



Bekesbourne and the Second World War

David Millyard

This booklet was originally written in 1995-96. It is reprinted now in 2011 with some minor amendments and a number of additional illustrations.

I remain very grateful to those residents and former residents of Bekesbourne with whom I talked in 1995 and who very kindly shared with me their memories of the war and pre-war days : Mrs Hogben, née Griggs, who was born at Cowhouse Cottages and lived for many years in School Lane; Mr Hopkins & Mrs Hopkins, née Rennels, once of The Unicorn; Mrs Jarvis, née Wilson, of Aerodrome Road; Mr David Friend, once of Shepherdswell, & Mrs Doris Friend, née Measday, once of the Prince of Wales; Mr & Mrs White, formerly of Vine Cottages and Bifrons Road; Jane Mount of Woolton Farm.

GDM
Bekesbourne
April 2011

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Bekesbourne and the Second World War

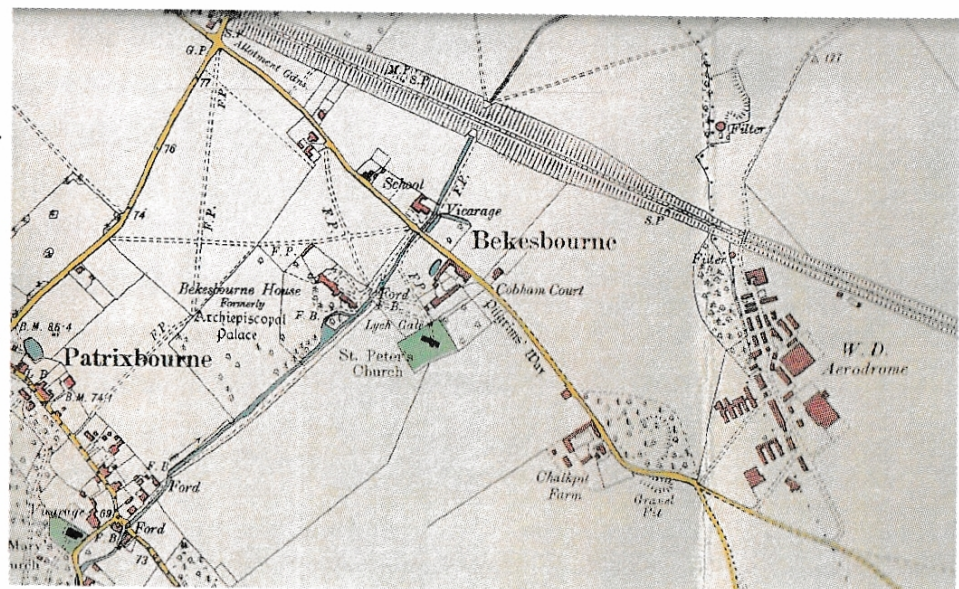
1. Outbreak of War

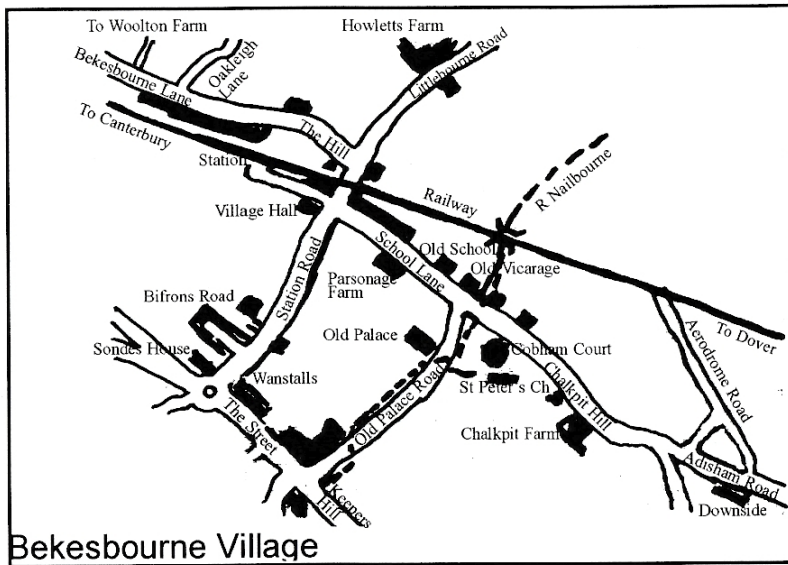
Britain declared war on Germany on Sunday 3rd September 1939. A final ultimatum had been issued at 9.00 a.m. that morning to the effect that unless the Germans gave, by 11.00 a.m., a satisfactory reply undertaking to withdraw from Poland – Germany had invaded Poland on September 1st – a state of war would exist between the two countries. No response had been received by the deadline and the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, addressed the nation on the wireless, announcing the start of hostilities.¹

In Bekesbourne that Sunday morning an event without precedent took place: Mattins at St Peter's Church was postponed from 11.00 a.m. to 11.15 a.m.. The Vicar began a series of brief notes in the church's Register of Services which he continued more or less throughout the war years. On this occasion he wrote, "11 am Mattins Postponed to 11.15", and in the remarks column: "War with Germany announced".²

Bekesbourne after the end of the 1914-18 war.

From a six inch to one mile Ordnance Survey Map dated 1920 in a private collection.





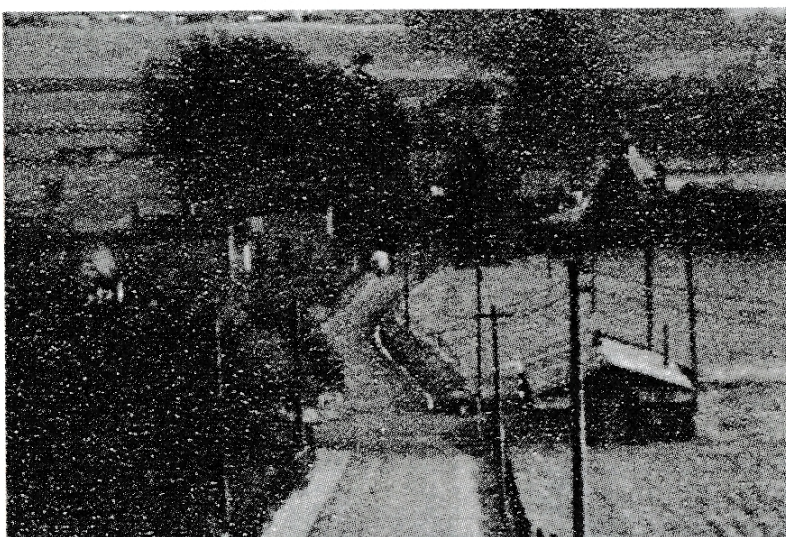
2. Introduction to Bokesbourne in 1939

Bokesbourne is a parish some two miles long by half a mile wide aligned roughly north-west to south-east. It is not a compact village but has a number of separate communities: The Hill, with

the pub and the railway station; The Street, which is the N.E. side of Patricbourne village street, the boundary between the two parishes being down the middle of the road; School Lane and the area around the church; and The Aerodrome. As is clear from the map, a principal feature of the parish is the railway line from Canterbury to Dover, which goes through it, first from the north west in a cutting; then past the station, over a short viaduct and along a high embankment across the valley of the Little Stour; and then again into a cutting past the aerodrome.

a. From the Street to the Railway Station

If a present-day resident or visitor were transported back in time to 1939, he



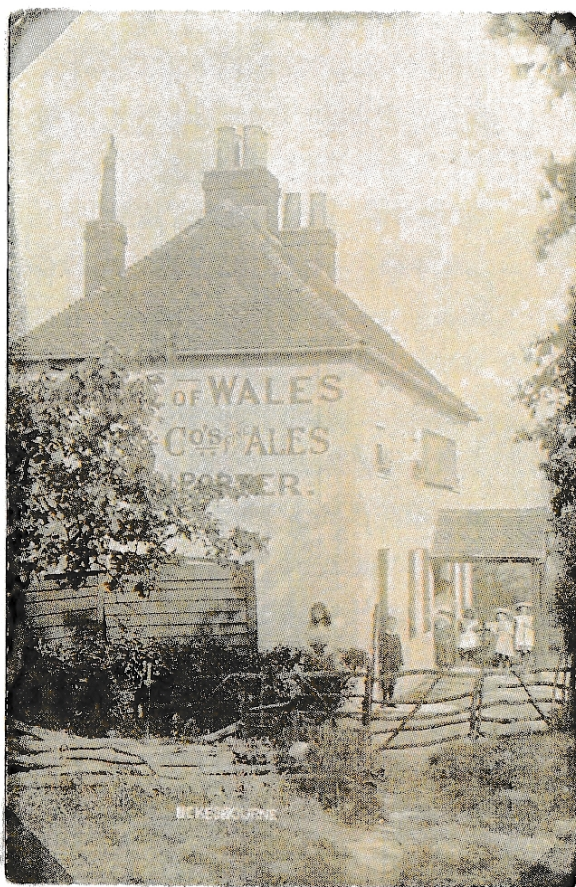
The Village Hut in 1945

or she would still find the place recognisable despite changes which have inevitably taken place in more than fifty years. The tall Wellingtonia tree – on its triangle of land – was still a landmark and traffic hazard at the junction of Bifrons Hill, The Street and Station Road. Bifrons Road was not there; it

was built as council housing by the Bridge-Blean Rural District Council in the early 1950s. Cranmer Close and Aspinall Close are recent additions. At the junction of Station Road and School Lane the present village hall has replaced an earlier, smaller and meaner timber building known as the Village Hut.

Station Approach, by the Village Hut, led, not as now to an unmanned station and a modern office building, but to station buildings with booking office, waiting room (with a fire in winter) and stationmaster's house. There was a goods yard, with a coal depot run by Mr James Newton who lived on Bekesbourne Hill, and from which baskets of fruit destined for Covent Garden and hop pockets for the brewery trade were despatched in season. The station complement consisted of the stationmaster himself with a booking clerk and two porters/signalmen. The livery and signs were in the green paint of the old Southern Railway. The trains were, of course, all pulled by steam locomotives. Steam trains in those days were not romantic as they seem today; indeed at times they could be positively dangerous, as when an engine labouring to get going up the steep incline out of Bekesbourne station gave off a cloud of sparks which blew through the open sash windows of the upper floor of the Prince of Wales and set fire to the bedclothes; or when Mr Wilson's horse field up at the aerodrome caught fire one summer.

The Prince of Wales was a public house, now converted to a private house. It stands on the far side of the station and is approached from Bekesbourne Hill. The landlord since 1924 was Mr William Measday who lived there with his wife and two of his three daughters, the eldest having left home. Mr Measday was a veteran of the 1914-18 war in which he



An early photo of The Prince of Wales

had been severely wounded and lost a leg. They had a large garden and orchard where the car park for The Unicorn is now situated. It was a good place for a quick drink while waiting for a train.

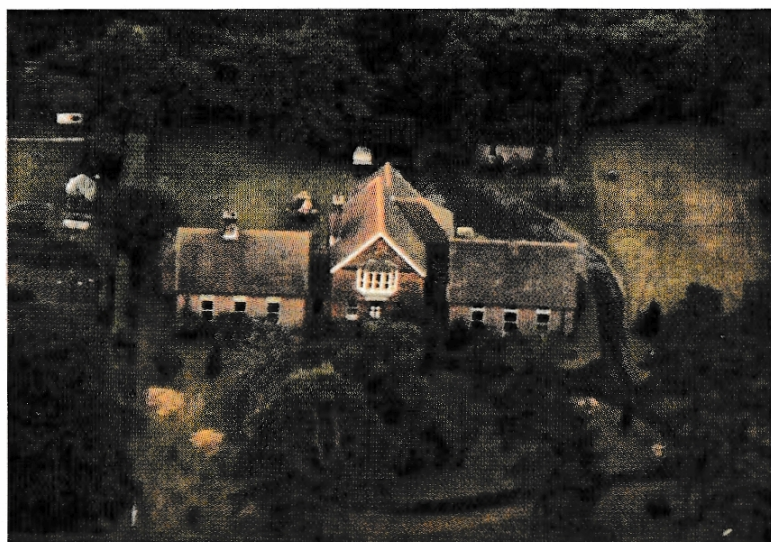
(b) Bekesbourne Hill to the Parish Boundary

Beyond the Prince of Wales, on Bekesbourne Hill itself, stood, and still stands, the Unicorn public house. Whereas the Prince of Wales had a full licence for beers, wines and spirits, and possessed a cellar for the beers, the Unicorn had a restricted licence as a beer house only and had no cellar. Here the landlord was Mr Albert Rennels. He and his family were newcomers having only taken up residence in June 1939. Mr Rennels soon gained the reputation of being willing to sell almost anything at any time, having a regular stock of sweets and groceries. Both public houses were at that time owned by Shepherd Neame, the Faversham brewers, who had bought them, together with four adjacent cottages, in September 1924.

On the opposite side of the Hill was the fruit farm of Mr W.M.Wallis who lived in Yew Tree Cottage. The land remains fruit orchards today. Further up on the same side is Oakleigh Lane, at the end of which is the house named Oakleigh, in 1939 the Bekesbourne poultry farm owned by Mr Frederick J Helbling, one of three poultry farms in the village. The Helblings moved to Kingston in 1942 when Mr Wallis bought Oakleigh as his own residence.

Behind Oakleigh is the land of Woolton farm, in Bekesbourne parish, although the farmhouse and buildings are in the parish of Littlebourne.

Going back to the road from Oakleigh you must imagine that the houses and bungalows opposite are not there – they are



Springfield as a private house

post-war buildings. Taking the road towards Canterbury, you will pass Four Acres on the left and St Quentin on the right. The latter, in 1939 was the second of the three poultry farms, owned by Mr Richard Gray. Further on, on the right, lay the entrance to Springfield Nursery and on the left the house called Springfield. This was a large building of red brick, consisting of a two-storey central block with a tall single-storey wing on either side. It looked like a late-Victorian or Edwardian institution of some kind, as indeed it had been. It was built as the Bridge Rural District sanatorium or isolation hospital, an essential requirement in times when diseases such as scarlet fever, diphtheria and even smallpox were still common. By 1939 it had been sold as a private house. It is unrecognisable today, having in recent years been completely remodelled to become the modern and up-to-date Highfield Care Home.

Beyond Springfield, just before you descend the hill to Palmstead Bottom and the parish boundary, there is a lane on the left which crosses the railway cutting on a bridge and leads to the pair of farm cottages, belonging in those days to Hode Farm, and known as Cowhouses. It was here that Mr Griggs, who worked for Mr Spencer Mount of Hode Farm and Mrs Griggs had brought up their family of three boys and four girls. They were all grown up by 1939, the youngest having been born in 1910. The sons all worked for Mr Mount, having started in turn, as they left school at the age of fourteen, as backdoor boys doing the chores of the farmhouse, before graduating as fully-fledged farm workers. The daughters, on the other hand, would go into domestic service, again perhaps at Hode Farm, before getting married and giving up paid employment.



Hode Farm House



Howletts

c. Littlebourne Road

Let us retrace our steps to the Village Hut and stand with our backs to the station approach road, a private road belonging to the Railway Company as the Parish Council was informed at a meeting in 1941³. On our left is the road to Littlebourne past Howletts Farm, and the entrance to Howletts mansion. This is now The Aspinall Wild Animal Park.

In 1939 it was occupied by the Ramsay family. From Tudor times in the 16th century and probably earlier the owners of Howletts had been the principal landowners of Bekesbourne, but by 1939 much of the land was owned, as it still is, by the Church Commissioners.

d. School Lane

Opposite the Village Hut is School Lane. On the left, in the triangular piece of land now occupied by several post-war bungalows, were the village allotments, managed by Messrs Truscott & Sons of St George's Street, Canterbury. They had a hedge adjoining the road which tended to get overgrown, to the extent that the Parish Council wrote formally in November 1940 to ask Truscotts to get their tenants to cut it back "as same was overgrowing the highway". One of the amusements of the children on their way back from school was to watch one of the allotment holders, who had a reputation as a boozier, sleeping off his liquid lunch.

Further down School Lane the house Winlen was there in 1939. So was the Old Post Office; but not "old". It was a sub-post-office, a room in Mr and Mrs Crouch's bungalow with the posting box and telephone kiosk outside as they are today. It was the sort of sub-post-office where you had to knock on the

door to get service, usually from Mrs Crouch. But it did more than sell stamps and despatch mail; it was, for example, where Mr Measday collected his first world war disability pension. But telegrams had to be sent from the railway station and were delivered from Bridge.⁴ Mr Crouch was a member of the Parish Council.

Next to the post office Glencot was there. The house had been built in the twenties by the then headmistress of the school, Miss Trees, for her own retirement, but in 1939 it was occupied by a young married couple, who had married in 1937, and their small daughter. Both came from the village.

Opposite is Parsonage Farm, occupied then by Mr and Mrs Ernest Baker who farmed much of the land in Bekesbourne.

Then on the left of the road was the Church of England elementary school, now also a private house having been closed in the early 1970s when a new school for the whole district was built in Bridge.



Parsonage Farm

The Headteacher was Miss

Allen who lived on the premises. There were three classes: an infants class taught in its own classroom and the junior and senior classes in the large classroom divided in two by a curtain. The other teachers at the time were Miss Cooper and Miss Capon.

Next to the old school now is the Old Vicarage. In those days it too was still in use for its original purpose, as the home of the vicar, The Rev Albert Amos Fletcher Lamplugh MA and his wife. Mr Lamplugh had been appointed to Bekesbourne in 1928. He had been a student at St John's College, Cambridge where he read History, then going on to Ripon Theological College. He was ordained at Ripon Cathedral and held a number of curacies in Yorkshire before coming south. His last appointment had been curate in charge of St Peter's Church, Whitstable, where he was for two

years before coming to Bekesbourne. In 1939 he was 56 years old or thereabouts. Mrs Lamplugh was the teacher of the Sunday school, which she held in the Victorian schoolroom at the side of the vicarage. At least one child remembered her best for the toffees she used to hand out from the red toffee tin.



The Old Palace

e. The Old Palace, Church and Cobham Court

Opposite the Vicarage and School, down a lane alongside the river, called either the Nailbourne or the Little Stour, is the Old Palace, which must have looked much the same in 1939 as it does today, except possibly for a thick covering of ivy. This substantial house is all that is left, in fact the gatehouse,

porter's lodge and some domestic offices, of a palace constructed by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the 1540s, in the reign of King Henry VIII. It lasted barely a hundred years and was sold off for demolition in the late 1640s by the Commonwealth Commissioners.⁵ All that was left, the gatehouse range, was converted into a house, improved in the 18th century⁶ and further enlarged and castellated in the 19th century. In 1939 the house was occupied by Major-General and Mrs Delano-Osborne. They took their share of village responsibilities; he was particularly active as one of the school managers.

On the hill above stands St Peter's Church, in those days looking much as it is today.



St. Peter's Church

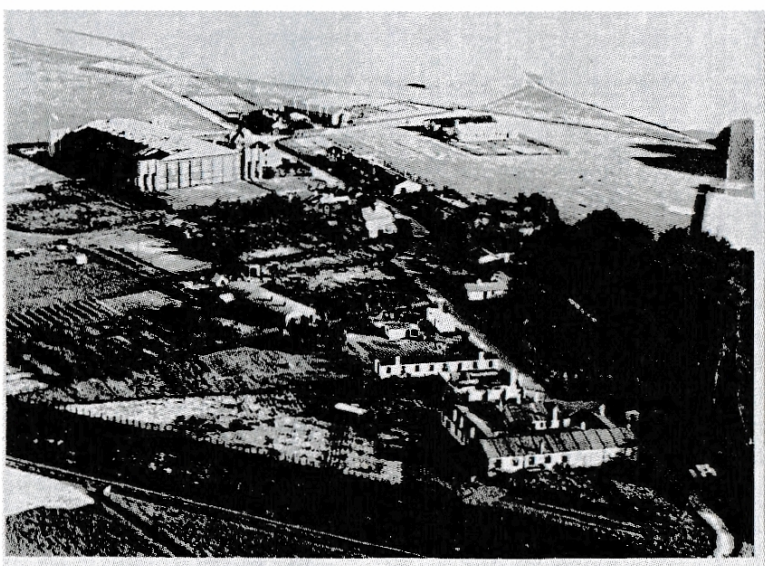
The main difference is that the ordinary way to approach it was not, as it is today, across the footbridge or the ford by the Old Palace and up through the orchard belonging to Cobham Court; that was known as the hearseway, presumably because it was the only vehicular approach.

The ordinary approach on foot was to go through the iron gate – which is still there – just beyond the bridge by the vicarage, beside the river and then left along the boundary wall of Cobham Court gardens. This was a maintained footpath, and was from time to time the concern of the Parish Council as to how it should be mended. Below the church is Cobham Court itself, another substantial house of ancient origins, at that time the residence of Miss Hordern, dairy farmer and Justice of the Peace.

f. Up the hill to the Aerodrome

Then up the hill to the Aerodrome, past Chalkpit Farm belonging to Mr Baker. Aerodrome Road would be barely recognisable today. Many of the original buildings put up by the air force in the first world war, though they are still the core of present-day bungalows, have been much altered and there have been many new houses and bungalows built, in-filling between the original buildings. Many of the buildings and indeed the aerodrome hangar and field were not actually in the parish of Bokesbourne during the war, although their postal address was Bokesbourne and the residents felt themselves to be part of the Bokesbourne community.

The buildings had been sold off by the Air Ministry in the early 1920s after the aerodrome was shut down as an active RAF station. The first people to buy a property were the Wilson family, moving back to Kent from Essex. They had been negotiating for a never-completed brick-built barrack



The aerodrome in the 1930s

block which happened to lie within Bekesbourne parish on land owned by Miss Hordern. Stalemate was reached because the Ministry was willing to sell the building but Miss Hordern would not sell the land. There was a solution at hand: the Wilsons did a swap with someone who was negotiating for another property on land not owned by Miss Hordern and who only wanted it for the salvageable building materials. So the Wilsons moved into their bungalow which had been the wireless operations hut of the aerodrome and which was in the parish of Ickham. Or so they thought – until one Sunday they were somewhat put out to find a group of people crossing the garden. They turned out to be the Vicar and congregation of St Peter's beating the parish bounds. The bungalow was named Boundary Cottage.

g. Beyond The Aerodrome

Opposite the aerodrome, on the other side of the Adisham Road are the four pairs of houses called Downside, which were built as council houses by the Bridge Rural District Council in 1934. Further over, on Bramling Road can be seen the cottage which was once the miller's house when the old windmill still worked and beyond, at the junction of that road and Shepherd's Close road is Chota, the third of the poultry farms, owned by Mr Tyler. We can then return, by Shepherds Close road and Keeper's Hill to the village of Patixbourne and the Street and on up beyond the Wellingtonia along Hode Lane to Hode Farm. These roads all form the boundary between Patixbourne and Bekesbourne. In the Street we shall pass Court Cottages, Mulberry Cottage, the oast houses, three cottages later destroyed, Elephant and Lion, Godden House, part of which is a small general stores and off licence, and Wanstalls named after the family who lived there in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Opposite is Sondes House which was severely damaged by fire in the summer of 1944. Wanstalls was burnt down in the 1970s but has been rebuilt and renamed Patixbourne House. All the houses named are in the parish of Bekesbourne. It was only in the local government reorganisation of the 1980s that the civil parishes of Bekesbourne and Patixbourne were united. The age-old dividing line along The Street remains now only for the ecclesiastical parishes.



Godden House, once the village shop.



The crossroads and Wellingtonia tree



Wanstalls rebuilt

3. Preparations for War

a. Civil Defence

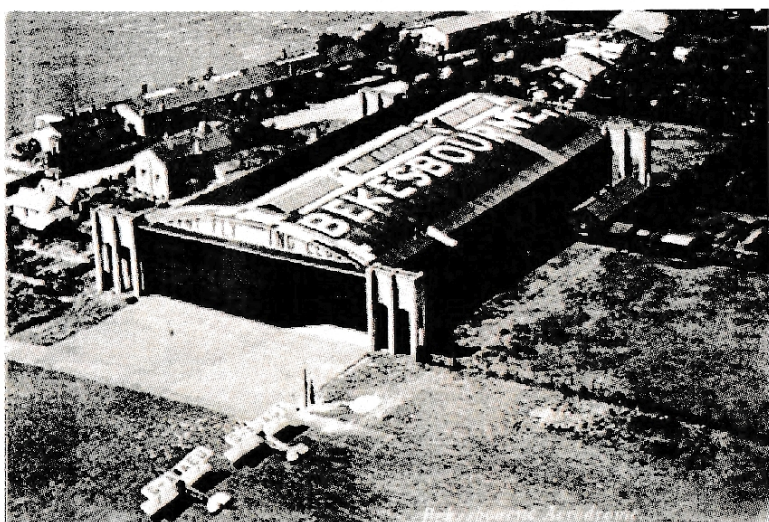
From 1935 onwards there was a growing expectation in the country of a second war with Germany. The Munich agreement of the summer of 1938 and Neville Chamberlain's "Peace with Honour" speech which followed, gave a brief year's respite during which preparations for war and re-armament could go forward. In July 1935 the Government had issued a circular⁷ encouraging local authorities to expand their civil defence activities with particular reference to air raids. The Kent County Council set up an Air Raids Precautions committee and in July 1936 this body agreed with the District Councils and the Home Office the delegation of authority over various matters to District level, including the organisation and training of local personnel as air raid wardens, the provision of first aid posts, the control of shelters, arrangements for evacuation of personnel or the reception of evacuees, liaison with fire, ambulance and emergency rescue services and the like.

In this way Bridge Blean Rural District Council (RDC), which only a year or two before had been formed from an amalgamation of the two districts of Bridge and Blean and had taken new offices in Old Dover Road in the City of Canterbury, became the responsible body for civil defence for the parish of Bekesbourne. The RDC appointed its own chairman as Chief Warden and an Air Raids Precautions Officer (ARPO), Captain J A Pittock, who, in the spring of 1937, wrote to Parish Councils regarding air raid precautions in the parishes⁸. Bekesbourne Parish Council received the letter at a meeting on 15th March, but deferred it as new elections were to take place and it seemed better for the new Council to deal with a matter of such importance. The new Council met on 26th April 1937 and appointed its own chairman, Mr E W Baker, to be Head Warden, and Messrs Scales, Birchett (a former member of the Parish Council) and Wallis as Air Raid Wardens. They also agreed to invite Capt. Pittock to come and address a public meeting in Bekesbourne, which duly took place on 14th June.

At this point we should say a word about Mr Baker who was, undoubtedly, the key individual in Bekesbourne at the time. Though not the landowner, he was the principal farmer in the village, farming Parsonage and Chalkpit Farms and living at Parsonage. He represented Bekesbourne on the RDC; he was Chairman of the Parish Council; he was a member of the School Management Committee; he was Chairman of the Littlebourne and District British Legion. Known as "Buff" Baker he is remembered for his two fox terriers, Bubble and Squeak. And he liked a quick beer at the Prince of Wales – but, so the story goes, would escape through the kitchen, calling his old dog from the step outside, if he spied someone coming up the footpath outside in search of him. Now he had taken on yet another job in the village.

It is clear that the RDC took its responsibilities seriously, stepping them up as the threat of war advanced. At least from the start of 1939 there was a regular training programme organised throughout the district, including anti-gas and first aid courses in the village halls, including the Bekesbourne Village Hut. One or two special exercises were held in the district, which included the simulation of an air raid at night on Chartham and Canterbury⁹. However there were, inevitably, snags.

On July 1st 1939 Mr Baker complained at a meeting of the RDC that the ARPO had asked Bekesbourne to establish first aid posts and the village had set up a voluntary committee to oversee the programme; but no money had been provided on the grounds that the village was not in a danger area. As the *Kentish Gazette* reported him saying: "They cannot expect to go on like this. The village is actually under an aerodrome".



The Aerodrome hangar in the 1930s

b. The Aerodrome

It has already been noted that the RAF left the aerodrome at the end of the first world war. The Air Ministry sold off the ancillary buildings, having first removed the fittings such as the electric power system and made the mains drainage inaccessible to the new owners. The airfield itself would have reverted to farmland had not Mr Ramsay, the owner of Howletts at the time, taken up flying, which he did at the age of over 70¹⁰.

It was he who set up the Kent Flying Club which became a thriving concern during the late '20s and '30s, with its own servicing organisation, Air Sales and Service Ltd. Its secretary was Mr James Pratt, who lived at Wanstalls in the Street. The aerodrome was sometimes called Garrington Aerodrome and appears in the pre-war Ward Lock Red Guide to East Kent towns as "Canterbury aerodrome at Bekesbourne"; but BEKESBOURNE was the name painted in huge capitals on the roof of the hangar to guide incoming aircraft. In 1938 with the threat of war the Kent Flying Club took a share in training pilots under the government-sponsored scheme called the Civil Air Guard. Early in 1939 officials visited the aerodrome and decided that it was unsuitable for conversion to use with the new fast RAF fighter planes being built for the expected war. Later in the summer as the threat became greater civil flying had to stop and the aerodrome was taken out of commission once more.

c. The Parish Council

A new Parish Council had been elected in the spring of 1937. The members were Councillors E Crouch of the Post Office in School Lane; W H Scales, a dentist, who lived in Oakleigh Lane; W M Wallis, fruit farmer of Yew Tree Cottage, The Hill; J Newport, coal merchant and carrier of The Hill; and F Goldfinch, of Riverside Cottages. Their first action was to co-opt Mr Baker as Chairman. This council stayed in office right through the war as local government elections were held in abeyance for the duration. In the years leading up to the war their main concerns had been to put pressure on the RDC in such matters as the maintenance of roads, ditches and drainage. In particular, over a number of years, they persistently tried to get a 30 MPH

speed limit in the village, at first for the whole village and latterly for School Lane only. Only when eventually the application was turned down by the Ministry of Transport in the spring of 1939 did the Council agree to drop it.

The start of the war was not noted by the Council; indeed there is very little in the Minutes throughout to indicate that there was a war on, although their business must have been conducted against the background of changes brought about by the war. One or two hints are given: for example, in the autumn of 1939 there had been a fire in Oakleigh Lane when the water pressure at the hydrants on Bekesbourne Hill had proved inadequate. The Council took it up with the RDC, received an unsatisfactory reply in the spring of 1940 and then asked the RDC ARP officer for a 200 gallon static water tank.

d. The School

In the summer of 1939 the managers of the Bekesbourne school, a Church of England elementary school under the control of the Education Committee of the Kent County Council (KEC), took a concerned view of the expected outbreak of war. The managers consisted of The Vicar, who was ex officio chairman, Mr Baker, Mrs Ramsay of Howletts, Maj-General Delano Osborne of the Old Palace, Miss Hordern of Cobham Court, and Mr F W Bovill of Sondes House, who represented the Parish Council having been previously its chairman. They anticipated possible air raids and considered what precautions should be taken. Their preferred solution, in addition to some sand-bagging of parts of the school building, was to use the railway tunnel as a shelter. This, which was sometimes also known as "the long arch", is a farm accommodation way



A pre-war senior class



The tunnel or long arch

beneath the railway embankment behind the vicarage and quite near the school. It consists of a brick-lined tunnel, built high enough to take a fully-loaded hay wagon, and the Nailbourne river is taken in a culvert underneath.

The managers met again in September soon after the outbreak of the war. They confirmed their decision and Maj-Gen Delano Osborne was commissioned to direct the sand-bagging of the tunnel. Various members promised help and materials and they decided to set up a voluntary subscription fund to provide for this and other air raid and war emergency expenses in the village. Mr Bovill agreed to be treasurer.

The decision to use the tunnel raised a storm of protest in the village. A meeting of parents was convened at the Village Hut. Strong objections were raised to the tunnel scheme "on grounds of (a) cold (b) damp and (c) technical grounds connected with ballistics". An alternative scheme was put forward of wiring the school windows and sand-bagging the buildings, if money was found to buy the necessary wood. Mr Tyler, owner of the Chota poultry farm on Bramling Road, would provide the wire; Mrs Tyler would lead a group of mothers to put the work in hand.

The Major-General reported all this back to another meeting of the managers later in September. The meeting was also attended by a Captain Montefiore of the Royal Horse Artillery who had looked at the tunnel and now confirmed the ballistic objections to its use. So, although the railway company had agreed to the use of the tunnel, the alternative scheme was adopted, the voluntary help "thankfully accepted" and the work authorised to go ahead under the direction of the Major-General. Someone – who it was is not recorded – pointed out that in extreme emergency the tunnel could still be used.

e. Evacuees

In 1938 it was clearly expected by the government of the day that, if war broke out, London and other large centres of population would immediately become targets for aerial bombardment. Plans were drawn up for evacuating some 2,000,000 people from London, including over 145,000 to rural areas of Kent, and a further 50,000 from the Medway towns to Kent "reception areas"¹¹. In view of the 'Munich declaration' the emergency plans were not needed in the autumn of 1938 but more careful and detailed arrangements were drawn up over the following six to nine months, so far as Kent was concerned under the direction of the Kent County Council (KCC) in co-operation with the District Councils. Towards the end of August 1939 war seemed inevitable. On 31st August the KCC received notification from the Ministry of Health on behalf of the Government that the plans should be put into effect. The evacuation was started on 1st September, the day Germany invaded Poland, and was complete by 5th September. The plans included the evacuation of 9000 people from the Medway towns to Canterbury City, Bridge Blean Rural District and Elham Rural District, the evacuees going by train to Canterbury East station and from there by bus to their final destinations. In the event a good deal fewer arrived than had been planned for.

A reporter of the Kentish Gazette watched the arrival of the evacuees at the East Station in Canterbury on Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd September and their onward despatch by bus. Bekesbourne is recorded as having received sixteen on the first day and fifteen on the second. Preparations in the village had been made earlier, Mrs Baker, wife of Mr Baker, Chairman of the Parish Council etc etc, being billeting officer. She was rather lame and walked with a stick. She and her husband both rode to hounds, she riding side-saddle in the traditional lady's way. She had the reputation of being a no-nonsense sort of person. As billeting officer she would be unlikely to take no for an answer. That was certainly the experience of one young married woman whose husband had joined up in the Royal Artillery. Mrs Baker asked her to take three evacuee children. "But I've only got two beds", she replied. That was no problem; Mrs Baker lent her a third.

4. The Early Months: October 1939 - April 1940

The autumn, winter and spring of 1939-1940 became known as the period of the "phoney war". The British Expeditionary Force had gone off to fight in France but there was little fighting actually done. The allied armies of France and Britain were protected in the concrete fortifications of the Maginot Line on the French side of the frontier with German forces similarly occupying the Siegfried Line on their side. The German army was more concerned with the completion of the conquest of Poland and later with the invasion of Norway and Denmark.

At home in Britain shortages were beginning to bite as a result of enemy naval and air attacks on shipping. All the civilian population were required to register and Identity Cards were introduced. Food rationing was organised and ration books were issued. People were given instructions to register with specific retailers, first for bacon and butter which were to be rationed from a date to be announced, and also for sugar. Evidently some retailers in the district jumped the gun, refusing supplies to unregistered customers before the due date. On 16th October 1939 the Kentish Gazette published a tetchy note from the authorities denying that rationing had yet started.

The expected air raids on London and other urban centres did not take place, either because the German air force was fully occupied in eastern Europe and in attacking shipping or, perhaps, because the range of German fighters was insufficient to give cover to their bombers over south-east England from bases in Germany. As a result some evacuees began to drift home.

Throughout the country County War Agricultural Executive Committees ("War.Ag.") were set up to oversee and to increase agricultural production to offset shortages arising from import restrictions. Kent was no exception. A Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Lord Cornwallis which in turn set up sub-committees in the districts including Bridge Blean RDC¹². Their initial task was to increase the acreage given over to arable crops so

as to reduce the dependence on grain imports in the following years. No doubt the farmers in Bekesbourne were affected both by the objectives of the Kent War.Ag. and the bureaucracy which attended them. In addition a county-based Women's Land Army was organised.

There was one excitement for the village and indeed for the whole of Canterbury. The Kentish Gazette, in its edition on November 18th 1939, carried the front page headline, "Bekesbourne man's thrilling story". The article told how Harold George Goodwin of Bekesbourne Hill, then a naval wireless operator, had escaped from a destroyer which had hit a mine.

So this was a period of waiting, of preparation and consolidation on the home front; but against a background of appalling weather. The autumn was exceptionally wet. As the vicar recorded: 15th October "v. wet indeed"; 29 October "wet after terrible spell of rainy weather"; 26 November "Parade. Rain and Flood". Then the winter became exceptionally cold: 19 December "Cold"; 25 December "Hard frost and fog"; 31 December "Hard frost continues"; 7 January "Thaw"; 14 January "Hard frost"; 21 January "Europe frozen up. Snow"; 28 January "Snow". Then in February the church was abandoned and services held in the Village Hut; perhaps it was inaccessible because of snow or there was no fuel for heating. By March they were back in the church, but on Easter Sunday, 24th March 1940, so the Vicar recorded, there was an "epidemic raging". It cannot have been a happy time when there were already many husbands and sons away from home for the first time; some awaiting what might occur at the front in France, others already involved in naval warfare. And at home wartime restrictions and privations were starting to be felt.

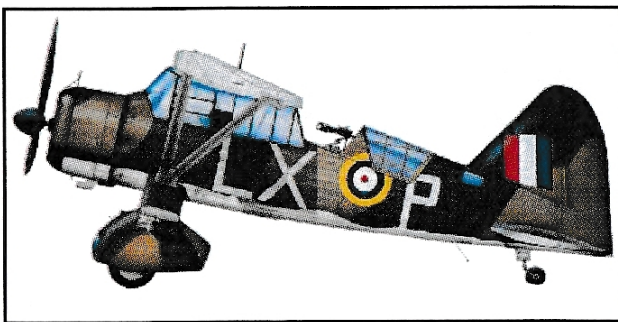
5. From May 1940: pressure increases

In May 1940 everything changed. On the 10th of the month the German offensive to the West began. In only three weeks the Netherlands and Belgium were overrun, France invaded and the British expeditionary force driven back to a tiny area around the French port of Dunkirk. There followed the evacuation from Dunkirk, completed in the most difficult circumstances by 4th June.

On 19th May the vicar recorded that Bekesbourne had been declared a 'danger area'. This declaration had considerable consequences for the village.

a. The Aerodrome

On 21st May the aerodrome was re-occupied by the RAF for the first time since 1918. As British forces were forced back in France, the forward support airfields were overrun by the enemy and the squadrons of Lysander aircraft undertaking support duties had to be found premises in England near enough to the front to provide the support needed but not taking



A Westland Lysander

airfields required for the fighter squadrons. Bekesbourne was one such. At first it was occupied by a squadron of Lysanders and 2 Hurricanes withdrawn from France. To the residents of Aerodrome Road the men appeared demoralised and indeed the squadron was quickly replaced by another squadron of Lysanders from elsewhere in southern England. The

aircrew were billeted on the residents: for example a warrant officer and two sergeants at Boundary Cottage and a young officer at Sidi Bishr, who was later killed.

Then it was decided to evacuate the civilian population from Aerodrome Road and Downside altogether. Almost no notice was given. A public meeting was held in the school with Sir John Prestige in the chair. He was the owner of Bourne Park at Bishopsbourne and represented Bishopsbourne on the Bridge Blean RDC. At this time he was the RDC's Chairman and chief billeting officer. He announced the intended evacuation which duly took place by 2nd June, the residents being placed in vacant accommodation in the district requisitioned for the purpose. For example the Wilson family from Boundary Cottage went to Lee Priory near Littlebourne. Ernest and Gladys Griggs from Downside were found rooms in Bekesbourne vicarage.

Yet the use of the aerodrome by the RAF only lasted until 8th June. When the evacuation from Dunkirk was complete there was no further need for the Lysander support force near the south coast. The aerodrome itself was closed and the field sown with stakes and wire to prevent an airborne landing by enemy invaders. The buildings were used for other purposes and the families were not able to return to their own homes until the end of the war.



The Hangar in 1995. It was demolished in 1998

b. The School

The school managers met at noon on 3rd May 1940 to hear how the air raid precautions, which they had approved, were progressing. Evidently they were going well, for those who had helped were duly thanked. A number of suggestions for improvement were received.

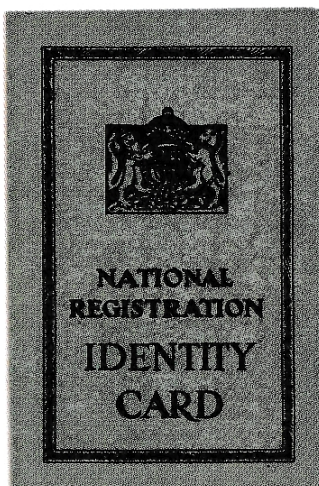
A little over three weeks later, on 28th May, they met again. This time the situation was very different. Sir John Prestige and a specially-commissioned inspector from the Kent Education Committee (KEC) had visited and

recommended closure for the duration, as the school "had been declared in a danger area owing to the presence of the RAF at the aerodrome and a recent bombing". The KEC acting on expert advice had already decided to close it; the managers now had no option but to concur.

A number of supplementary decisions were taken. The managers sanctioned the use of the school by the Kent Public Assistance department as "an emergency shelter for war refugees".¹³ There is no evidence that it was ever used as such. And a note was added to the minutes: "The scholars have been divided between Bridge and Littlebourne schools, Miss Allen and Miss Cooper going to Bridge and Miss Capon to Littlebourne. The KEC providing and paying for transport. In the course of correspondence the KEC has assured the chairman that the school will be re-opened when circumstances permit." Presumably Miss Allen continued to live in her accommodation on the premises.

c. Evacuees

As a result of the development in the war situation children evacuated to the Bridge Blean area, including Bekesbourne, who still remained, were re-evacuated to Wales. Children from the Kent coastal districts were also evacuated but the new evacuation did not extend to the rural areas. Bekesbourne children stayed put and went to school in the neighbouring villages.



FOR OFFICIAL ENTRY ONLY (apart from Holder's Signature). ANY OTHER ENTRY OR ANY ALTERATION, MARKING OR ERASURE, IS PUNISHABLE BY A FINE OR IMPRISONMENT OR BOTH.

NUMBER OCHE 179-67	SURNAME MILLYARD	
CHRISTIAN NAMES First only & full GEORGE D	CLASS CODE B	
FULL POSTAL ADDRESS ZZEE	HOLDER'S SIGNATURE <i>G. D. Millyard</i>	
CHANGE OF ADDRESS: No entry except by National Registration Officer, to whom consent must be notified. REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)		
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)		
REMOVED TO (Full Postal Address)		

Early in the war everyone was issued with an identity card which they were supposed to carry with them at all times. The one pictured above is of the type issued to adults from 1943. It was issued to the author to replace an earlier card in October 1951. These identity cards were abolished in 1952.

6. Bombs and the Battle of Britain¹⁴

The great air raid on Bekesbourne took place in the evening of 12th August 1940. There had been warnings before and the Vicar had noted a number of events as worth recording in the church service register: 7th July "air battle over Folkestone"; 9th July "air battle over channel"; 28th July "Air Raid"; 11th August "Air Raids". But none could compare with the events of the evening of 12th August.

During the early weeks after the evacuation from Dunkirk the German air force (Luftwaffe) were mainly engaged in supporting the conquest of France, then in re-grouping and consolidation in airfields in northern France in preparation for the projected attack on Britain. July and early August saw the main thrust of the Luftwaffe in attacks on shipping in the Channel and on the Channel ports, such as Dover and Folkestone. Thereafter the plan of the German high command was to destroy the British air force, preparatory to a seaborne invasion across the Channel in mid-September. The start of the first part of this plan, Adlertag (Eagle day), was set for 10th August but postponed on account of weather conditions to Tuesday 13th August. The air attacks which did take place on the mainland of Britain in the days leading up to Adlertag were preliminary strikes by relatively few aircraft.

Nevertheless, Monday 12th August saw some important raids from the German point of view. In the morning there were concerted attacks on British radar stations along the coast between the Thames estuary and Portland, including Dover and also Dunkirk some miles inland north west of Canterbury. In the afternoon there were severe attacks on the forward RAF fighter airfields at Manston, Hawkinge and Lymne.

Whether Bekesbourne was a deliberately chosen target for the evening raid or whether, as local opinion had it, it was an opportunistic target by raiders turned back by the RAF from their original choice, cannot be decided now. Certainly it might not have been known to the Germans that the aerodrome had been abandoned, and the railway line could be regarded

as a strategic target, being a supply route to the coastal districts and the forward airfields. The map, published by the Kentish Gazette in December 1944, which shows the distribution of enemy bombs over the whole of the Bridge Blean district during the course of the war, suggests that the railway line through Bekesbourne was targeted.

At all events the facts of the raid are soon spelt out in the words recorded by the Vicar as follows:

"On Monday August 12th at circa 5.30 pm the village was raided by 27 Dorniers. Mr Baker's horseman Mr Austen was killed and four navvies working at Hoad. Mrs Stacey's and Miss Prett's houses were blown up and that of Mr Adams was damaged. A number of windows were broken. Mr Baker lost a horse, a cow and 29 sheep. Mr Price lost a number of fowls. It was reported that over 400 bombs were dropped. An attempt was made to machine gun the down train."

Mr Austen had been filling a water-cart at Chalkpit Farm. He had harnessed the horse to it and was going up Chalkpit Hill to the fields opposite the aerodrome to leave water for Mr Baker's sheep; there was no piped supply to the fields in those days. Mr Baker's farm was worked entirely by horses before the war. Mr Austen and the horse were both killed. He is commemorated on the war memorial tablet in St Peter's Church as "Killed by enemy action". The "navvies" were a group of workmen who had taken refuge under the bridge at Cowhouse Lane¹⁵; the blast from a high explosive bomb blew them from their shelter and they were killed. The three houses were a row on the Bekesbourne side of the Street in Patrixbourne village.

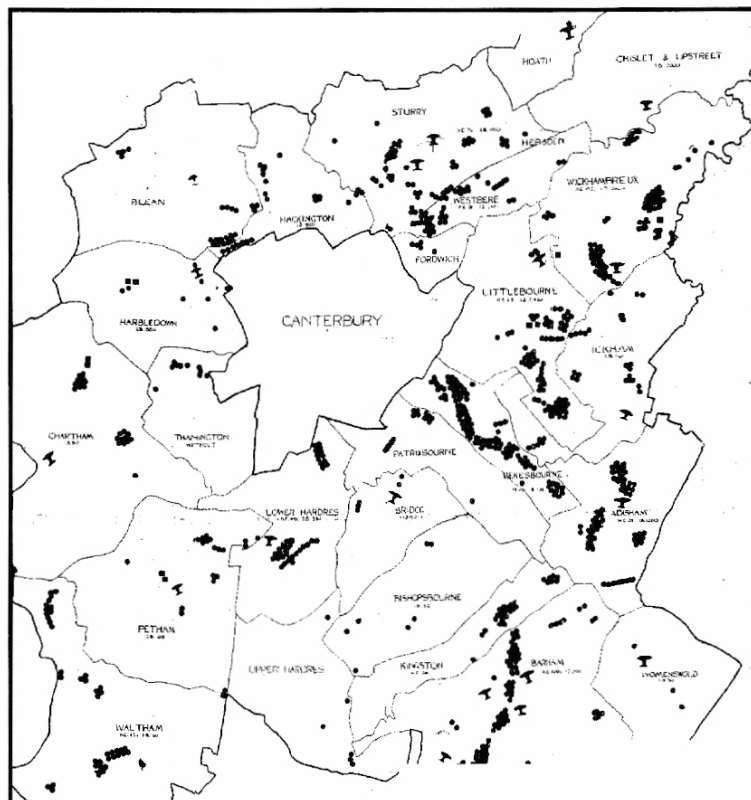
At the Prince of Wales tea had just been laid on the table when the raid began. Having seen his wife and one daughter safely into the cellar, Mr Measday put on his steel helmet – he was an air raid warden – and went to watch from the doorway of the pub. He was expecting his younger daughter back from Canterbury by the next train and was anxious about her. She was indeed on the train which the raiders attacked. During the war every railway carriage had a notice of what to do in the event of an air raid: "Close all doors and windows and pull down the blinds as a protection against flying

glass. If danger is imminent lie on the floor". The passengers, including Miss Measday, took the advice and emerged unscathed. The guard was not so lucky and was hit. Back at the pub windows were broken and the kitchen ceiling came down, spoiling the family's tea.

One man was working in the orchards of Little Barton Farm quite close to Canterbury when the air raid took place. He himself took refuge among the apple boxes until it was safe to get up. Then he ran as fast as he could back to the village. When he got there, he found the Street already cordoned off and was stopped from going further. Shouting that he lived there and that he had to get to his wife and two small daughters at their home in Vine Cottage, he pushed his way past and ran home, noticing the damage to the three cottages as he went past. Fortunately his family were unharmed. In the row of three houses destroyed or severely damaged no one, fortunately, was killed. Miss Prett, retired schoolteacher at Bekesbourne school, had sensibly taken refuge under her dining table.

The raid made the first item of an article in that week's *Kentish Gazette*, under the headline "Mass Raids by Germans", "Sporadic Bombing", "Many Planes Shot Down". Bekesbourne is not mentioned by name – that would

Distribution of enemy bombing during the war in the Bridge-Blean Rural District, published by the *Kentish Gazette* in December 1944



have been to give information to the enemy – but the story is recognisably of the same event: "In one country district on Monday afternoon over 200 bombs, including incendiaries, were dropped by raiders. Unfortunately this attack resulted in seven deaths and two people slightly injured. The material damage was confined to the demolition of three cottages, in which nobody was hurt. A horse, a cow and a number of sheep were also killed and an empty bus, parked under a tree, was machine-gunned. One man was blown against a bridge as he was running for cover. Another was blown from a railway bank to the bank on the other side. Considering the intensity of the bombing, casualties were extraordinarily low."

After that nothing so dramatic happened in Bekesbourne while the Battle of Britain continued during that long hot summer of 1940. Villagers became used to the up-down wail of the air raid sirens, a noise which still sends a slight shiver down the backs of those who lived through the war. Aerial dog fights between the Messerschmitt 109E fighters of the Luftwaffe and the Spitfires and Hurricanes of the RAF became a regular spectacle, with the accompanying cackling rattle of machine gun fire, the roar of aero engines in the sky, and the occasional scream of a plane diving out of control followed by a crash.

A few tales are still told. There was a point on the road between Patix-bourne and Bridge which was the half-way mark. If the sirens went when the children were on their way to school and they had reached this point, then they had to go on. If they had not got so far, they could turn back home-wards. One can just imagine the dawdling on the first half, followed by scampering on the second to avoid being late. But on one occasion a mother taking her children to school had to push them into the bed of the Nail-bourne alongside to prevent them being shot up by an aircraft machine-gunning the road.

On another occasion a farm worker, who at that time lived in Shepherdswell and worked on a farm there, was ploughing with a team of horses above Lydden, when there was a raid. His chief concern was that the horses should not be injured by falling shrapnel. On another occasion he watched a single raider pick off the barrage balloons above Dover and get away unscathed.

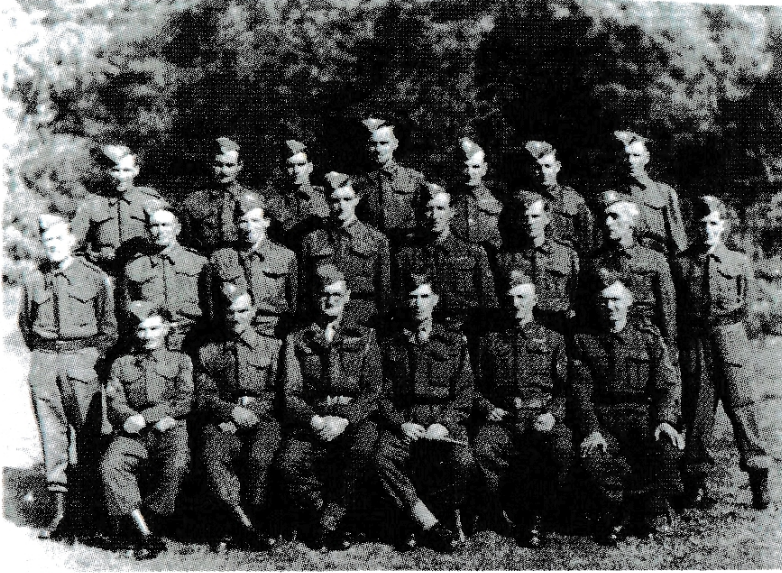
7. The Home Guard

These days the Home Guard seems vaguely comical, groups of old men and boys playing at soldiers; a view derived, perhaps, from the TV series Dad's Army, or from such hazy recollections as the present writer's of his father's Home Guard company vainly searching the Welsh hills for phantom parachutists which were no more than the fevered product of an overactive, if patriotic, imagination.

In May 1940, however, the situation was not comical at all. Britain was faced with the real prospect of defeat in France. There was the clear possibility, if not probability, of the loss of virtually all the trained men of the British Expeditionary Force, killed, wounded or taken prisoners of war. Defeat would, surely, be rapidly followed by enemy invasion of the British Isles. Much of the rest of the regular army was deployed in other areas, India and the Middle East for example. Reinforcements from Australia had not yet arrived. The War Cabinet in London had to take what steps it could to secure the defence of the homeland¹⁶.

One such was to raise a force of Local Defence Volunteers (LDVs). This had first been suggested in the Cabinet on 13th May by Anthony Eden, then Secretary of State for War. The following day the Chief Constable of Kent received a telephone call to the effect that Mr Eden would broadcast to the nation a call for volunteers to report to their local police stations to be enrolled in the LDVs¹⁷. The new force would have as its main task the combatting of paratroop landings inland behind the main lines of defence. It would be armed with whatever weapons came to hand until regular supplies could be made available. The response was immediate, enthusiastic, and in almost overwhelming numbers.

Bekesbourne was no exception and provided a platoon, which, with platoons from the neighbouring villages of Bridge and Adisham, formed D Company of the 7th Battalion of the Kent Home Guard. The men were mostly



The Bokesbourne Home guard Platoon

farm workers in the prime of life, tough and used to hard work outdoors in all weathers, who were in a reserved occupation not liable to call up for the regular services . As with most units, they started in civilian clothes with the LDV armband until uniforms could be provided, and drilled with broomsticks and a few shotguns until enough rifles became available. The name

Local Defence Volunteers was changed to Home Guard at the Prime Minister's request in August 1940. Their headquarters was the Village Hut and their regular duty was to mount guard at the road block under the railway bridge on Station Road near to the Hut during the night from 7 pm onwards. Six men formed the guard by rotation daily with two standing guard outside at any one time. ¹⁸

The road block mentioned seems to have been only one of the defensive works constructed in Bokesbourne at the time. Others include trenches dug



The Railway Bridge

the length of the field between the railway and Bokesbourne Hill and elsewhere; the brick and concrete pillbox which still survives years later on the open downland behind Downside; "dragons teeth" concrete anti-tank traps sown on the Garrington side of the railway across the bridge at the end of Aerodrome Road, of which a hundred or so still nestle

forlornly above the railway, and others behind Springfield at the other end of the parish; and a road block in the "long arch" tunnel. It looks very much as if the railway embankment across the valley, reinforced at crossing points and where embankment meets cutting with trenches, dragons teeth and road blocks, was intended to serve as a line of defence against an invading force coming up the Little Stour valley. Whether the Home Guard would have manned it for real one cannot say; for of course it never happened.

In addition to their regular patrol duties the Home Guard took part in training exercises. Those still recalled include a scheme to capture the Margate waterworks tower in the Adisham woods which involved crossing the open land from the pillbox to the old mill at the double and a night exercise in Bifrons Park to the annoyance of the regular troops camped there. They were also called on to guard planes shot down or force-landed in the district. On one occasion some Home Guard members had got there first to guard a plane up near Highland Court above Bridge. Along came a squad of soldiers who told the HG, in no uncertain terms, to b..... off. The HG complained to their officer who took the matter up with the military.....and received an apology!

The threat of immediate invasion receded in late September 1940, but there remained over the next two years or so continued anxiety about the possibility of airborne or seaborne invasion and the Home Guard continued to be seen as an essential force relieving the army of some necessary home-defence functions. So the Home Guard continued to serve, getting better equipment and becoming better trained in the following years. It continued to wait for some genuine action but was never called on to act.

Towards the end of 1944, with the successes of the campaign in France after the D-day landings in June of that year and the cessation of any threat that the enemy might invade, the decision was taken to stand down the Home Guard. The 7th Battalion of the Kent Home Guard had its farewell parade at Bridge on Sunday 3rd December 1944, reported at length in the Kentish Gazette the following Friday. D Company, consisting of the Adisham,

Bekesbourne and Bridge Platoons, were under their commanders Major G H Parnell and Captain C Carte.

They formed up in Bourne Park and marched to Bridge recreation ground past the school where Lt. Col. O H Maxted, the commanding officer, took the salute. He was accompanied by a number of military officers, including Major-General Delano Osborne of the Old Palace, Bekesbourne, and a number of civilians representing local authorities, including Sir John Prestige of the Bridge Blean RDC. There followed a religious service conducted by the chaplain and a farewell speech of thanks by Col. Maxted. And so the story of the Bekesbourne Home Guard Platoon ended.

We cannot leave the Home Guard without mentioning another organisation which would have formed a Resistance movement in the event of an invasion and occupation of the country. The resistance cells which were set up were known as Auxiliary Units¹⁹. Their Members were given ranks in the Home Guard; but, whereas the Home Guard was publicised and its members known, the very existence of the Auxiliary Units was a closely kept secret, not even the wives of members being told in many cases. The Units were trained in "cloak and dagger" exercises, how to blow up bridges and carry out acts of sabotage against an occupying power. In each area there was an army officer, known as the Intelligence Officer (IO), who was seconded for the purpose and whose job it was to set up and manage the Units. The first Intelligence Officer in East Kent was Captain Peter Fleming, the well-known travel writer and brother of Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels. The first Units in Kent were set up in the summer of 1940. The IO would seek out reliable leaders, many of them farmers, who would in turn recruit five or six other men to form the Unit. There were several Units along the Nailbourne/Little Stour valley including one based on Woolton Farm, Bekesbourne, and headed by Mr John Mount. These Units were also stood down in the autumn of 1944.

8. The War Continues

a. Bombs and Air Raids

With the autumn of 1940 came the end of the battle of Britain with success for the RAF. The Luftwaffe changed tactics from mainly daylight raids to night raids on cities and urban areas. In Bekesbourne the drone and throb of massed bombers passing overhead and the beams of searchlights criss-crossing the night skies must have become familiar.

The major air raids on Canterbury in 1942 were noted by the Vicar.

"On June 1st between midnight and 1 a.m. Canterbury was bombed by about 25 raiders. Many H.E. and incendiary bombs were dropped and the sky was red with fire. Great damage to property in the High Street and elsewhere was done but casualties were comparatively few. On June 2nd 4 bombs were dropped at Renville. On June 3rd Canterbury was again extensively raided as was also the case on Sunday June 7th at about 1 a.m. Bombs were also scattered in the country areas. Some damage to property reported and slight casualties."

It was the first of these which destroyed much of Canterbury's ancient city centre.

Later the same year the Vicar wrote:

"On All Hallows E'en [31 October 1942] Canterbury was attacked by 50 Focke-Wulf aircraft. About 30 of these passed low over the Vicarage and the Old Palace at about 5 p.m.. Mr Baker's milking shed was machine-gunned. Casualties and damage at Canterbury. 9 raiders brought down. Bomber raids at 8 p.m. and 1 a.m. Four brought down. 7 incendiaries dropped at Patricxbourne."

In June 1943 night raids were noted and further raids in February 1944. In June 1944 the new menace of Flying Bombs aimed at London started. Only

one fell in the Bekesbourne area. "On Tuesday flying Bomb at Hode", the vicar commented. These bombs contained something like a ton of explosive. One resident of Bekesbourne remembers the devastation of more than an acre of orchard caused by the one which fell on Hode farm.

b. The Military.

Bifrons Park and the land belonging to Sondes House on the other side of Bifrons Hill were occupied by army units. So too was the aerodrome. At one time there were Canadian troops at the aerodrome and a detachment of French Canadians at Bifrons. Mr Measday at the Prince of Wales found it prudent to segregate them in different bars. For some reason closing time at the Unicorn was later than at the Prince of Wales and soldiers would move from one to the other for the last orders. On the whole this was a profitable time for pub landlords if for no-one else.

c. The School

The School Managers continued to meet at intervals during the war and discussed the use of the building, the annual accounts and war damage repairs.

In December 1940 they received a request from the Soldiers Rest Room Committee to use the school. The managers consulted Miss Allen, the former head teacher who was still living on the premises, and she, very naturally, raised objections. So the managers referred the matter back, suggesting the committee look again at the Village Hut. A month later the committee re-applied: "The Hut is undesirable for the purpose". The managers granted the application. No-one now seems to remember the school being used for this purpose nor what a rest room amounted to. The only hint is that, 18 months later in September 1942, Mrs Ramsay told the managers that "the canteen had a balance of about £40". The possibility is that the ladies of the village organised a canteen selling tea, sandwiches and cigarettes for troops camped around the village, opening, perhaps, a couple of evenings a week²⁰.

In September 1942 it was reported to the managers that the Village Hut was no longer available for meetings and social functions. Maybe it had been damaged in the air raids or, more likely perhaps, it was in constant use as the headquarters of both the Home Guard and the ARP. The managers agreed to the school being used for these purposes and set a scale of charges as follows:

Whist drives, concerts, weddings	10 shillings
Women's Institute and similar meetings	2 shillings
Committee meetings	1 shilling

to which would be added ninepence an hour for cleaning and one shilling for a fire, later increased to one shilling and sixpence because of an increase in the cost of fuel.

In December 1942 it was agreed to use a room in the school for a first-aid post as "the Vicarage was proving somewhat inconvenient". And in the same month permission was granted for the school to be used for choir practice, at one shilling a week to be charged to the Parochial Church Council. The 1942 accounts show the school being used for cooking classes (hire charge 10 shillings in all) and by Mrs Mount for a nursery meeting, as well as by the Women's Institute.

November 1943 saw a discussion on war damage repairs. Some had already been done temporarily but more were needed – to the roof, windows, window frames, door frames and ceilings. The managers left it to the KEC to finalise.

d. Other things

At church the Vicar continued to take the usual services: Holy Communion at 8 a.m., Mattins at 11 a.m. and evensong at 6.30 p.m. in summer and 3.30 p.m. in winter. He continued to note air raids and comment on the weather. He noted days of national prayer on which there were sometimes

church parades; e.g. on 23rd March 1941, "Parade of RA, Home Guard, Police", or 17th September 1941 "Parade of Troops". On 3rd September 1942, the third anniversary of the start of the war, Mattins was replaced by a service broadcast from St Paul's Cathedral in London.

In June 1940, as a result of a meeting held at the Bridge Blean RDC offices, the Parish Council invited the local organiser of the National Savings Movement to address a parish meeting with a view to setting up a National Savings Group in the village. What transpired is not recorded, but it is known that Albert Rennell's daughter did run a group from the Unicorn. The Council continued to meet about twice a year dealing with its usual business. It continued to be anxious about the pressure of water at Bekesbourne Hill; a letter from the Margate waterworks, which evidently said pressure to the aerodrome was to be increased, prompted a reply asking if this would increase pressure to the Hill. They at last obtained a satisfactory response, so the clerk reported in December. Also they pursued highways problems: the dangerous corner by Sondes House, which was left to the chairman to look into, and painting CAUTION on the road at the bottom and half way up the Hill. Both problems were no doubt caused by the increase in military traffic.



The leader of a savings group would sell members a weekly savings stamp for 6d or 1/-.. These could be exchanged for savings certificates in multiples of 15/- or deposited in a Post Office Savings Bank Account. The examples pictured above were issued to the author after the war in the 1950s

9. Celebration

Victory in Europe was won at the start of May 1945. The official victory day, VE day, was 8th May 1945. Celebrations were held in towns and villages up and down the country. In Bekesbourne a service of thanksgiving was held in the church at 7 pm. and was followed by a village party. It was all reported in the Kentish Gazette as follows:

"BEKESBOURNE VICTORY CELEBRATIONS

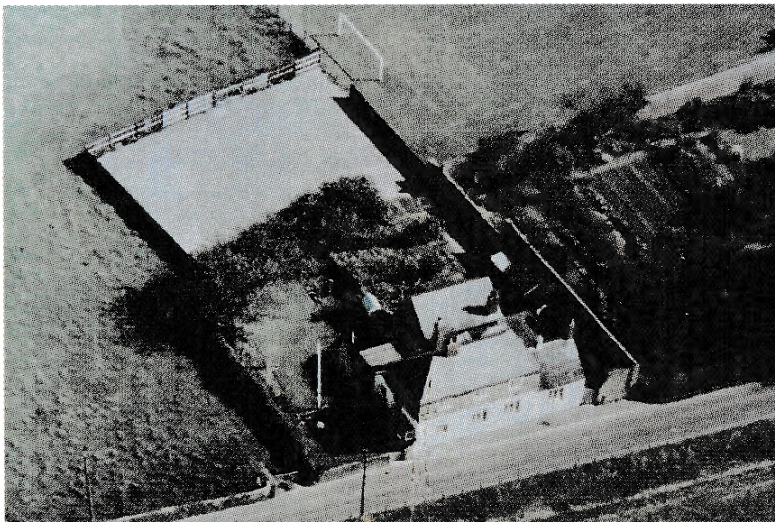
The village celebrated VE-Day in a worthy manner. A service at the Church of St. Peter in the evening was conducted by the Rev. A. Lamplugh. A huge bonfire had been built near the Adisham Road surmounted by the effigies of Hitler "Musso" & Co. This was lit at 10 p.m. and the crowd watched the "victims" perish. Sports and teas for the children had been arranged for the next afternoon by an energetic Committee and were opened by Mrs Ramsay who gave an excellent address to the children. At tea about 100 children sat down in the Village Hut, decorated by a band of willing helpers, to a spread that taxed the gastronomic limits of the children to the utmost. Music was provided by two members of the local Military Forces. Sports were resumed and concluded between local teams of men and women. The day ended with singing and dancing in the Village Hut. There is no doubt that the children will not forget VE-Day for a long time and the Committee are to be congratulated on their arrangements."

VJ-day seems to have passed the village by.

10. Clearing up

Villagers began to agitate about post-war plans as early as December 1943. Now it was the Women's Institute who took the lead, demonstrating the first signs of feminism in the village. They wrote to the Parish Council requesting them to make representations to the RDC asking them to set up sub-committees for housing and other post-war plans and to "allow the women of the Parishes to be represented on those sub-committees". The Parish Council instructed its clerk to write in these terms and got the reply that "in any post-war plans the women of the District would be considered".

In October 1944 there were complaints about the continued closure of the school. Again the Parish Council took the matter up with the KEC, asking for the school to be re-opened forthwith. A reply was read out at the following meeting in April 1945. This cannot have been very satisfactory as the school managers did not begin discussing the re-opening until August. Then there were repairs to be carried out, following discussions with the KEC architect and the Church authorities. In October the Chairman was able to report that "he had drafted a letter stating the case for the re-opening of the school as soon as possible which had been forwarded to the KEC with a large number of parents' signatures. A copy of a favourable reply was in his possession".



The school in 1964 after post-war improvements

Meanwhile the freehold of the school had come on the market. The land had been leased to the managers by George Bowdler Gipps of Howletts in 1905. The term of the lease was 80 years and the rental £1 a year. However the freehold had been sold by Mr Gipps in 1910 along with other land. Now the managers

were able to buy it for £30 and the completion of the purchase was reported to a meeting in February 1945.

The re-opening eventually took place in 1946. But it was not without yet further problem. Miss Allen, the pre-war head teacher, had by now retired and the managers sought a successor. They offered the post to one of the candidates, but she turned it down because the standard of the accommodation offered her was inadequate. Several meetings in 1946 were taken up with discussion of improvements and how they were to be paid for. Of particular concern was the installation of a bathroom in the head teacher's accommodation.



The class of 1947-48 with Miss Gandy, Headteacher, on the right, and Miss Driver, Assistant, on the left.

Then there was the clearing up of military defence works. The Parish Council sent a list to the RDC at their request in November 1945:

Trenches on Mr Baker's farm

Wire and slit trenches near railway bridge

Dug out and slit trenches on the path on Station Road near the Hut.

Road blocks under Long Arch leading to Garrington

Pill box near Shepherds Close Road and one near Seaview Bungalow

Anti-tank traps bordering railway N.W. of old Sanatorium²¹.

Concrete blocks on field belonging to Cobham Court.

The clearing up was never completed; "dragons' teeth" and the pillbox survive 70 years on.

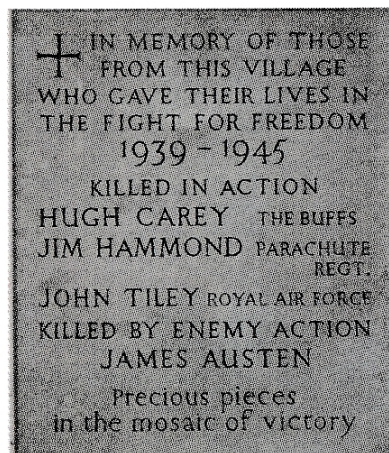


The Pillbox



Dragons' Teeth below Aerodrome Road

Finally, in the spring of 1946, a new Parish Council was elected. A letter of appreciation was sent to Mr Baker, the retiring chairman, "for his services as Chairman of the Parish Council for a lengthy period, for his work as Rural District Councillor, and for his great interest in the various Parochial activities". At long last the war was truly over and a new start was being made in the village.



World War II Memorial in
St. Peter's Church,
Bekesbourne

Notes.

¹ See for example: Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, 3rd Ed Cassell 1950 p363

² The register is held in the Canterbury Cathedral Library.

³ References to the Parish Council are to the Council's *Minute Book* 1894 - 1949.

⁴ Kelly's *Directory of Canterbury and District, 1940*

⁵ See *Archaeologia Cantiana*, Vol. XCVI, 1980, pp27 - 57.

⁶ Hasted *History of Kent* 2nd Edition 1800 Vol IX p270

⁷ Kent County Council (W L Platts, Clerk), *Kent The County Administration in War*, Maidstone, Dec 1946 p11.

⁸ Parish Council Minutes 15th March 1937.

⁹ These were reported in the *Kentish Gazette*

¹⁰ R J Brooks: *Kent Airfields Remembered*, Countryside Books. See also *Flight*, May 6 1932, p394

¹¹ Kent County Council op.cit. p43

¹² Recorded in the *Kentish Gazette* for 9th September 1939

¹³ A government initiative in the summer of 1939 required county councils to establish "feeding stations" or Rest Centres for people made homeless by enemy action in large urban areas. Kent complied through its Public Assistance Department. The initiative was gradually enlarged to cover provision of shelter as well as food and the areas to include rural as well as urban districts. The organisation was devolved through the districts and coordinated with the ARP organisation. See Kent County Council op. cit. p119 ff.

¹⁴ See, for example:

Richard Hough and Denis Richards, *The Battle of Britain*, Hodder & Stoughton 1989
Caius Bekker, *The Luftwaffe War Diaries*, 1964 (published in translation, Corgi Books, 1969)

¹⁵ I am indebted to Jill Thomas for the information that the four workmen were William Edwards, Arthur Fabb, Frederick King and Donald Young whose deaths are recorded in the Margate Civilian Roll of Honour, which states that they were engaged in "defence construction work". GDM

¹⁶ See Churchill, *op.cit.* Vol II pp. 48-9

¹⁷ K R Gulvin *Kent Home Guard* North Kent Books 1980 p.7.

¹⁸ Members of the platoon have been identified as follows:

Back row: ???, Peter Griggs, E G White, George Griggs, Jack Cage, H Clarke, Nobby Clarke;
Middle row: Fairbrass, Farbrace, Jack Payne, Norman Carpenter, ???, Albert Coleman,
Jack Cassell, ???

Front row: Herbert Kingsford, Harry Goodwin, Pelham, Davies, Barnes, Harry Collard

¹⁹ David Lampe *The Last Ditch*, Cassell 1968, tells the story of the Auxiliary Patrols. He does not refer to the Unit based at Woolton Farm but gives references to Wickhambreaux (Mr J F Montgomery), Ash, Wootton, and elsewhere.

²⁰ The present writer's mother organised just such a canteen for troops camped in the grounds of the 'big house', in the church hall of a village on the Welsh border.

²¹ The Dragons' Teeth below Aerodrome Road were in Ickham parish and so not the concern of Bekesbourne Parish Council

David Millyard was born in 1931 at New Radnor where his father was a Land Agent managing a number of estates on both sides of the Welsh border. He was educated at Lancing and University College, Oxford. From 1963 to 1990 he was a senior administrator at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He has lived in Bekesbourne since 1978.

