. The paper shop only sold odd tins of milk in case you run out. The paper shop was always open early than the other shops were. They did not used to open at all on a Sunday. If you didn't get anything on Saturday you'd had it. Sunday was a day of rest. We weren't allowed to any knitting or anything like that on a Sunday. We could go out to play. We use to walk a lot, up through Sandringham and pick wild flowers and things like that. Come home and put them in books. Press them in books.

Was there electricity then?

There was electricity but we didn't have electricity. We had a hanging lamp.

Paraffin lamps that used to hang from a chain. You couldn't see a lot for reading. We used to have to go to bed early. In them days there were three of us girls. We had Enid Blyton books, a couple of comics. We didn't have a lot.

Mother use to have the kitchen range going all the time. Kept the place warm.

How old were you when this area was built. White Horse?

The council estate you mean. There's somebody lived in here before I had. I've been here over 40 years. I can't remember them building them. I remember the White Horse Inn. We had a lot of pubs then - The Albert Victor; The old Dun Cow, they pulled the Dun Cow down and rebuilt it, remodelled it, I still call it the Dun Cow. If someone comes to ask in the shop you forget it's Budgens. It was a place that stood out.

I lived at Century Villa till I got married and then I went and lived in Meckleburg cottage opposite the Gamekeepers Lodge which was the Old Hall then.

Can you remember the row of old cottages that used to be there?

All I can remember is there was Isherwood's garage, the big house. There was the wine shop, then there was the garage, then Isherwood's house, then Mecklenburg cottage as that joined on to their garden. Then there was the big house where Fells live now, I think that's called Mecklenburg House, Then the house that is there now. I can't remember the cottages.

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

They've just done away with all the fields, the ponds. There used to be a pond round The Feathers; they've built on the pond there. There was a pond opposite The Oaks; it's Clayton Close now. There was a pond opposite The Paper Shop, where the flats are now. You could go for walks and see the cows and the lambs, you can't now. They use to put the sheep on the field opposite the shop. I didn't like it when the flats were first done but it looks tidy now. The old Hawthorn Cottages can still be seen.

We use to love the White Horse and they've just built shops. I always remember it as the White Horse. In them days the old people used to walk up to the pub. We would go up there with dad and have a bottle of pop. We used to sit outside and have the pop; we weren't allowed to go in the pub. They used to meet each other at the monument and then walk up. Some of the old boys had a bicycle and they'd be talking so long round the monument they'd walk up the pub and forget about the bicycles and leave the bikes behind.