

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 31

Date interview conducted: 8th JULY 1997

Name: George Richard Eldred Stanton

My nickname is Dick. We alternate in generations between Dick and Richard

When did you first come to Dersingham?

I was born in Dersingham in 1934. I have always lived here apart from 12 years when I farmed in Newmarket and had three years in the Army and at Agricultural College.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

My son lives here. We have five children; four of them are married and they are spread around elsewhere.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

I suppose most of my memories are connected with a small private school called Wellswill school in Manor Road which now sadly doesn't function. My sister and I, who is more or less the same age, used to go there together. We walked there daily. Some of the memories we have from there are when the garage behind Parkers shop which is now Crane's Woodwork caught fire. Another memory was when a Blenheim aircraft landed just by the Shernborne cross-roads on the field which we farmed which was a satellite airfield, an alternative for Bircham airfield which was being bombed at the time.

Earlier than that I have many memories of playing on the Open Common. We used to play a lot. Another memory is, my father being a farmer going with a little party up to see our carhorses. And, like most children, wanting to show off I went rather close to one of the mares who had a foal, who came up to me, got hold of my shoulder, lifted me off the ground, shook me and threw me down again. That certainly taught me a lesson or two.

This school. Where was it?

I'm afraid I don't know the name of the house now but it's next door to where Mary Spaxman lived. About 100 yards down from; do you know where Manorside is? More or less opposite Manorside. The house is still there. It's a very nice house. It's changed hands once or twice lately.

In those days St. George's didn't exist.

In those days no, I think St. George's was built at the beginning of the war.

Can you remember that?

No, not really. The only school I can remember, the other school besides that one was the one that is now the Community Centre; opposite the Coach.

Now these big horses did they work in the village?

Yes they used to work on the field. We used to have two or three horses on the plough. I think we had one tractor at the beginning of the war, or two tractors. We had the first combine in 1942. Before then it was binders, or work by horses.

And did you have a lot more men?

Yes, we had I would think in those days, we had probably the same amount of land and we had about 40 men on the pay-roll. In fact I've still got some of the wages books. Now we have fewer acres but we do contract, we have four men today.

Were you much more dependent on the weather in those days?

Yes I think so. We had a corn drier built about 1942, before that all the corn as cut by binders and put into "shocks", we called them. Some people call them sheaves. In Norfolk we call them shocks. We used to go and thresh them out during the winter.

So if you had a wet spell it could have been a disaster.

Yes, we used to put them out in the field, stand them up and just wait for the weather to dry them. It was fairly good if you had a good stack-man. I can't remember what he's called, but someone who could build a good stack so the rain wouldn't get in. And also if you had a good thatcher to put a good roof on them. We used to have a lot, certainly bonuses. I think some of the bonuses are when you have a lot of chaps around. The old farm people we talk to they all remember the piece work gangs and the comradeship and the haggling and the bullying.

They were in many ways the good old days. Today so many farms may have 600 or 700 acres, we have a bit more than that, hence the four men. You have one man on 600 or 700 acres; a really lonely life. Can you imagine facing a wet Monday morning in a trye(?) taller than you are which is flat. No one to laugh and joke apart from your boss. The relationship between you and your boss is never the same as between you and your comrades.

Would you say that the summers now are longer and hotter?

I think possibly but I don't think it's anything like so drastic as people would have us believe. The media is much more powerful now. Everyone had

television, more newspapers so we tend to believe what we're told. I think probably it is slightly hotter. It's certainly no colder in the winter. This year, for instance we've had the most extraordinary year. We had no rain until the end of April, and now the last three months we've had more rain than we've ever had for the last 200 years almost.

Farmers tend to get the blame for the draining of the aquifer; is there a way to solve this problem?

We can save a lot more water. Farmers certainly are partly to blame but they have only been encouraged to do what they are doing. You have to remember when you irrigate in the day time 30% of the water you are irrigating with goes for evaporation. One of the answers is to go deeper for water. But that's only a short term solution. I think winter storage reservoirs, a lot of farmers are building winter storage reservoirs, so they can keep the water for the summer. But I think there are so many other problems. There is so much development so much water has to run off now that it can't go into the ground. There are ways. You can have your water from the sea but that's ineffective. You can bring down your water from Yorkshire.

You think that the building -- Dersingham keeps growing. You as a farmer would not like to see it any bigger?

Well if it's going to get bigger I don't know how it's going to get bigger. I am a tenant farmer; I rent my farm from Sandringham estate. Sandringham Estate from two farms to the east of the village so really you can't go to the west of the by-pass. There's not a lot of room in Dersingham.

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

I've never been a scout; I've never been a cub. I'm involved as church warden. I've just become a member of the British Legion. I've been a member of the cricket club. I'm President of the Dersingham Institute Bowls Club. Sadly I haven't got round to playing much Bowls. But they have certainly looked after me very well. I have been Branch Chairman of the National Farmer's Union. I found that very interesting. I'm a member of the Hunstanton Golf Club so I keep myself fairly active.

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

I think it was V.J. Day going round Dersingham collecting any wood. Anything that would burn anywhere. I went round with one of our drivers who is certainly no longer with us called Dick Griggs and we collected anything which would burn. And we went up to the hill behind you, we call it a hill in Norfolk but it's quite a hill when you get on top there. We had a bonfire that night. I can't remember a lot about the bonfire except there were a lot of people there. *A bonfire for the village?* A bonfire for everybody. All I can remember, a

silly thing, there were two girls; there were some old Home Guard Thunderflashes; I don't know where they got them from. Two went off and quite badly burned two girls. It was I think a general sense of relief.

Have you many memories of war-time Dersingham?

I think my first memory was being on a field with my father and mother; a very hot day in 1940 and we were actually burning twitch which is couch grass. You couldn't spray it in those days, you just had to drag it up and burn it. My sister and I loved doing the burning with matches. I remember all that afternoon my father and mother kept saying to us, "We just hope the Germans don't come. They are not far away." I can always remember them being, my father wasn't a miserable person but he was very upset that afternoon.

Then the Troops arrived. My Mother was in charge of the W.V.S. She had some charge of the billeting in the area. We had a lot of troops that came through. They came here; they came to the house. A lot lived at the Old Hall. They had a canteen in the Old Hall. I can remember one or two of the troops. There were so many of them. They were just billeted here. They were just passing through, in transit. Well, I can remember a lot of Newfoundlanders who came, who went to Dieppe and they had a really rough time at the Dieppe raid. We had troops coming all the way through till after D-Day.

My Father also, he was involved in the Home Guard. I suppose you can call it Dad's Army. He used to go off every weekend and several of the chaps on the farm were his team and they used to do exercises. They use to go and blow up anything you could blow up. They had a lot of explosives. They also had a little cabin about 40 foot down in Sandringham woods. I have been taken there. I couldn't find it again. Apparently, I don't really believe the story, but the only way you knew it was underground was a rhododendron bush planted above it which flowered on Christmas Day.

What was the worst time you remember?

I don't think I can remember a worst time. I can remember the floods. I wasn't here for the floods; I was working on a farm inn Essex at the time. We were filling sand bags down there because that's right on the Stour Estuary. It never occurred to me that we were flooded up here but my father had somebody who was helping him on the farm who rang me up so I came back. I was absolutely appalled. The whole marsh was awash. A high tide mark of debris just beyond Dersingham station. Obviously there wasn't much we could do about it until the water had receded. There's a little wood, at the Duck Decoy on the right hand side, and we had 17 animals in there from the Friday night until the Tuesday. They drunk a lot of salt water, there's a bank in there and we had to go and swim them out down to Dersingham Station. Those animals never ever really recovered. We had an awful job to get them back. We've got a film somewhere

of that.

We had about 12 acres of strawberries down there. I remember going down the following Summer. The Ministry of Agriculture advised farmers not to touch that land for a year. Some cultivated it straight away and it grew perfectly good crops. We duly left it and didn't touch it for a year. I remember going down in strawberry time in July, a mass of weeds where our 12 acre strawberries should be. In there amongst these weeds were some of the biggest and best strawberries I'd ever seen even though it was salt water. An awful lot of crops respond to salt water. The water was on the marsh about a week. I think the eye-opener was the line of debris right from Dersingham Station right the way up to Hunstanton. And there were 64 people drowned between Hunstanton and Dersingham.

It couldn't happen today could it?

I think it could happen very easily. There is a new sea bank but when you hear that the water level is going to rise a metre. Little money is being spent on coastal defences. I think if we had the same combination of wind and tide. And the wind that night was a north westerly coming down the Lincolnshire coast. If you had the same combination again I think the same thing could happen again.

In the old days the rivers, Woodhouse Creek used to come up to Nancy Cables House just on the main road. Almost up to my old school I was talking about.

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

I suppose just the general development and infilling. I think Dersingham's a very nice village to live in; I would thoroughly recommend it to anybody. It's got so many good points. I think one's lucky to live in a big village. *We've got more amenities now.* There are many more amenities, surgeries, libraries etc. I think it is infinitely preferable, it might not be so picturesque, to some of the outlying villages. I think it's a pity there's not more of a village centre or a market place. I suppose the village centre is really Budgen's or the library .

The playing field to me is very important because I've been on the Dersingham Sports for about 20 years. In that time three acres of the land of my farm have been incorporated. We've got one of the nicest playing fields in West Norfolk, a very good pitch, a very nice pavilion. We are very lucky. It's due to the work of a few people.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

I would like to see a larger hall than the Church Hall.

We discussed this at the Millennium Meeting we held; where would it be built?

No idea, no. It's got to be in the middle. But we do need a bigger hall. I think we are talking about an awful lot of money unless you knew you were getting lottery cash I don't think it's right we should go ahead and do it.

Presumably you will retire in Dersingham?

Don't know. I have a son who is farming with me. Mixed feelings really. I would be sad to leave Dersingham on the other hand it just depends on houses really. I won't live here for the rest of my life. Hopefully my elder son will come and take over here. This house is a Sandringham house for the farmer.

Going back a bit, your father lived here. Did your father's father live here?
Yes it goes back a long way. My father lived here. My grandfather lived here. Before that they lived at Lyng House which is in the parish of Dersingham. My great-grandfather also farmed at Lyng House. Before that I'm not quite certain how it was farmed but I do know there are 15 Richard Stanton's in Dersingham churchyard and there are three Richard Stanton's around, alive and kicking at the moment.

It's obviously a family title, calling all the sons Richard.
It seems to be. You can't get away from it.

Will you be buried in Dersingham?

Yes. I would always wish to be buried in Dersingham. My father moved to Snettisham but he still wanted to be buried in Dersingham.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

Apart from the religious significance I don't think. not very romantic, I don't think it means too much. We're going to carry on, I can't even plead that my computer's going to pack up.

What kind of celebration would you like to see in the village?
I think we should have a good party. I think we should have a dance. We shall certainly have a party. A big village party which is planned well in advance.

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

Look after the place.