

LOHP Oral History Interview Summary

Interviewee: JOHN WEBB

Interviewer: Karen Warren

Date of Interview: 4<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011-~~09~~

00-00 Introduction to Webb Family

Grandparents Webb came to Thelnetham from Thrandeston 1911 to take White Horse Pub/village grocery shop. Grandfather in World War 1-spent 18th birthday on The Somme. In grocery trade-good trade until 1953

01-42 World War 2 in Thelnetham. John saw first his first~~st~~ double decker bus 1940/1- bought evacuee children from London. John's father and other men involved in illegal black marketeering with American airmen at Knetishall. Police tipped off John's father if Weights and Measures Inspectors coming so that "black market" goods could be hidden.

02-34 John born Thetford Hospital, lived in Thelnetham in various houses all his life apart from" until 1990  
Boarding school age 9-15. Lived "end council house", bungalow next to "The Cottage", and at "The Cottage, before moving to current house.

03-24 Mother (nee Reeve) died peritonitis, incurable then, when John age 7.  
Helped Father , John (Jack) Webb on grocery round in old Morris van through war-Hopton, Barningham, Blo Norton, S.Lopham, Wortham, Redgrave mentioned.

04-14 World War 2 Families/Events

Thelnetham families: Pawseys and Fulchers big families, other families + evacuees  
1943/4 American Fortress aircraft crashed on Mrs. Rush's cottage next to Frogs Hall. She and her 2 evacuees escaped as it was Sunday and they were out at Hinderclay chapel. Pilots had bailed out after raid on Germany and set plane on "auto" to land in sea/something went wrong. Remembers "shot up" planes returning to Knetishall.

05-28 Family life continued. Lived with Grandmother Reeve ( who was also Mollie Aves' Grandmother) for 2 years after death of own mother. Father remarried-John "inherited a sister"- They all got on well- John wistful/regretful that she was more intelligent than him .

05-58 School life. Hated boarding school- Langley Park, Loddon, Norfolk, from age 9. Had to look after selves/cut-find own firewood/long cross country runs/cold showers.  
Fonder memories of staff at Thelnetham School up to age 9. Miss Kellick (Head), married became Mrs Brown. Miss Dodman ( came from London with evacuees). Miss Ward-local-related to the Shaves. Basic curriculum. No facilities at either school. Teachers (male implied) called up in war. Playtime at school-in woods. Polio outbreak at Langley School- One died, one recovered. Not allowed off site all term/came home for school holidays only. Then helped in grocery shop.

08-34 Grocery Shop/Move to Farm/Food/Family/village life

1953 Father saw birth of supermarkets so shop closed. Bought farm - pigs/poultry Still lived at The Cottage until Stepmother died 1990. Present house built 1939 by Weavers Family. Father had been good to shop customers. If couldn't pay one week he let them pay the next week. All helped each other. Low agricultural wages. Good meals in wartime-black market. Cooking/heating water on old Rayburn. Oil lamps/tilly lamps, Father bought a generator. No electricity in Thelnetham until 1953

Very few vehicles – very few cars. Were bicycles. Petch's Buses Hopton. Symonds buses Dis run on Fridays.

- 11-04 Changes brought about by/at time of/after Second World War  
Farms bought u/made bigger/hedges bulldozed out to make bigger fields to get a good living and as part of war effort. Sugar beet forked out by hand. Hard work. Lorries mentioned.
- 11-55 Recreation: Mainly pub/people drank mild or mild and bitter. Murray family put on plays at village hall late 1940s/50s
- 12-44 Farming changes continued: Mostly horses and binders pre war, then gradually tractors/ bigger fields/bigger tractors/combine harvesters. Before that thrasher used to thrash corn in winter.
- 13-44 Wildlife: Fewer house sparrows now. Farmers not to blame. House roofs now sealed so fewer nest sites. Collected fruit/nuts/conkers. Many wildflowers have disappeared. Used to be kingcups(marsh marigolds). Fens were burnt off every year. Not permitted now by Natural England. Young alders burnt off/cut for firewood. Before that turf cutting-traditional still alive today. Church Farm-woodland/orchard taken out for modern farming.
- 16-13 River- was kept better than today. Was deeper. Some floods-inevitable. Will get worse as boulders in river to clean it at Riddlesworth are stopping the flow.
- 17-20 Webb's Fen: Bought by John Webb Senior with this farmhouse 1953. Cut for hay. Unsuitable for cropping-too wet. Alleged that Suffolk Wildlife Trust/Natural England Stopped river from being dredged 1980s. Arthur Rivett used to come round- approachable/less personal now/no one comes.
- 19-00 Peat digging stopped before John born. Stepped out plot on Monday night after Easter at toll of bell. Anyone could step out a square-dig out as much as want/take wood from it. Sedge cut from Middle Fen for thach-local farmers thatched cornstacks
- 20-34 Birds: Snipe/woodcock were common, rare now. Never bitterns.  
Barns now converted to houses.
- 22-15 Thoughts for the future: John's views- willow trees on Fen rotted and disappeared. Should Replant. Should burn fen to keep reeds in control- when dry enough after winter-about half an hour in March as used to but wouldn't be allowed today. Hate to think of Fen spoiling.

Interview end. Interview length 25 minutes.

Addendum to above interview: a further 9 minutes 24 seconds

- 00-00 John showed own maps of Thelnetham of 1944 and 1984 and showed copies of books-Community Farm by John Middleton Murray(Lodge Farm), 1844 White's Directory-references to Thelnetham.
- 00-13 Father was Churchwarden. 5 crossways at village hall. One that led to Church Removed by Rev Sawbridge. Path visible on old maps.
- 02-43 John showed family photo collection-at White Horse pub, Uncle Tom Flatman,

John's father -John(Jack) Webb Senior in World War 1 uniform.  
American airmen-World War 2-one Major married village Pawsey girl.  
Americans supplied the pub-swapped farm butter for their tinned  
meat/sausages/peaches. Police had some too.No one got caught  
Old people couldn't afford mats for floors. John Webb Senior got them coconut mats  
from Diss Brush Factory. People paid him when they could.  
He then had Alzheimer's Disease for 20 years-age 65-85. Had tempers. John blames his  
experiences in World war 1. Mrs. Ferguson mentioned-same illness.

08-30

John, Churchwarden himself for short while, embarrassed the Archdeacon by laughing  
at him when he suggested they borrow money at 12% interest to repair crack in arch over  
the nave. John stated vehemently that they couldn't borrow money as no hope they  
would be able to pay it back.