

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 32

Date interview conducted: December 5th 1997

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When did you first come to Dersingham?

In December 1968

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

Other than my immediate family, my son and wife, no.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

Earliest memories are one of space. Green fields and accessibility to Dersingham beach as well as the railway. One could look out of my back window and there were green fields down to the sea. We used to make maximum use of Dersingham beach before it was sort of fenced off by the bird people.

What was it like?

Well they were the quarries. We used to go down there and walk around the broken concrete path as it was then. Around the quarries and picnic down there. It was very sort of quiet area as it was difficult to get out onto the main road in those days. The broken path was broken; that would be the floods in 1950 something; well before we got here.

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

Yes, I've been a member of one or two things such as the Dersingham Social Club. I joined at the inception of the club. Eventually became Chairman for four years and when it was sort of in the process of doing an extension really. The membership built up gradually during that four years to a very thriving community centre really or type centre for the whole of the village.

What sort of activities go on there?

It's mainly drinking. People did play cards and darts, typical if you like pub games. They also had groups and things on in the Saturday evenings, and Bank Holidays.

Even though Dersingham had lots of pubs?

But they were closing down. I mean when I first came here there were three more pubs than there are at present. Three have closed down in the 30 years I've been here so it was a changing social scene. It was a place which was much

more accessible, not only to some of the younger people but also to the female population because at one stage of course females did not venture into pubs.

So really the club did a good service for ladies.

Yes, and families because a family club it was a place you could take your family.

Does it still exist in the same form today?

As far as I'm aware it does, yes; I don't go very often now.

I was Chairman of the Community Centre when it started, well for a large number of years really until a couple of years ago. I became chairman when it first started. It must have started back way back in the early 80's when the school closed with the reorganisation locally. The Junior School moved up to St. George's and the old buildings there by the Feathers were converted into a Youth and Community Centre. It was a voluntary effort to start with and it proved very successful.

It's still used by lots of different organisations.

Absolutely, it's a very valuable asset for the village. One of the highlights there was the visit by the Queen; must have been 1981 or 82, somewhere round there. I think she visits some place locally every winter when she's here. Especially if it's connected with her estate and obviously the buildings are part of her estate and rented at a peppercorn rent. She was interested to see what was happening.

You also belong to the Church Choir.

I do now; only the last couple of years. Before that my wife had been in it for a large number of years and I looked after the son.

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

On a personal basis I mean, and the highlight of my career was for all family the marriage of my daughter here. As far as the village is concerned the one thing that stands out, and always will do as a very vivid memory, was when half the village came out as a big protest against the possible stopping of the by-pass application; we stopped all the traffic.

Why did people feel so strongly that we needed this By-pass?

Because the amount of traffic on the A148 Or A1149 whatever it is, was so heavy that you simply could not get out at weekends if you lived off the roads. And one part of the village wouldn't even venture down to the other part of the village because of the density of the traffic. So from an environmental point of view and in the village it was absolutely essential and the delays for those going to Hunstanton were intolerable I would have thought.

This had been mooted a long while.

Back in the 20's and 30's.

What was the final straw? What caused this?

Well the application was going along nicely when suddenly it was pulled into the Department of the Environment to say, which was a most unusual thing to pull the application in, it was all going through the normal procedures, with a view to stopping it or not permitting it. I think that was the last straw. So there was this great sort of protest. We had this marvellous sort of march down the road and stopped all the traffic for hours and hours.

This wasn't anything to do with the moth?

Well the moth was there, this moth, I don't know if anyone ever found this moth; this mythical moth, this small moth that was on Dersingham fen, which is supposed to be a rarity. But in the end of the day the whole thing was solved very simply by allowing water to drain from one part to the other allowing the fen part to be protected.

The only people who lost were some of the shops.

Well in fact that's not the case. Because the village became quieter then there was more opportunity and people took the opportunity to shop within the village. In fact more shops have opened since the by-pass has been built and seemed to have developed and grown to an extent where one didn't see previously than before.

So we've become much more a centred village rather than just a road through to King's Lynn?

Certainly local shops seemed to be used more.

What was the worst time you remember?

Well the whole time here's been quite happy really. I supposed the worst time was when we all got blocked in with snow some years ago; probably late 70s. I know that King's Lynn was cut off as well. Certainly you couldn't get out of Valley Rise. You couldn't get out of the village for a day or so and all the bread and all the milk came into Thaxter's and one had to go to Thaxter's to get the bread and milk. We couldn't get out the village to any extent for a day or two. A lot of people in the small hamlets round about were cut off for several days.

There were no buses and you could just walk across the middle of the road.

Yes there was no traffic, no nothing. Prior to that about 1969 it must have been before the railways were closed I remember being cut off again with snow. The only way into King's Lynn, I taught in King's Lynn, was to use the railway. I waited for the train. The train got me in and I found the school had been

closed. The railway line was a very useful means of communication. *It was sadly missed?* Sadly missed, I mean it was an absolute travesty that they closed it down. Of course in those days who was know there would be this amazing growth of cars and everything. *It wouldn't be used in the same way today.* No.

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

It's just the sheer number of houses that have been built. The place has virtually doubled in the time I have been here. I mean when I first got on to the Local Council that's the District Council in 1973 virtually could tell you every name of every person in every household. I mean the changes have been so great that it's impossible to do that now. The electorate's virtually doubled in that time. Tremendous changes from that point of view. I was on the District Council from 1973 to 95.

Can you remember anything particular?

Well the by-pass was one of the things and I suppose one tried to preserve the past. And tried through open spaces but unfortunately those who drew up the local plans in the 60s didn't necessarily envisage the tremendous growth that did take place over the last 20 years and didn't always allocate green space when perhaps they might have done.

So was most of your problems to do with planning?

Most, mainly planning yes. Well the Authority is responsible for planning so you used to get lots of queries regarding planning applications, occasioning housing.

So it was your job to try and say know if you felt it was affecting the history of the village?

Well you looked at the arguments on both sides. There was obviously the planning regulations that governed what you could do and what you couldn't. The various policies which the council had, relative to certain types of development in certain places and yet you had the wishes of the individual. So it was really a matter of trying to get a balance between them and use a bit of common sense.

From that point of view as a councillor are we now full?

Virtually; once Suiter developments have been completed at Mountbatten I think that's the last of the really major development that there is in the village. Then there are the odd little bits of infill. What we try to do with the last of the local plans has yet to be finalised but certainly in the early stages when I was still on the council that we tried to put a green belt all the way round Dersingham and try to preserve as much open space as we could.

There seems to be almost a natural green belt now.

Yes, but it has to be put onto the map and said this is green, this is a non-development area. Otherwise there would be pressure to develop these things over the years.

The by-pass makes an almost natural break.

It does.

We have that little wood.

Life Wood yes yes that's a break.

Is that privately owned?

As far as I am aware; that is now part of the so called green belt between here and Ingoldisthorpe otherwise the two of them would merge together like Ingoldisthorpe and Snettisham. Try to keep them separate entities.

Sandringham obviously provides a buffer to the south and east.

So every tiny piece of land, for example that old house near the Scout Hall.

How do feel all this building ties in with being short of water?

I wasn't aware we were that short of water in this area.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

As long as the future inhabitants of the village can try to retain the historical character I think in part we've probably failed the past. We haven't retained it quite as we could have done but I hope that now we're more aware of our heritage than we have been before those coming will not neglect and try to retain that sort of peculiar character of Dersingham because it spread. It has no particular centre. Certain areas near the church and that part of the carrstone set up ought to be preserved. Such as the basic road structure.

We've got that beautiful old tithe barn which doesn't do anything. What would you like to see go in there?

It's used for storage for reclaimed bricks and tiles and stuff for keeping the older properties in repair so it has got a sensible use.

Some people want some kind of Millennium Hall.

I would have thought the village was quite well provided for halls and I think one of the problems with providing any of these structures is keeping the thing going. It's not raising the capital, the Millennium Fund might give you some capital towards it, it's the revenue expenses afterwards to keep the things going.

We don't have a need for one.

I wouldn't have thought so; there is the church hall which provides a good facility and might well be improved. There's an opportunity to ask, "can that sensibly be re-furbished?" There's the small hall at the back of the Methodist Church and of course you've got the Gamekeepers, The Old Hall Hotel which have got good facilities. I would have thought we've got enough halls.

Also where would it go?

Precisely, there's no real place for it unless you use the bits of green space. The nearest part to the centre of the village is the northern end; Post Office Road, Chapel Road, and that part, and down towards Thaxter's.

There are certainly two distinct parts. The Manor Road part, and northern part which I think in the past were in competition with each other. It will be interesting to see though all those people who come along 100 years from now whether in fact they put a total preservation order on the village because all the properties will no doubt need renewing. They will all be well over 100 years old. Do you renovate or do you knock down and build. If you knock down and rebuild do you retain the existing street pattern or do you try to do something completely different. A pedestrianised centre and roads round the outside.

This area has a lot of attractions; a lot of people drift up from the south east and from the urban areas. There's no doubt the pace of life here is much slower than it is in some of the big city areas.

And the quality of air.

It amazes me because it is a very cold air. You have these lazy winds don't you. Go through you rather than round you. It always seems to be cold and damp yet old people thrive on it. On the other hand there are more nitrates in the water which is good for you contrary to what we heard previously. I think it's just the general pace of life.

It's easy to go for walks. We have a wide variety of scenery. When I first moved here in 68 I never dreamt I would stay here so long but when you got here it's an ideal place to bring up a family. You've got the Sandringham woods. You've got the beaches. You've got a small market town King's Lynn near by which provides most things. It's an ideal place to bring up children.

Will you retire in Dersingham?

It looks rather that way; the answer to that must be yes. Yes I intend to retire, by the year 2000 I might make my retirement.

What does the Millennium mean to you?

It means retirement.

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

Ask them when they are looking back, when they reflect on their 50 or 60 years whatever it may be whether they felt they had actually preserved the historical heritage that we left them. I'd hope that it could retain its entity. Its community spirit. There used to be a tremendous community spirit; certainly in the 60s and 70s. But perhaps not quite such a spirit today; partly because I think it's got so large. And because it's got so large, huge sections of the area you never see the people and never meet them so you don't know who they are. I think there's a change in social habits yes.