DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW 30

Date interview conducted: 25th March 1999
Name: Eddie Roye
I was born at Great Massingham in the year 1908. That makes me 90.

When did you first come to Dersingham?
I came to Dersingham, I couldn't tell you exactly the year, I'd be seven or eight so that would be 1916, 1917 around about that. I was a lad.

Do other members of your family live in Dersingham?
I've got no members of my family living in Dersingham now except for say second cousins. The family originated in Great Massingham and his (dad's) sisters came here as servant girls, possibly with the farmer's, and they married here, and father used to visit his sisters. The sisters lived in the village here right from the time they was servant girls; they married Dersingham men. My dad was a small holder in Great Massingham. I moved here to No. 18 White Horse Drive. That was in 1962. The bungalows on the left were built about that time. That as pasture land. The houses on the right were there. No. 18 one of the best houses up White Horse Drive. I moved from the house to the bungalow. After about seven years in the house, then I moved to the bungalow. I lost my wife and mother was living with me and she'd reached the age of 96 and we moved into the bungalow to make it more convenient for her.

What are your earliest memories of the village?
I came to Dersingham and stayed with my aunt, Mrs. Gold? from Dodds Hill. It was called my holidays. There I got to know and meet my other aunt Mrs. Houchen; lived in the old Centre Vale. I used to go down to Centre Vale to play with all the girls and boys there because at that time there was very few up Dodds Hill. And there was the Riches and the Nurses; I can't remember all the names now. There was still a few of them grown up like meself that I contacted with when I came back to Dersingham.

I went to Great Massingham School. I was here for the holidays. It was a change. My aunt had no family and they like to have me. I don't say I spent all my holidays here but I spent quite a few. My dad bring me over here on his bicycle. I can remember it now having a cushion on the bar of the bicycle and he bring me over. My aunt done the washing and the bath was one of the old type of hip bath. I remember it today.

My aunts were married and settled down then. *They were in service?* That's how they came to be in Dersingham. The girls used to go out to service in those days, when they left school, into the big houses. Some went to London, some went to local houses like Houghton Hall and the various places. And nine times out of ten they married somebody in that vicinity.

They stayed in service until they were married?
More or less; some of them did go back to houses and do occasional work until the family come along. In them days the wives used to stay at home when they had a family, and that was their job. Looking after the family, provide the food when the husband came back from work, and that was their life. Their life was harder. They got no modern conveniences to do the work and if they had three children that's nothing to go by and see the linen line full of washing. Something like this cropped up when I was in hospital. They were talking about the ladies going out to work today and not staying at home looking after the family. That was why a lot of the trouble is possibly today. And there was a chap from Clenchwarton he said, "Well I had three children and my wife didn't go out to work and we managed all right.". I said to him, "You know the old saying, don't you? That was a poor old cock if he couldn't scrap for one old hen."

Why do you think women are expected to go out to work and have child minders to look after the children?
I think that happened after the war. When the war came along the ladies they went out to work say munitions or whatever, and went on the land as the Land Army Girls and all the rest of it. They got the taste of money. Then government round about altered. They needed more money and so I think that was the cause really. The taste for money and there's another thing. Want a hair do every week. They'd have a hair do every week whereas years ago they'd do it up with a bun or whatever. There was no hairdressers in those days. I can see the old tortoise shell combs, huge tortoise shell combs going in the back. Never went anywhere without a hat. That was fashion. In the war the women went out to work and the children landed onto the grandmas then. The same as it's now happening again a bit.

Also today they have mortgages.
Yea, I agree with that. They need more money. But I look at it like this. In my day, men's wages in my early days were only about £1 a week you know. And when I left school I went to harvest for a John Morton of Great Massingham for a month for 25 shillings. I maintain that if I was living today I could manage on the money as I did in those days gone back. Because where a man's wages was now, was then about £1 a week. They did get up to 30 shillings, in the factories they're up to £300 a week. To me I know they say that we got a mortgage, we

got a mortgage; it's good house-keeping. It's how you lay the money out.

Your dad was bringing in £1 a week. Was his house his own?
No, he pay a rent. The rent was about £6 a year. But that took some finding. They did have to save it. The majority of men were farm workers. And they went to harvest and they looked to their harvest money to pay the rent. They hadn't got no money up to that time. Not for rent. They looked to the extra harvest. The harvest would be about a month from seven a.m. to seven p.m. They made extra above their £ a week. They made that extra six or seven pound.

There was no electricity that was all coal fires. But when a tree fell down on the farm the farmer used to very often give that to his men on a Saturday afternoon or whenever they used to cut that up and there'd always be in the garden a huge heap of wood. To supplement the coal. There was always coalmen in the village. I don't know about Dersingham I'm talking about Great Massingham. There was two coal merchants in the village. They got the coal by train. And I've seen as many as 80 trucks of coal with two trains pulling and one pushing bringing the coal from the Midlands. The coal merchants often had a truck of their own and you'd see their name on it. That was their own truck and sometimes they brought their own coal, sometimes that was somewhere else on the line. It was an investment in those days on the railway line. Wherever that truck went so the rail companies paid the owner. That was the investments in them days.

Did they unload it at King's Lynn?
No there was stations all the way along; South Lynn, Millington, Great Massingham, Rudham, Raynham Park; all had stations right the way to Yarmouth, Melton Constable and Yarmouth. There was two railways; Midland and Northern.

Dersingham coal would have come to Dersingham Station.
Oh yes as a branch; that was the North Norfolk line.
A bag of coal was about 1/6d. You didn't use a lot because you used so much wood. That provided everything.

Water was free. We all had our wells. In our village we had four wells. One called the Town Well. Where the cottages hadn't got a well they would go there with their pails and yokes and get their water from the Town Well. Always plenty of fresh water.

Dad gave most of the money to mum. He'd have a little bit for himself. My dad wasn't confined to the pound. The labourers were on the -------? Dad was a

small holder. He worked night and day. We had Pigs and chickens and we eventually had three cows. And he done a milk round in the village so we'd be better off.

Most of the labourers in Dersingham worked for the ------? Did they get £1 a week?
Yes, lots of men worked on the Sandringham Estate. So did the ladies. At one time there were 60 ladies working at Sandringham House. Going up there five o'clock in the morning. When it was a full house. Because a lot of bedrooms cut down. That used to be a regular thing. They was there, I can remember that because my Aunt Louie, that was Mrs. Houchen, she was one of the workers that went up there. All the work had to be done early before (the Royals got up).

I did know how many bedrooms were up there because a few years back since I've been here they cut all the back off the house didn't they. A lot and they all had to be done. No matter who you talk to here as I got older and older right to the time I retired that was Sandringham. And you couldn't do much else that was Sandringham. Nearly all the old village as I knew it then well Sandringham was the estate. I mean there was Mr. Stanton's farm and Mr. Smith's as far as I remember. I mean Mr. Stanton would take 20 or more men on. I think that was where my Aunt started in the house.

What were some of the things you used to do when you were living in Dersingham?
My cousin Freddie was the butcher for Mr. and Mrs. Lines that had the butcher's shop opposite the Coach and Horses. And so I used to come down there during the morning very often go on the rounds with him on the Butcher's cart. People ordered meat in those days and we used to do from Dersingham to Hillington, Flitcham, Anmer and back to Dersingham. I didn't spend every day with him. Others days I be down to Centre Vale to play with other boys where there was quite a lot.

Even in our school days harvest time we'd always look out for a job. You'd start with what we'd call elevator boy. And that was, they had elevators then to send the corn up- send the shoes (?) up to the stack, and there'd be the elevator and the horse going round to drive the elevator. The first job'd be to keep that horse going. If not they'd shout at you 'cos you might fall asleep. That was a nice job and the farmers 'd be looking out for a boy. Giving him a pound for the harvest. Lot of money then. Then you start off with elevator boy and then you'd go to what we call the Hold Ye. And that was when they were loading the corn up on the field you'd go from shock to shock and you'd holler Hold ye. That was to warn the men on the load that you was moving off. They called you the Hold ye boy. Then you graduated from that and you go on to say the horse rake

which followed the loads and rake up all the corn. Eventually you'd be on the load as you got older and older.

What did the boys spend the money on?
It had to go on the clothes nine times out of ten. You had to more or less buy your own clothes. That'd be a nice pair of boots for the winter to go to school in. Yes that's where the money went. Probably had a few sweets. Your money went back on your clothes for the winter. There was no fashion. For your hair cut you had a short back and sides. Everyone had the same. A little fringe here. You had your little old Norfolk jacket and there was no long trousers then for school. You had your shorts; you went into long trousers just when you left school. Had to be on a Sunday very often when it was Sunday School Anniversary.

Everyone was more or less on a level. The biggest difference I noticed was I was well fed. Some of them were poorly. If there was three or four children, there was no child benefit you know. There was big families. Lots of the women did take in a bit of washing besides theirselves to make a little bit of money.

The men used to do a bit of poaching. There's another thing although I say this pound they did make it up other ways, in a way. There was sweet turnips on the farms; they take a sweet turnip home which was good in a stew. Swedes today are good.

Rabbits were plentiful. What they would do very often I mean. They had to do it on the sly a little bit. I don't say a farmer would prosecute them, no, but what they used to do; they'd have a trap and when they was ploughing in the fields on the last furrow they would set a rabbit trap. Because a rabbit always go to a fresh furrow. Well then rabbits come out twice at night to feed six o'clock and 10. And in the winter time you'd go back again to see if you could - at six o'clock to see if you got a rabbit in the trap. The rabbit would not be dead. He'd be caught. They were gin traps. They were caught with two feet and if you got round he was still alive and they'd break his neck. That's how they supplement the pound. You probably get one or two a week.

And then there was another thing too. There was the huge hedgerows and then you see when mother, or any of the mothers had a chance, they'd get the blackberries and the various fruits of the hedgerow. They didn't get trimmed in them days and there was plenty of stuff there. When the mothers had a chance; I'd see three or four of them go to these hedgerows with the prams with another little kid in and they'd be getting stuff to preserve for the winter. The blackberries and stuff they used to make into jam.

Bread from the baker. If you had a good round of bread and jam you was well away. Lot of the parents did make their own bread. They used to have the bread bins. How they got it I don't know; well they used to do the gleaning and then the wheat used to go to the millers and he'd mill the wheat and they'd get half a sack. It'd be brown it's true because there'd be nothing took out. It'd be brown bread. And they have what you call a flour bin and this half sack put in the bin and a big piece of suet in there. And then you used to buy the yeast- used to go to the baker but there was still the baker coming in the village.

Plain and good food and another thing too very often they used to keep bantams. They'd be fed from the scraps. They didn't take much keeping. Then very often the farmer, when you had a litter of pigs there always be the last pig; he'd be the runt. Sometimes you give it to somebody else and he'd, we call it wiggle it along and eventually grow it up and then he kill the pig eventually. He live on the waste so that supplement the food. They was always looking out if you know what I mean. No waste. I felt the same the waste is terrible.

Tell me your memories here in Dersingham

Well as I said before I spent a lot of my school days holidays here.

What was the worst time you remember?

The worst thing I remember was about 1916, 1917 and we heard Sunday morning; we was living in Great Massingham and we heard on the Sunday morning, how I don't know, that Zppelins had dropped three bombs at Dodds Hill and the gable end of my aunt's house had blown out through the concussion of the bomb. Two bombs dropped in the garden and one dropped in that little piece of green; up Dodds Hill is a little piece of green where three rows of cottages stand back. Father got to know somehow or other, he brought me, I was seven or eight, he brought me over Sunday morning to see the damage and see if aunt was all right. And that was what we found. And that was the worst moment of my life. They was all right and, when we looked into that gable end, there was the bed there. All that property up there belonged to Sandringham Estate. My aunt moved to some cottages opposite the video shop. There was three cottages there and one was empty and she was moved there until her house was repaired. As far as I know that was the only thing. And that wasn't bad as it wasn't a direct hit.

Well, going back to Jannoch's corner,now after that he was interned.
Where was Jannoch's corner?
Where the Gamekeeper's Lodge is'
This was the man who lived there and didn't like coming out.

He was German.
Did the village resent him?
I don't know. I was too young to know. He was a big nurseryman. But I understand he was interned after that incident . But I can't see where there was a target here. I can't remember much more in that period.

I left then; well I helped my father, we got more land. We got a 300 acre farm in Great Massingham. In the 1930s in the depression we moved to Wisbech; in the fruit growing business. So I had 25 odd years there so I retired at 50 and come to live in Dersingham. Not because I had relations or anything like that; riding round and got to The White Horse the driver and said we go up here. Saw this house with the ticket in the window for sale. It cost me £1200; I retired at 50. And was riding round and went up here and saw the house No 18. I went in and the young chap there with his mother and we liked the place. A very good house. £1200. I said that's mine. I've lived here since 64.

W*hen you came back were you shocked at the changes?*
When I left Wisbech I went to Harpley for three years. Whilst the latter part the time being in Wisbech prices for our products, particularly apples and strawberries got so poor that I came round the villages that I knew selling my produce. I didn't come to Dersingham; I done Massingham, Harpley, Rudham,and there was an empty shop in Harpley; been empty some years. I still knew a lot of people in the villages, Harpley, Rudham and all round there and they said why ever don't you open that shop. I did open that shop; that's 1958 and I had the shop three years. We sold everything and kept nothing. It got so big I had three assistants. It got so I was working six o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock at night and I said this is no way for retirement. So I sold the business.

In 64, no I weren't bored. I went round the village and I joined the Seniors Club straight away. That was in a poor state. Mrs. Cripps was running that. And so she asked me to help her. She was the Chairlady and I went in and helped her and we got the club going. I started up an auction for the club and all the rest of it. We had various things and after a year she turned the lot over to me. She resigned and I took over. I was Chairman then for 20 years. From very few people in the club we got it up to 110 members and a two-year waiting list.

We tried to make it free and easy. We played cards mainly, and that time Bingo was coming about and we run a Bingo once in three weeks. But it was mainly a free and easy do. The rooms were there and if someone played darts there was a place for them to play darts, but the majority wanted to play cards. Some played whist. They did exactly what they wanted; it was a social club. They used to pay then, not much money but I tell you this we was never short of money 'cos

I used to arrange lots of outings, especially Sunday afternoons. It was very popular. I had a very good committee and we used to go on a Friday morning once a fortnight and set the chairs and tables out and have a little committee. The treasurer was Mrs. Houchen's father-in-law, I forget his name. I say to him, "Bert how do we stand for money." And he tell me, "Have we enough for an outing?" Yes. And we spent the money as we came along. I didn't have to ask for money anywhere and plenty of times in them days I've gone to the club on a Friday with £15 donations.

I'd always have a notice up in my garden when there was an outing. Houchen's coaches in them days. I have a word with him and he'd suggest some places he knew and we'd go out on a Sunday afternoon and he'd arrange for us to stop somewhere for a cup of tea like Thetford Forest. I never had to ask for money in those 20 years it came in and I even had people who left and occasionally they send me a fiver. I still got old people in the village, there aren't many, only five or six left and they said they never had such a time. It still exists. They got a very Chairman there now, a Mr. Stone. He's a retired police officer, he's very good. Mind you he's got different ideas to we had in those days but it's still going . I feel that I got that going.

The same thing I did with the Bowls Club. That was on a low ebb with only 15 members and five shillings a year. Mr. George Batterby he was getting an elderly man He was the verger to the church. I went with him and he turned things over to me and there was only about 12 or 15 members and they all worked for Sandringham. So I worked on that. The green was in a bad state and I got that going. Dennix the manure merchants of King's lynn which I had contacts with being a farmer gave me permission to go to their works and have the sweepings of their manure. I scattered that on the green and got that going.