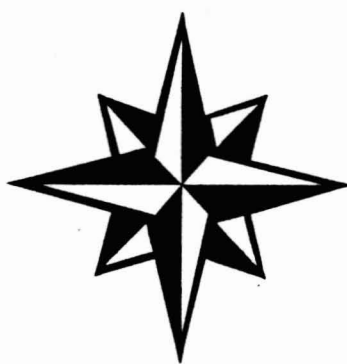


DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT

DERSINGHAM IN WARTIME

A VILLAGE REMEMBERS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This tape has been compiled from the interviews of Dersingham residents conducted for the Millenium History Project.

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DERSINGHAM 2000 HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT FOR TAPE RECORDING
DERSINGHAM IN WARTIME
A VILLAGE REMEMBERS

Liz

Throughout the centuries Dersingham has not been a stranger to conflict. The villagers of the 17th century were caught up in the events of the Civil War, and there is a document dated 1807 stating that 30 Dersingham men were liable to be enlisted for service in the Napoleonic wars. It is even recorded that £6 --16s - 6d was collected by the villagers for "the relief and benefit of the brave men killed and the wounded sufferers in the battle of Waterloo."

A Parish Magazine lists the men of Dersingham who served in the Boer War. Jack Coe, Walter Dyble, James Grief, Albert Flegg, and Harry and Thomas Riches are a few. Names still familiar in the village today. Harry Riches was the first to be invalided home and later Gunner Sidney Rainbow, also invalided home, helped out by teaching the schoolchildren military drill on the school playground.

There are many references to the First World War. The first attack by a zeppelin was in this area when one flew over Hunstanton, dropped bombs at Snettisham and went on to drop more bombs at King's Lynn causing much damage and loss of life.¹ A later Zeppelin dropped two bombs on Dersingham, causing damage to a cottage at the top of Doddshill and the loss of one life.

Glo

Cliff Riches and Eddie Roye have vivid memories of this zeppelin raid.

Cliff Riches

The first War I remember the zeppelin raids very well. I suppose about 1916 they probably started. I was 4. I can remember that ever so well. You must remember when they drop bombs that impress on a child's mind. My mother used to take us all up in the pantry, in the larder under the stairs, they always thought that was the strongest part. I remember this night. And I can tell you exactly where the bombs dropped. The zeppelin came over our house, from the seaside. The first bomb fell - do you know where Wellswill House is in Manor Road? It's now Manorside. Well that used to be a field. The first bomb dropped there. There was a crater there. The next one dropped on the open common. You know where they've been doing all this clearing - well where they haven't done it. The crater was there. We used to go and find bits of shrapnel. And then luckily it went and dropped the rest of its load on the fen.

One bomb didn't go off and I remember the next day, I was only a small lad. Dad kept a few chickens and I went up to the Baker's shop that was opposite the White Horse - Jarvis, to get some corn for his chickens. They hadn't told people or at least we didn't know. This bomb went off and I dropped corn all over the road. We were terrified. It killed a woman that night. Up Doddshill. You know where the square is at Doddshill. If - you can still see some shrapnel marks from one of the bombs on the chimney. If you look across there's houses. This woman was caught

outside and she was killed. Name of Dunger.

I remember my parents taking us up there the next day and some old boy got a collecting box, was sitting on the bomb crater. Collecting money. 2 or 3 times we had raids like that. I saw one of them with a searchlight on it one night. Like a cigar. My father take me out in his arms. **I can remember that.**

Eddie Roye

The worst thing that 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 zeppelins had dropped 3 bombs at Doddshill 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 Doddshill is a little piece of green - 3 rows of cottages stand back. Father got to know somehow or other, he brought me, I was 7 or 8, 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 - They was all right and - when we looked into that gable end - there was the bed there. All that property up there belonged to the Sandringham Estate. My Aunt moved to some cottages opposite the video shop. There was 3 cottages there and one was empty and she 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.²**

Liz

One soldier returned to Dersingham after this conflict and lived for a time in a pumping station in Sandringham Woods. Now, with hindsight, it is obvious he was probably suffering from shell shock.

Glo

Bill Playford, whose Grandfather ran the Bakery in Manor Road at this time, recalls an incident involving this unfortunate soldier.

Bill Playford

One of the old boys who came back from the First World War, Arthur Dowdy, stood on the letterbox corner where the BMW cars are now. He stood there all day, clapping his hands trying to keep warm. Until one day, well he lived in the pumping station which is up in the woods which pumped water for Wolferton, Sandringham, West Newton. He lived there. Nobody interfered with him and he didn't interfere with anyone. The police were suspicious. Grandfather was suspicious of him because every now and then there'd be a loaf missing. So one day a policeman in plain clothes they was waiting for him. And he did. He went up to the cart and nicked a loaf of bread. And they had him. He was harmless. *Was he suffering from Shell shock? Yes, poor old boy.*

Glo

As a little boy Sidney Mitchell remembers the return of his father from Gallipoli.

Sidney Mitchell

My memory takes me back to immediately after the First World War, the return of my father after the war. I was 5 or 6 years old. My father had been a member of the Sandringham Company and had served with them in Gallipoli but fortunately he wounded on landing and he got home. There were many that did not come back and there is still speculation as to what happened to them. He was a Military Policeman. He was wounded and became a Military Policeman.

Liz

We have only to look at the village War Memorial, the Altar in the church, and several gravestones in the churchyard to read the names of those men who served in the Great War of 1914 and in the Second World War, many of whom paid the ultimate price. Just inside the gate of the Churchyard is the grave belonging to Wesley Tuck, who served in the Norfolk Regiment and died in October 1916. On the gravestone is the name of his brother Hubert who served with the Canadians and died the month before.³ 43 Dersingham men lost their lives in that conflict. The memorial also commemorates 19 men who lost their lives in The Second World War. There are 204 names on the memorial of men honoured for their service overseas and of 44 who served here in the Home Guard. In the churchyard there are the graves of a private killed by enemy aircraft on Massingham petrol dump, a London Policeman killed on duty during an air raid, a Flying Officer killed on active service aged only 19. Another grave shows one who died a prisoner of war in Japan.

Glo

Dick Stanton can remember the effect that the fear of invasion had on his mother and father while Elizabeth Neale remembers the day her father left.

Dick Stanton

I think my first memory was being on a field with my mother and father. 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 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.

Elizabeth Neale

I remember when my father had to go off to war and I can remember walking down Station Road with Mum. I remember it was very sad. I was only 4 and didn't know when I'd see my father again. I can't remember Mum crying. People did not show their emotions to children in those days. I can't remember all through the

war when things must have been really bad and we did not know what had happened to my father I never remember being scared. She used to say it would be all right. **People put on a very brave face.**

Liz

War was declared on September 3rd 1939, and the village was immediately affected. The school log book records on September 11th that the school opened with evacuees attending.

Glo

Many residents who were children at the time recall the excitement of the evacuees arriving. Here is Gill Griffin.

Gill Griffin

The evacuees came. I had 2 cousins living in London and they were evacuated here. So they came to live with us after the soldiers had left. Then one of my cousins went to my Aunt's in Heacham and the other cousin stayed with me all my young life. She went to Dersingham School. She was here a long while. They was happy here. We had a happy time here. I can always remember the evacuees coming off the train. Several evacuees were put in what was a hotel right near the station. Down Station Road. There were several families there. There was some more in the White House on the Main Road. Another family near the Fish Shop which is now the Chinese. There was others opposite the church. I don't think they all arrived at once. Some of them came with their parents and their parents lived there. The family who used to live at the White House. I think their name was Hold? One of the families that lived at the Railway Hotel was the Peels. I can always remember my mother saying she didn't have anything. **She was a relation and she wouldn't take anything off her sister.**

Glo

Here is Elizabeth Neale again with her memories of the evacuees.

Elizabeth Neale

We had all the excitement of the evacuees coming. We had to have an evacuee. I was an only child and this child staying with us. We were like sisters really. She was awful when she came. She was from the East End of London and came from a terrible background. Mother was so patient with her. It was a sad day when she eventually went home.

The evacuees came to school. We were packed out at school. On one of my school reports, number in class 63. I was only 5 to 8 when they were there but most of them settled in well. Looking back on it how strict the teachers were in those days. There was no emotion or feeling or it didn't seem to come over that way. I can remember a little boy, and he used to come back to this village. His name was Billy and he used to wet himself because he was frightened if an aircraft went over. But he would get into awful trouble at school and the teacher would not let him go to the

toilet. We had those double desks and once you were in you were in. You couldn't get out because you were in a long line. Perhaps ten in a line.

You had literacy hour and a Maths hour and that was the morning done. In the afternoon when you got into the big classroom which was Mrs. Barker who died not too long ago. We had to knit socks for soldiers. I can remember we had these sets of four needles. I can see it now in her best copperplate writing on the wall how to turn the heel. We had to do four and half inches of knit 2 purl 2 ribbing. The boys were knitting as well and they had to do quite a lot of work in the garden. The vegetables were used and chickens were kept there as well on the garden at the back. **They were happy days.**

Liz

The school log book also records the visits of the gas van which would arrive in the school playground and all the children had to walk through it with their gas masks to have them tested. The arrival of Stirrup pumps is recorded and the visit of Superintendent Woodeson, the local police officer, who came to demonstrate Anti-Personnel bombs and to warn the children of them and all the dangers they were to look out for.

Glo

Alan Cross, Edie Gillson with her friend, and Geoffrey Rolfe could remember these events at school.

Alan Cross

The schooling made a great deal of difference because the schooling was quite poor at the time. Many young teachers had been called up. Sport was completely out as far as school was concerned. In many ways they were very poor years. I remember Miss Boyce and Miss Robinson were very good. Miss Cook was her name. She married and became Mrs. Boyce. We weren't allowed to go on the Pastures to play sport at all. It may have been because of air raids. They had trenches dug in the school gardens and on the Emblems⁴ which we had to evacuate to if there was an air raid. We had to take our gas masks everywhere. There were thousands of troops manoeuvring around here. It was wonderful entertainment for us. **We could find a few thunderflashes on the Common, which the troops used.**

Edie Gillson and friend

Friend I panicked a bit when we first had to wear gas masks. I was worried about my mother and father because he said he wasn't going to wear one.

Edie One night my mother heard the church bells and thought it was gas. She got everybody in the road up. It was a false alarm. **We had practices to wear masks.**

Geoffrey Rolfe

Up at the top and during wartime we used to have gas masks on and we had to go to the top there and go into the trenches. Because they said if ever there was an air raid or a threat of war we'd have to go up top playground and down into the

trenches for shelter. They were dug directly behind the school. They were dug for the school children. You carried your gas mask with you all the time, like a satchel. There was times when they make you go through like a little gas chamber. They brought a mobile thing to the school and you walked through and tested your mask. **You never went without it.**

Another thing I did mention to the boss, I don't know if anybody know about it in the field, but when I was a young boy up the road here was a searchlight. It was to do with the war and there is a little bit of the footings left and the field is now called Searchlight High Field. The top of Doddshill on the Ling House Road. And as children we were very interested in that. That was such a powerful light and that was **at night searching the sky for enemy airplanes.**⁵

Glo

On January 5th 1942 the school log records that water was laid on to the school. This is among Bill Playford's memories.

Bill Playford

They used to take us for nature Study walks up the woods. Half the day we were digging trenches on the Emblems. In case of air raid.

They laid the water on when we were at school.⁶ Docking District Council did. There was no mains water till then. We used to jump in and out the trenches when we were kids. Mother bought us a pair of overalls because we made our other clothes so dirty. The first piped water they had was stand pipes which were on concrete posts and just a tap **where people had to go to draw the water.**

Liz

The whole community in Dersingham were all actively involved in one way or another in the war effort. Mr. Linford and Mr. Tuck were appointed the village's first Wardens. Others soon joined and after 1940 Mr. LLOYD Pratt of the Oaks was the leader and a Warden's Post was established at his house. The present day Doctor's surgery and housing now occupy the site of this large house with lovely gardens, which was sadly burnt down in 1965. Other Wardens Posts were established at the Feathers and at Mr. Linford's house, the present day Hot Food Takeaway at the crossroads. Dersingham had an efficient casualty service with trained stretcher-bearers. There was a First Aid Post at The Feathers and later also at the Dun Cow Pub.⁷ There were many lectures and exercises. Special Constables co-operated with the Civil Defence enforcing blackouts, looking for parachutists. All were trained to deal with air incidents or gas attacks. Other villagers became canteen workers, and savings collectors. Others worked on the farms, and at the Flax Factory in West Newton.

Glo

Many of the young men joined the Local Defence Volunteers. One of them was Peter Reynolds.

Peter Reynolds

The Local Defence Volunteer thing. When the war broke out I was what, Rising 17. Everyone rushed to do something and I joined Civil Defence for a while. As a sort of messenger whizzing around on a bicycle if needed and then, after Dunkirk time there was a call for Local Defence Volunteers so I jumped at that. One had an armband that said LDV and no uniform. We didn't have rifles, walking sticks or whatever. We used to have a shepherd's hut up on Mill Road, beyond Mill Road, beyond Mill House, on the road to Ingoldisthorpe, between Mill House and Ingoldisthorpe chalk pit. had a shepherd's hut there where we were supposed to watch out for parachutists or anything going on, whatever. Nothing ever happened except we used to pinch an odd bird? out of the hedgerow. And then eventually that got transferred into becoming the Home Guard. And so I became in that until I joined. I volunteered for the Air Force and went away. I was away for, I suppose I did come home on leave once, the first year in the Air Force. Then I went abroad without coming home on leave. I was away 4 years or so before I came back. Came back in '45 I suppose. Posted down to Suffolk and had a cushy number down there. There were 6 of us on an Air Force transmitter station at an Air Force base. Doing the work of about 3. **It was the tail end of the war. The panics were over.**

Glo

Dick Stanton and Geoffrey Rolfe both remember the contributions made by their fathers to the war effort.

Dick Stanton

My father he was involved in the Home Guard. I suppose you 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 used to go and blow up anything you could blow up. They had lots 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 believe the story, but the only way you knew **it was underground was a rhododendron bush planted above it, which flowered on Christmas Day.**⁸

Geoffrey Rolfe

There was another thing. There was the Home Guard. My father was in the Home Guard. My Grandfather was in the R.A.P. as an Air Raid Warden and he would go out and make sure people hadn't got lights showing. You had a bicycle light with only a little slit through the metal. Car lights were the same. These are some of the things that stick in my mind as a young child. Going down the hill you would very often have one of the Home Guard jump out on you and shout,

"Who goes there? Friend or Foe?"

Because we used to go down the George King's the barber and sit in his hut. That was warm. We very often sit in there of a night time and course that'd be dark when you come back and they'd want to know who you was. *There could be Germans coming in off the coast.* **They was always aware of that what was going on. Just find out who you were.**

Glo

While many villagers joined the Forces and served overseas those who contributed to the war effort at home and those who were children remember, like Dick Stanton, the arrival of the soldiers in the village.

Dick Stanton

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 Dieppe. Dieppe Raid. **We had troops coming all the way through till after D - Day.**

Glo

Now here is Gill Griffin, followed by Elizabeth Neale, recounting their memories of this.

Gill Griffin

When I was a little girl I can remember we had to have soldiers billeted with us. And we had 3. We had a 3 bedroomed house but they had to sleep in the front room - bedroom I can always remember. One of them taught me to ride a bicycle. And they used to teach me over the playing field. There was a lot of bushes on the field opposite Mr. Cross. There was just a track across to the other gate. It was all little bushes. What always stuck in my mind that none of them came back. They all got killed in the war. One of them came from near Lowestoft. I have a letter that the parents wrote to my parents. They wrote this letter 1941 I think.

Other families had to have some. If you had a spare bedroom you had to have them. **It was just me on my own then. I was an only child.**

Elizabeth Neale

The other big thing for the village was when the Americans came. They used to drive through and we used to call out "Got any gum, chum."

One night we had a knock at the door. We opened this door and this gentleman he looked so sad and he said

, "Can you tell me the way to Bircham?"

My mother said "It's a long walk from here to Bircham. Why do you want to go to Bircham?"

"My son's in the Air Force and he's got himself into some kind of trouble. I must get to him."

My mother said " You can't go tonight. You had better stay here."

So he came in and had something to eat and stayed the night. Next morning we got up and he'd gone. Mother looked round. Nothing was missing. We didn't think any more about it. We always had the day for doing the bedrooms. The sheets had to be changed and the slip mats shook. As she picked the mat up there was 10/-

note underneath. And a note saying " Thank you very much."

Ever so many years later my father was out in the garden one and a car drew up and a gentleman got out

" Could you tell me if the lady who used to live here during the war still lives here?" Dad said yes. **It was the gentleman and he'd come back. He'd sorted his son out.**

Glo

Bernard Twite, who was only a little boy at the time, can still remember these events.

Bernard Twite

The earliest recollection would be the latter end of the war - the planes going out and coming back. I was born in 1939 so I was 4 or 5. The bombers from the airfields about would be going out over the Wash. I can remember the army exercising and manoeuvres. I can remember convoys of army vehicles parked along Lynn Road and all the houses providing tea and sandwiches for the soldiers. Some were based at the Drill Hall, some at the school. We had soldiers billeted with us. We kept in touch. They were close friends; they kept in touch up to the time they died in the 50's and 60's. They finished up part of the family.

Glo

Here is Bill Playford again as he has distinct memories of all these events.

Bill Playford

The Newfoundland boys were stationed here. In the top school.⁹ That never was used as a school They commandeered it straight away. They had to put a new parquet flooring in because their boots absolutely ruined the floor.

They were and still are known by a number. Because each Christmas and Birthday time we ring up one of the girls who married one of the Newfoundlanders, he said to Ernie Kelly,

"It's a long time since we cooked the Christmas dinners for you Ernie. "

Because they brought about 20 turkeys down and father and I cooked them in the ovens for their Christmas dinner. In fact their cookhouse down this end was where the gateway to the Gamekeepers Lodge is now. They were in there as well. They ended up in North Africa most of them.

They had these terrific naval guns on rubber wheels and they were at Wolferton. And we used to go Sunday mornings and sit up on the common on the seats up there and watch them fire them out into the Wash at targets. They were just over here. The 57th they called themselves. They still have a parade in Newfoundland, that's Canada, every year. They are getting old people now. Nice chaps. They used to help with the War Weapons week. They were English Officers down as far as Sergeant major and then they were all Newfoundland boys. Most of the local boys had gone off to serve.

They went and a load of Waltzing Matilda tanks came up to the top school and Gamekeeper's Lodge. There was nothing else to do and we used to go for a walk round the village and we looked up over that brick wall that is now missing from the

Church Hall back to Jannoch's Corner¹⁰ and there were these dozen waltzing Matilda tanks. One Sunday morning, well they slipped off over night. Early one morning they went off down Post Office Road and they were gone somewhere and they just weren't here. Took them up on the common one day and must have been a Sunday and us kids went up with them. They just ran about on the common. They parked one in front of our shop and swung it round. Father said,

"You want to watch out there's a big drain run under there."

"Don't worry about that", he say, "any damage we'll compensate you for it."

They took them up on the top the common and they went down on the Main Road and back up Heath Road. And now they've cleared that common you can still see those ruts where those tanks went down. The officer in charge he was pointing up about going over onto the fen and I said,

"If you go over there you'll lose them. They'll sink."

They didn't know where they were, what the land was like or anything.

Liz

Standing on the corner of the crossroads in Dersingham is a small guesthouse. In the past it was known as The Temperance Hotel, later The Westdene Guest House and now it has been recently reopened under new management and is now known as Ashdene House. During the war years Mr. Fisher's father and mother ran it and it was known then as The Chestnut Tree Guest House. There were soldiers billeted there and the Fisher's used to lay on tasty suppers for the men. Moreover as it was one of the few houses in the area that had a bathroom the Military requisitioned it and sent soldiers from the Norfolk Regiment, who were billeted in the Drill Hall, down there each week to have a bath at 6d a time. Mr. and Mrs Fisher were also compensated with an extra ration of coal.

Glo

The children of the village found all this most exciting and were not perhaps fully aware of the hardships; particularly those associated with rationing. Here is Alan Cross.

Alan Cross

I remember once my mother promised me something if I did so and so and I was given an orange and that was a treat.

During the war in many ways perhaps we in the country, nearly everyone had allotments. We all had big gardens and that was part of the thing we had to do to help on the allotments and in the gardens, which meant we had a good stock of vegetables. Many places also kept chickens which gave you food from the eggs. Indeed when the chickens got old from the chickens themselves. We used to have sport by catching rabbits. They were a basic diet. So food wise we didn't do too bad. Vegetables and what you could produce yourselves was one of the main things. It was a healthy diet. Everything was natural. Very little tinned stuff at that time. Milk was plentiful. There was never a problem with milk. **Farmers had their own milk rounds then.**

Liz

During the war to help with more efficient food production a pumping station was erected to drain the Dersingham marshes which were then ploughed and existing fields squared up. The concrete road to the beach was constructed and shingle from the shingle banks was taken to the airfield at Marham. Peter Reynolds speaks about this.

Peter Reynolds

Because that was all changed, the layout of the marsh was changed in the early part of the war. People called the War Agricultural Executive, a government body had it drained and squared up. Instead of odd shaped bits it became rectilinear and that sort of thing. A pumping station was put in to drain the water and a lot was ploughed up for food production. **Grazing became diminished.**

During the war the whole area all that shingle bank, there were shingle banks 20 feet high and it was all taken. Some of it finished up in the base of runways at Marham Airfield. Lorries were running constantly to and fro taking it up as a base for concrete. After the war it was worked out. Work was stopped for fear of flooding; the shingle bank was so weak the sea might have come in. **As it did in '53.**

Liz

As the war progressed many villagers remembered seeing the Prisoners - of - War who worked farms in the area. There was a Prisoner - of War camp at Snettisham.

Glo

Let's listen to Sidney Mitchell and Ivy Lines talking about this.

Sidney Mitchell

I can recall German prisoners of war. They could be identified because they had patches sewn on what was left of their uniform. They were employed by the local shepherd, Mr. Lincoln, who lived in Chapel Road and tended all the stock on what was then the marshes between the railway line and The Wash. The marshes were owned by the local farmers and they would graze their stock, cattle, sheep horses on these marshes. Mr. Lincoln was designated the Marsh Shepherd and tended the flock on a contractual basis for various farmers. I remember him going off to the marshes in the morning on his horse and cart with German prisoners marching behind. I don't know where they were billeted. **There were 5 or 6.**

Ivy Lines

The prisoners of war were on the farms. I remember walking down Doddshill and see a load of Germans coming towards me. I was terrified. Asked me how far the Russians were from Berlin. They spoke in English. They wanted to know about the Russians. They were coming up to the farms.

I remember seeing smoke over the Wash. Terrific lot of smoke. Down at Snettisham was the American Air Force. They put the German prisoners there when the Americans went. All of a sudden it exploded. **It was a plane. They had got the**

pilot out.

Glo

Elizabeth Neale can recall what happened to these prisoners at the end of the war.

Elizabeth Neale

They had a prisoner of war camp down on Snettisham beach. After the war there were - they called them DP's - an awful name really, Displaced Persons from all over Europe. They were put in this camp. My father and I used to go down and deliver bread. I can remember the awful smell of this stew stuff they had. Any bread or cakes that were not sold would be taken down there. We would go down in the van and deliver it. **They were so sad and badly dressed. Some settled in this area.**

Liz

During this time, when the village was full of soldiers, many of the villagers joined together to raise funds for the war effort. The dances and concert parties that took place are well remembered.

Glo

Gill Griffin's mother, Mrs. Reg Houchen organised many of these events.

Gill Griffin

My mother used to run the Concert Party. The Dersingham Premiers Concert Party. They were mainly all village people. There was one man from Snettisham. He used to sing. One lady from Gaywood who played the accordion. Mrs. Nora Nurse she was in it. Yvonne Hyner. Rita Hyner and I used to tap dance. We was very young. We used to go to tap dancing lessons. Then there was Edna Linford, Peggy Martin, and several other names. There wasn't much social life. And that was entertainment for people. And then we used to go out doing it in all the villages. Out as far as Gayton, Bircham, Snettisham. My dad used to take us and we used to have a trailer and put all the props on the back. My mother used to make nearly all the costumes. There used to be little sketches and other - all variety of things. A singer and a comedian. My mother used to write the sketches. One scene was a sailor's hornpipe. And the sailor's hats - I can remember her making those out of - you remember the bags of flour we used to get - they were muslin bags - we washed those and then starched them and she would make the sailor's hats. We had a lot of long dresses. She used to make a lot of them. Sometimes she had help. My mother had a spare bedroom then so she used to put it all in there, all packed in cases. **It was nearly every week we was out with a concert party somewhere.**

Glo

And here is Nora Nurse who took part in many of these concerts.

Nora Nurse

Nora Nurse

Mrs. Houchen, Mrs. Reg Houchen, I'll give her name because there were several Houchens, she was good at putting things on like that. And she asked people if they'd, I don't know if anyone had asked her if she would do it, but she invited several people to a meeting to see whether they could do something for War Weapons Week, in the first place. War Weapons Week. We went to a meeting, I was interested and we had a meeting and she, we got together you know. We had these rehearsals and we put this on and she called it The Dersingham Premiers. That was the first Concert Party they had. And we really had fun. And we had good times. And we had hard work because we used to practise. And they really did. I mean the girls because I was older than the girls, I mean I was married and I'd got a baby. My husband used to stay at home and look after my daughter while I went out. We used to go round the different villages and do these concerts. For War Weapons that was what it was for.

How did you get the costumes around the villages?

We made them. Mr. Reg Houchen was a bus proprietor. He had a bus. They only had one bus when they first started, so we used to have his bus. Because she was the --? And he went round and he, oh he helped. He was great. His sister - in - law, Mrs. Evelyn Houchen, she was the pianist. Yes, we used to go round in the bus to different places. We used to carry cases. I've been coming down this road, course it's not like it is now, because it was only a lane, I've been coming down here **1 o'clock in the morning, coming home from a concert.**

Liz

1944 was the year of the D - Day landings. As June approached the woods surrounding Dersingham were filled with tanks and lorries parked deep under the trees.

Glo

Ivy Lines told me all about this when I interviewed her.

Ivy Lines

I remember all the soldiers being here. The woods was full of tanks preparing for D - Day. All up that road, Admiral's Drive, the lorries and tanks were hid up, pushed right up the side. They had taps where they used to clean them but they were hid from the air. My mother was worried about an invasion.

The troops mixed with the people. Troops were billeted in houses up here. They made a lovely swing in the woods with ropes for us. We called the lorries Scammells? We didn't know all about the Holocaust and the horror of it but we knew what was going on. We were very quiet when the news was on. We heard Churchill speak. We had to keep quiet. I remember hearing the news read by Alvar Didell (sic) We heard William Joyce. I remember him. Lord Haw Haw. I remember him describing the Gaywood Clock. He was a traitor.

I remember the end of the war we really did celebrate. We put all flags up right across the garden. We wrote on the road. We really celebrated. A big party in Dersingham. They all paraded, Dances. Fancy Dress. I can vividly remember D - Day. I was at my

Grandmother's. She lived at Ickburgh. My mother and my sister we walked from Ickburgh to Mundford. That was the battle area. Terrific amount of troops there, convoys. But we didn't see one. Then all of a sudden the sky was black with planes. All flying out. I was ever so frightened. They went over. My mother kept saying,

" There is something happening today. I don't know what. "

Nothing on the roads. The roads were still. We didn't know until we got home and it was on the news. It was all secret. It was so frightening, the blackness of the sky. When we got home all the tanks had gone from the woods. They never came back. A lot didn't return. Down the Old Hall that was all tents there. The Newfoundland Regiment in there living in tents. Troops everywhere. **Hunstanton was mined. I remember the black spikes. The whole beach was mined.**

Glo

As Ivy has recalled the end of the war was celebrated in style as remembered by Dick Stanton

Dick Stanton

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 that 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 2 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.**

Glo

When I interviewed Elizabeth Neale I asked her what was the most important day she had ever spent in the village. Her reply is a fitting way to end our story.

Elizabeth Neale

The day my father came home as far as I am concerned. That was the best day. Some were fighting in Europe, some in the Far East, some were prisoners of war, so they came home at different times. My father had Malaria very bad and kidney problems. He had to go into a fever hospital before he could come home, He made it before VJ day. We had a concert, a VJ concert. There were great celebrations in the village. The children did not really understand. We didn't really understand about the war. There was no television. We always had to listen to the 6 o'clock news. **I never remember feeling really frightened.**

¹ The First Zeppelin Raid on Great Britain, 19th Jan. 1915.

Two Airships, the L3 and the L4 arrived off the coast of Norfolk on the night of the 19th/20th January 1915. The L3 crossed over Great Yarmouth but then appears to have moved out over the North Sea. The L4 crossed the coast at about 7.55p.m. somewhere close to Bacton. It followed the coast round to Cromer but apparently did not realise this town was below. The blackout restrictions had been well heeded. It circled between Weybourne and Sheringham, then went out over the sea. About an hour later it passed Thornham where it dropped an incendiary device in a field. A second device was dropped close to the church at Brancaster. It then went over Holme towards Hunstanton and attempted to bomb the wireless station.

At about 10.40 p.m. it passed over Heacham and dropped two bombs. One in Lord's Lane and a second, which failed to explode, was found in a field between the school and the chalk pit.

Another bomb was dropped near the church in Snettisham and then the L4 passed over Dersingham. Many villagers heard it and came out of their houses. Some reported seeing it, describing it as cigar shaped and making a shattering noise. No bombs were dropped in the village on this occasion. The L4 went on to King's Lynn where it dropped bombs in Tennyson Avenue and in Bentinck Street, causing loss of life

² Mrs. Cynthia Goodship told us her grandfather, Mr. Buckett, who was a gamekeeper on the Royal Estate, lived next to the cottages that were bombed. The end wall was blown out and the bedroom of the two girls who lived there was exposed, both girls being still in bed. Mr. Buckett fetched a ladder, climbed up and helped the two girls down to safety. Mr. Buckett's own cottage was damaged and during all the mayhem his two ferrets escaped from their cage. During WW2 Mr. Buckett, remembering this experience was very concerned that Blackout regulations should be strictly observed. He often reprimanded those villagers who were at all lax about it.

³ Mr. Andrew England has written a fascinating account about the Tuck brothers called "Brothers in Arms". It tells in full their extraordinary story and a copy can be found in Dersingham Library.

⁴ The Emblems is the name of the cottage and the land that is next to the Community Centre which used to be the village school.

⁵ Dick Stanton also recalls that his family farmed a field near the Shernborne crossroads that was designated an alternative landing site for planes from Bircham. He remembers one plane landing there when Bircham was being bombed.

There were several decoy sites in this area. Docking began WW2 as a decoy airfield for the Coastal Command Station at R.A.F. Bircham Newton. A dummy flare path ran across the site powered by a generator in an underground bunker. During daylight hours a dozen dummy Hudson aircraft were deployed. The site was bombed a number of times but the only known casualties were some rabbits. It later became an operational aerodrome in its own right and had its own decoy field at N. Creak. Sedgeford was another decoy field for Bircham Newton. It used the site of the old WW1 airfield, again having a dummy flare path and fake aircraft.

⁶ This momentous event is recorded in the school logbook in capital letters. WATER LAID ON.

⁷ The Dun Cow Public House was on the site now occupied by Budgen's. The original pub, which was part of a farm that had existed in the village for very many years, was built of carrstone, a material much used in this area. Just before WW2 a more modern pub was built in front of the original which was then, unfortunately, demolished. In September 1993 The Dun Cow ceased trading and was eventually pulled down to make way for Budgen's.

⁸ There are several books in Dersingham Library, which give an account of this underground Home Guard guerrilla movement. It was officially known as 202 Battalion. If the enemy had landed

these men were to slip away to their underground bunkers and remain in hiding until called into action. Explosives had been buried and occasionally today these underground dumps are still discovered. The men were instructed not to carry family photographs or letters that could link them to nearby towns or villages. It was feared that if captured the enemy could hold a captive's family hostage and force him to reveal the details of other men or sites.

⁹ The Top School is now St. George's Middle School.

¹⁰ Theodor Jannoch was a German national who ran a nursery business in The Old Hall. He advertised in various publications.

Theodor Jannoch Lily of the Valley grower by special warrant to H.R.H. Prince of Wales; choice bouquets, wreaths, crosses, etc. Largest grower of Lily of the Valley in England. Hotels supplied with plants and flowers on the hire system.

As a German he was interned during WW1 but returned after the war and continued his business. He died, aged 75, in 1925 and his wife died in 1933 aged 77. Their graves, are to be found in Dersingham Churchyard. Jannoch's Corner is therefore the very sharp bend where Shernborne Road meets Manor Road.