

LOHP Oral History Project

Interview with Mr. Eric Davey on Wednesday 13/02/13

at his home The Old Inn, Fen Road, BloNorton.

HISTORY : Born in the house he now lives in when it was an active public house. Owned by Greene King, taken over by Youngs and Crowshee (? spelling) and then Bullers. Pub closed in 1962 and parents bought it from brewery as sitting tenants. 1 sibling, brother moved to Cornwall 25yrs ago approx. for work and no longer in contact with him. Parents kept the pub and Father also owned some farm land and did farm work for other local farmers. Pub used mostly by local farm workers who walked or cycled to it.

Went to BloNorton School but when it closed he moved to North Lopham school when about 10. Passed 11plus and went to Diss Grammar School. Left school when 15-16 and worked in Greene King Brewery as a lab technician for 5 years. Then became a sales rep for Agricultural Feed and later Agricultural Tyres. During time at school he helped at home and fathers land but also earned money bottling milk for Ted Andrews and later drove tractors for Pratts farms.

FOOD : Parents grew own veg. Ate lot of meat from shooting e.g. Rabbit, Pheasant, Partridge and Pigeons. Pies and Stews and Suet puddings. Any food in season available such as Apple pies and custard. Not go hungry. Owned 12bore shotgun by age of 9.

COOKING/HEATING : Double burner paraffin oven and open fire. Only one room heated- the bar of pub. Burnt Coal and wood cut from Fen-Alder, Willow, Sallow Silver Birch. Usually from trees that had fallen naturally.

GAMES : Cowboys and Indians. Made own Bows and Arrows from Reed, Elder and Hazel and string. Made pop guns with Hazel and Acorns. Leap Frog at school but mainly just played in local area and were trusted by local farmers to not leave gates open or trample crops. Swimming in river at Knettishall Heath. Local wood merchant Rooky Crow (had 1 eye) Picked up kids in his lorry to take swimming. Made Go-carts and used on local roads-not lot of traffic around. Some injuries coming off cart or falling out of trees. Bird Nesting/Egg Collecting-only one egg per nest taken- if rare covered tracks to protect nest eg Linnet and not tell others where found.

CHANGES: Remembers Horse drawn agricultural vehicles. Only 4 residents owned motor cars. Seen houses built inappropriate designs and sites.

During 2nd WW Lot of American airforce bases and lot of the americans liked to use the pub, coming by bike. Ask them 'any gum chum' and given chewing gum. Remembers a childrens party held at American base in Shepherds Grove and lorry came to collect them. Never had all courses on a tray before.

Remembers Reydon Common, Thelneatham Bridge was all gorse and bramble and it was all cleared by a Gyrotiller pulled by a Steam engine. Never seen one before-about 3ft long 'screws' grubbed up everything and then all burned. Then common was used for agriculture.

CROPS/LIVE STOCK: Sugar Beet, Cattle Beet and Swede, Kale grown for winter fodder. Lot of Barley grown for malting. Everyone had chickens to supply eggs. Cows –Ted Andrews had herd of Jersey Cows-butter always available even during rationing. 4/5 people had Pigs which were killed after a year. Meat from pig was distributed to others and then reciprocate when their pig was killed. Some pig meat was eaten fresh and some was cured. Always had Ham and Bacon hanging. Cured using traditional Suffolk recipe his mother knew. Story of local woman who repaired shoes who had a Gander that was aggressive.

GENERAL MEMORIES: Claimed his brother shot the last Otter on the river at night in early 1950's-didn't know at the time last one. Given to someone who skinned it. During Harvest time he would help on Lambs Church Farm taking empty wagon to be filled and driving away when full. Many villagers would kill rabbits with sticks as ran out of the crops being cut. Farmer wanted them for his men and to sell so locals would hide some to take for themselves later. Harvest Festivals the produce would be sold afterwards- enjoyed the Chapel (Methodist) festival over the Church's one. Didn't remember any parties in the village.

FLORA and FAUNA : Modern machinery has opened up and changed size of fields. Some areas of hedgerows still but now not cut by hand not as thick. Sprays on crops straying onto field edges has meant that lost lot of wildflowers and lost grass meadows. Remembers Violets, Cuckoo Pint, Ragged Robin, Clover, Birdseye Daisies and Cowslips. Believes too much area allowed to be scrub and preventing wildflowers.

Remembers collecting Hazel Nuts, Blackberries, Cherries, Sloes and Rosehips. Trees-Alder, Willow, Silver Birch, Oak, Ash, Chestnut and Walnut.

Believes too many foxes and rabbits and Muntjac now. Not so many Hares now. Never saw Deer in the area until 1968-70 when saw Roe Deer.

Lost a lot of Song Thrushes and House Sparrows. Saw Snipe when he was young and Woodcock but not now. Also used to have Turtle Doves and 'Blue Rock pigeon'

Says the River Ouse is now dirty and silted Used to be drained-? by waterboard-locals paid. Remembers when young the water was clean and he used to swim and fish in it. Fish were Perch, Dace, Roach, Pike, Millers Thumb and Sticklebacks. Doesn't remember flooding.

No memory of Peat being dug or used as a fuel but knows it did take place and there would be 3-4 ft deep pools around-Father warned him about.

Grass was cut for Hay. Reeds would be cut for thatching commercially by a firm from Thetford. Some Reeds and Sedge was used by locals for fodder and animal bedding.

Remembers regular burning on BloNorton Little Fen. Men that did it would be locals -pub users. Fires always started in right weather conditions and wind direction. Locals would shoot animals as they were flushed out by fire.

Remembers Reydon common being ploughed. 10 acres drained-dug by hand-mole draining pipes pushed through(?). Some meadows drained but not successful for growing crops. 'Other' side of the Fen Road soil was called 'black sand' and if windy weather the soil would blow and spoil crops of the sugar beet.

MEMORIES : Remembers day trips by coach for all village to Yarmouth in summer and a pantomime around Christmas. Organised by Harry Reader from Hopton. Sunday school also had occasional coach trip for the children

Carved names on back of Church organ-his and friends and many of the evacuees there during the War. Has been preserved.

Remembers Prince Freddie Dulip Singh from Elvedon. He lived and is buried nearby and sometimes Sikhs come to visit grave. Rooky Crow before being a wood merchant was butler to Princes sister.

Recalls the weekly bus service for everyone to go to Diss on market day (Friday)-see same old boys from surrounding farms/villages every week each year getting older.