

DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 34

Date interview conducted: 10th October 1998

Name: Alan Walker

When did you first come to Dersingham?

1st April 1939. I was born here and have lived here ever since.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?

My cousin. We are an old Dersingham family.

What are your earliest memories of the village?

My earliest recollection is of starting school. Remember having to walk to the Primary school which is now the Youth Centre; twice a day as we had to come home for dinner. We did not have school dinners then. We lived in Pansey Drive next door to the coal yard. My father was working for James Jackson the farmer at High House farm. I remember walking with Mr. Mason Jones. He was the headmaster and lived this side of the village as well. We had to run to keep up with him. The other teachers were Miss Hudson, Miss Robertson and Mrs. Boyce. Various others came as we went through the school. We did the 3Rs when we first started. I took the 11 plus at the primary school. I failed it the first time but I took it again at the Secondary School and I was the only one who passed that year. Went by bus to the grammar school. Some used the train. I used the bus. My Grandfather was the first caretaker of King Edward VII Grammar School and I hold his gold watch that the boys presented to him for his first 25 years service. We had to wear the uniform; I found it hard work. I was an out door boy. I liked the out door life.

We played cricket football and hockey; I used to support the local teams. What is now the playing field we used to call it the cricket field. It was long grass and gorse bushes. James Jackson used to mow it by hand twice a year and that was it. There were just the iron bars. Bank Road end was nearly all gorse bushes. Some used to go down to swim in the shingle pits.

What I remember about Linford's Corner. The thing that sticks in my mind is an elephant being fed by Mr. Linford at the doorway.

The doctor's surgery was in the shop in those days. It moved from there to Bank Road. It went into Mrs. Chisholm's bungalow first then to the surgery.

Mr. Linford sold groceries. He used to fill the bags of sugar up with his scoop.

You used to take your ration book to get your bananas. It became the Co-op. Mr. Dent came as manager of the Co-op.

Thaxter's wasn't there from what I first remember. Rankin's was. That was Mrs. Wyr's. Before that it was The Cyclist's Rest. It was a little restaurant. Mr. Thaxter started on the opposite side of the road with three or four greenhouses behind his bungalow. He sold his produce from a barrow at the bottom of his drive. His mother and father-in-law lived in the bungalow opposite which eventually became the shop. He took over one of their rooms to start with and then got bigger and bigger. They competed with each other. The prices by the end of the day would be completely different. There was Parker's on the other side of the village. There was Mrs. Terrington where the frame shop is now. Mr Whisker on the corner of Manor Road.

The butchers was on the corner of Heath Road. There were the Bakers. Playfords there and Fitts on this side.

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

The only youth organisation I joined was the cubs. The only reason I joined was because my cousin Bird was the leader. From an early age I went to Sunday school at Church. From Sunday School I progressed into the choir. From the choir I got so that I carried the cross. I learned to ring the bells. When my father died I had a full time job running the business. My daughter, when she was seven or eight, got involved with the church. I went back bell ringing.

Most of the children went to Sunday School. At Sunday School we used to have lessons on the stories of the Bible. Draw pictures. I can't remember a time when the bells haven't been rung. There are six bells. We had eight people to ring them. Mr. Evison taught me to ring. When he died Alec Nurse too over.

My dad's business was Market Gardening. We used to have two acres of Market Garden where we are now, a garden at the Red Pumps, a garden at the Feathers Car Park. We had eight acres land up Fern Hill where we grew strawberries, potatoes and sugar beet. We employed one more full time person and one or two part time. We had two ladies; they had worked on the land during the war and were still quite prepared to do the work.

We used to do floral work wreaths bouquets. I learned off my mother. I learned from helping the undertaker and seeing wreaths from other florists. Wedding bouquets all self taught. We grew a lot of early vegetables. The garden got sun all day. What we didn't sell was taken to Wisbech Market. My dad died when I was 19. He had just been elected to Parish Council. He attended his first meeting and dropped down dead on his way home. When I got married we

moved into the big house. My wife helped out with driving, delivering.

We rented the other places from Mr. Isherwood at the Red Pumps. When he died that finished. Then The Feathers developed their car park so that had to go. The garden was virtually half of the Feathers car park. I got some extra land up Fern Hill. I had 14 acres when we started with eight. There used to be ourselves, Mr. Bird, Mr. Balding and Mr. Riches, all had plots of land there. There were about 26 acres in total. It belonged to Sandringham Estate.

I remember a lot of the work was done by horse. We had an iron wheel tractor which if you took it on the road you had to put flat bandages we used to call them on the back wheels. The tractor used to do the main ploughing the horse did the rest. We sold the horse and bought a little Ferguson Tractor in about 1951. I sold it last year.

There are so many more regulations now about how things can be marketed. It became no longer viable I gave it up in 1976.

I worked for the construction industry at Bircham Newton. I started on ground maintenance, maintaining the sports fields. Now we do anything we are asked to do. A lot of the gardens have been done away with.

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

Nothing sticks in my mind. There's been so much happened.

What was the worst time you remember?

The floods 1953. My uncle had a dairy herd down on the marshes and him, my father and one or two other men went down to get the cows. It concerned me a lot. I was 14. We lived down Pansey Drive but had taken over the Market Garden at Hillside and we kept the tractor down Pansy Drive. When father got back from the marshes we moved everything up to Hillside and we moved the furniture upstairs. There is a bank but what is now Valley Rise did get flooded. That night of the floods they opened all the gates and all the cows were brought onto the fields around Hawthorn Drive. Then they went to the field barn behind Dersingham Mill. Over two months to get it sorted out.

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

All the houses. Gelham Manor was the first. Park Hill just after the war. We used to go up there blackberrying in the summer. Centre Vale. I have ploughed most of that land down there for different people. West Hall Road you used to go into that by the shoe shop. That was the Balding family land. Queen Elizabeth Drive that was James Jackson's land. There were two James Jackson's. Father lived in the house on the left as you go into Centre Vale.

He owned that land. Valley Rise about the same; my father used to farm part of that. Crest Road; Lincolns had a farm there.

We are not really a village. The little field opposite Bowden's had a big Hawthorn tree in the middle where Hawthorn Cottages got their name from. It got struck by lightning. We used to put cattle on it. Mr. Daw had it and used to put sheep on it. There were strict regulations when they built on it. The cottages had still to be seen from the roadway. They had to blend in with the cottages. It was successful.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

I'd like to see nothing happen; leave it as it is today. You could make the church hall a better place.

I can remember when the Barn had a corn drier in. You could see them working in it.

Will you retire in Dersingham?

I hope so

Do you expect to be buried in Dersingham?

I hope so

What does the Millennium mean to you?

Very little really, just the change of a century.

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

Hopefully I could say thank you for not spoiling it any more. I think we're very lucky with all the facilities we have.