

Blackmansbury, Braems and Bridge Place

The Parish of Bridge in early times had within it two manors: the first, Bereacre, very much the less important, has left no big house and had vanished before the mid-seventeenth century but appears to have occupied the northern part of the parish. It survives in two names: that of the triangular field at the junction of the roads to Pett Bottom and Whitehill, which on the tithe commutation map of 1838 is called Barakers, and possibly also in the former name of the Bargrave family, who are first recorded as Bargar, one of whom John, built the first house called Bifrons in Patrixbourne in 1607-11 but whose father Robert Bargar (died January 4 1600/01) was a yeoman tanner of Bridge. The family, though, is also said to have come from Woodnesborough.

The second, and far more significant manor was that of Blackmansbury (Blackemannesbyrie, 1253/4), 62 acres and three roods in extent in 1384, and until the suppression of the monasteries the property of the Abbey of St Augustine. It is notable that although the village of Bridge is not mentioned in Domesday, as the parish was regarded then, and for long after, as a subsidiary part of Patricksbourne, the name is attached to a much larger administrative division of Kent, the Hundred of Bridge. This suggests that the Hundred Court sat in or near Bridge. The most obvious location for this was likely to have been in the building described by Hasted as the 'Court Lodge' which was demolished to make way for Bridge Place. ①

Symonson's map of Kent of 1596 clearly shows a building on this site lying astride the Nailbourne. It is obvious that the stream at this point today does not lie in its natural bed, and there is evidence in Church Meadow (most noticeable when the stream is in flood) of a former stream bed on a different alignment. One of the two branches into which it is now artificially divided flows around Bridge Place to enclose its former gardens (the outline of which may be discerned from aerial photographs). The other has been more obviously canalised and flows through the grounds within three or four yards of the house. This seems possibly to be the remains of a mill-leat, for in 1271 Ralph de Brigg, clerk paid 20s for use of '4 acres of land and the moiety of a mill in Brigg'. Although windmills had been known for eighty years in England at this time, it is probable that this was a water-mill, and no other site within the parish is more appropriate (in Domesday, Patrixbourne as a whole is credited with four mills). ②

Although nominally the property of St Augustine's, as mentioned above, Blackmansbury was of course let to tenants until the Abbey was suppressed in 1538/9. Of these, the family of Garwinton is recorded, the last of whom was Thomas Garwinton who died c. 1411. Blackmansbury then passed by marriage to the Hauts of Hautbourn and later by the same means to the Isaaks. In 1544 after the dissolution it was granted by the king to Henry Laurence, who held a court there in the same year, establishing his manorial rights. At this time the Blackmansbury estate included 'Honpit' (or houndpit) i.e. Pett: where the manorial dogs were housed?. ③

The manor remained with that family until 1576 when John Laurence sold it to William Partheriche. By the late 16th century the mill had perhaps gone (to be replaced by a windmill on Bridgedown) though the building shown on Symonson's map might suggest its recent presence. The immediate vicinity of a supply of good water however was very convenient for ④

the manor house erected by William Partheriche, probably soon after he purchased the estate. Excavations in 1964/5 of the semi-basement of Bridge Place (originally used as a kitchen) revealed a number of centrally placed hexagonal brick pillars, cemented over and with the brick outline redrawn, still standing to a height of three or four feet, which probably supported a vaulted ceiling in Partheriche's house. These were unfortunately demolished in the early 1970's to make way for the dance floor of the Country Club. Some of the shaped bricks were later inserted in a wall in the garden, facing the stream. (8)

William Partheriche was Surveyor of the Ordnance Office under Elizabeth I, and its second principal officer, an important position at a time when there was no other permanent military establishment. The Office was responsible for "the ordering, purchase, storage, maintenance, issue, recovery, and repair of all munitions of war both by land and sea" (*GE Aylmer: The King's Servants*, 1961). In 1582 he was a member of a commission appointed by the Queen to carry out extensive work on Dover Harbour, which improved its facilities very considerably, and which of course also improved the mercantile life of the town. William died in 1598. His will makes no mention of Bridge or Blackmansbury, and refers only to 'Higham Close' or 'Higham Garden' as bequeathed to his son, but this is because his third wife (Affra Morton) continued to live at Bridge, even though in 1607 she was remarried to Sir Anthony St Leger, Master of the Rolls in Ireland. William was buried in his chapel in Bridge church. His son Edward Partheriche did not live at Bridge, but moved away, probably to Hollingbourne, the home of his wife's stepfather, Francis Colepeper. He was however eventually buried at Bridge in 1612.

Edward's son, also Edward, and later knighted, married Catherine Throckmorton, a niece of Sir Walter Raleigh, and later, Mary, a daughter of Sir Edward Fagge. He was MP for Sandwich from 1640-48 and is described as 'Adventurer [speculator/investor] in and a candidate for the Directorship of the drainage of the Bedford Level'. He appears to have lived first at Hollingbourne but never at Bridge, so no doubt the old house, left empty after his grandmother's death in the early decades of the century had fallen into some disrepair by the time he sold out in 1638 to Arnold Braems. He later moved to Ely, to be near his interests in the fens.

As a son of a merchant of Dover who had prospered mightily by the harbour works in which William Partheriche had been involved, Arnold Braems no doubt came to know of the old property languishing unwanted in Bridge, and as a canny businessman made Sir Edward Partheriche an offer it was not worth refusing.

So, Partheriche's Court Lodge in its turn was replaced by the house whose remains are still standing. When first erected, Bridge Place was the largest house in East Kent, second only to Chilham Castle and with its construction the name of Blackmansbury passed more or less into history. The house was rectangular, with a front of nine bays and a projecting porch with a balcony, seven bays at the sides. The gardens at the rear were lavishly landscaped. The centre was occupied by a courtyard serving as a light well. The front wing (facing what is now Bourne Park Road) incorporated the semi-basement of the old house, which extended nearly halfway under the two wings at the side. Further basement building towards the Nailbourne was impeded by the height of the water-table on that side. Four of the bays of Braems' original

front remain, with five of the east wing. The house is of red bricks, probably made in the adjacent field where remains of the old brickfield are still discernible (and which has been no doubt the source of material for other houses in Bridge), although it is also suggested that they were imported into Sandwich from the Netherlands as their size is alleged to be slightly smaller than English bricks of the same period, being two inches shorter. However, many are, by measurement, longer. On the outer face the bricks are laid (says Malcolm Pinhorn) entirely as stretchers (i.e. lengthways), and are worked into pilasters and string courses to form an ornamental and decorative façade. Even the window frames were originally of brick and then plastered over to simulate stone mullions and transoms. The windows between ground and first floor are separated by a full entablature. Above is a deep projecting cornice under a hipped roof. There were originally five chimney stacks, serving 24 hearths, one at each corner and one in the middle of the front wing. In the inventory of Sir Arnold's property drawn up at his death there are in fact 27 rooms listed, including a 'Billiatt Roome', in addition to the kitchen and lesser offices. The front porch was of stone topped with a balcony, and a wide terrace extended along the whole front. On the west wing there was an open verandah and covered terrace giving on to the water garden at the side which was surrounded by a wall, the lower courses of which still survive beside the stream. Thomas Philipot, writing in 1659 says: "Mr Arnold Brame of Dover. . . upon the foundation of the ancient fabrick hath erected that magnificent pile which obliges the eyes of the passenger, both to admiration and delight, and which like a Phoenix seems to have arose more glorious out of the ruins." Internally only the secondary staircase, one wooden cornice, two or perhaps three fireplaces, some panelling and some doors survive. The cornice is of carved wood (probably cut down from a larger room) which shows a number of carved heads about four or five inches in height, one with a Flemish hat, one with a wig – portraits of Sir Arnold perhaps? – and others, more grotesquely stylised. Until the fire at the house in 1971 there was another cornice depicting leaves and bunches of fruit. The fireplaces are of Bethersden marble. Quite apart from the subsequent demolition of some two-thirds of the building, the remains have undergone considerable alteration, with the insertion of some wooden window frames at various periods – Regency, Victorian and Modern - and the addition of smaller extensions to the building.

The English branch of the Braems family probably came to Kent from Brabant in the mid-16th century as the result of Spanish political and religious policy. Jasper Braems came to England in the time of Queen Mary and settled at Sandwich, one of a large community of Flemish refugees. By the early 1570's however, perhaps foreseeing the developments which were about to take place (to the detriment of Sandwich) he had moved to Dover, where his son Charles Braems (died c.1593) was already a merchant. Charles' son, also Charles (died 1611), merchant and fishing entrepreneur increased the family prosperity, acquiring 'a quay, wharves, and "herring houses" along Dover harbour front. In turn his son Jacob Braems eventually acquired most of the land along the harbour wall and by virtue of his pre-eminent mercantile position Jacob became Customer (ie collector of customs) of Dover. A street at the base of the harbour had even become known as 'Braems, his street'. His 'Old Buildings', originally two dwellings, and subsequently occupied by Arnold Braems and later also his son Walter, had by the 19th century become ruinous, and were destroyed by fire in 1808, but not before, in 1806, the New Custom House had been erected.) Arnold (and Walter) also acquired a grant of the beach on the opposite side of the new basin, which had been created in the later years of the 16th century, on which he erected a square pile of buildings for store-houses.

During the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) an international entrepôt developed at Dover as a result of attempts to exploit English neutrality by offering the convenience and safety of using neutral English shipping. Goods were to be brought to Dover, to be re-exported in (neutral) English ships. Naturally, in the process, customs duties were levied. As part of this process a silver entrepôt was established in 1620, and by 1632, with a diplomatic accord between England and Spain, 'it provided that English vessels freighting Spanish silver should always stop at Dover in order to unload two-thirds of their cargoes for coinage in London. The silver removed from the ships was transported "over the Dover Road [through Bridge] to the Tower Mint".' Reductions in the rate of tax resulted in higher income: 'The Farmers saw their revenue from commodity re-exports increase from £11,000 in 1634 to over £18,000 in 1636 and to £23,000 in 1638' [A. Kepler, *Arch Cant* 95]. As Jacob Braems' younger brother, a merchant in his own right and also one of the farmers of Customs, Arnold was closely involved. As he himself later admitted: 'when we had peace with Spain [I] paid in the Port of Dover for Customs six thousand and eight thousand pounds a year; and by [my] influence and Credit in foreign parts came through my hands in plate and bullion for many years five, six and eight hundred thousand pounds each year, a great part of which [I] sent to several merchants in London to be coined in the Tower...'. [from *The humble remonstrance*] No wonder that by 1638 he could afford to buy Blackmansbury and to build a vast new mansion there!

Arnold Braems was cultured, a royalist and a bon viveur. Born in October 1602 in Dover he was married three times: first to Joan, daughter of Walter Harflet of Bekesbourne (21 April 1631) who died in 1635, second, to Elizabeth Digges daughter of Sir Dudley Digges, Master of the Rolls, of Chilham (17 August 1636) who died in 1643, 'and was buried [according to Zachariah Cozens] near the handsome tomb in the chancel of Bridge Church under a gravestone' -regrettably the tomb is no more: Its top slab is probably now the one to be found just outside the west door of the church, lacking its brasses. Arnold was married thirdly to Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Palmer Bt of Wingham, who died in 1685. He himself died on 13 November 1681 and was buried at Bridge in the east Chancel 'close to the tomb which he in his life created there in memory of his two deceased ladies' [*Register entry by John Mackallar, vicar*].

He was knighted by Charles II on 27 May 1660 as reward for his efforts in support of the Cause during the civil war, and was MP for Dover in the 1660 parliament, but soon gave up politics in favour of continuing his business career.

On establishing his house, Arnold seems to have entertained very freely – no doubt partly from business acumen and motives, but also because he enjoyed it. He had an interest in art and artists: one frequent guest was Cornelius Janssen (1593-1664) a Flemish painter born in London, who was patronised by James I and his Court, and later by Charles I, and who painted portraits of numerous members of the gentry. One of these, said to be by him and of Robert Bargrave (1584-1649), is still in Bridge Church on the north wall of the chancel. As life became more difficult for those closely connected with Charles I Janssen in 1643 left England for Holland, where he died in 1664.

In the 1670's another such visitor was Adriaen Ocker, to whom we are indebted for the picture of Bridge Place in its proper setting, with subsidiary scenes reminiscent of the experiences of an earlier visitor who came just after the Restoration to stay for a while. This was Willem Schellinks (1627-78), who has left us a vivid portrait both of Braems and of Bridge. In the Journal of his travels in England, 1661-1663, he writes:

"On the 6th [August 1661] we [he is travelling with Jan Maurits (1604-79), founder of the Mauritshuis] were merrily entertained by the younger Sir Arnold Braems [a nephew, son of Jacob, born 1630] with French wine and light refreshments. . . . In the afternoon of the 8th . . . left Dover at 3 o'clock in a carriage, which Sir Arnold Braems had sent to take us to his delightful residence at Bridge, one hour's walk from Canterbury. . . We arrived there at 8 o'clock in the evening to a friendly welcome and were magnificently entertained, and drank quite a few good healths with sack.

On the 9th we played on the bowling green on the hill near Sir Arnold Braem's place.

On the 10th we saw a hart shot with a crossbow in the deerpark of Sir Arnold Braems; everybody, especially the ladies, washed their hands in the warm blood, to get white hands. The hart was immediately gutted and cut up into quarters.

On the 11th a venison pie and other dishes of the hart were on the menu. After the meal I walked to Canterbury and explored the town.

On the 12th we rode in two carriages with Sir Arnold Braems and Mr. Adriaens of London and several ladies to Canterbury and went to the cathedral to hear the canons sing the prayers and looked at the sepulchres or gravestones of kings, bishops, and other notables, some very old and much ravaged by age and war. In the recent troubles between the king and parliament, Oliver Cromwell had here, as elsewhere throughout the country, everything which looked like popery, such as glass, statues, crosses and the like, in and on churches and other public buildings, torn down and broken to pieces.

The 9th [September 1661] . . . took our lodgings .. in the Lily [in Canterbury] . . word was sent to Sir Arnold Braems to let him know we had arrived.

On the 10th September Sir Arnold came. . . we went on to Bridge, where we were sumptuously entertained in his great hall by Sir Arnold Braems with a large company of friends, ladies and gentlemen, and spent the afternoon in making good cheer and other pastimes, and left in the evening at 6 o'clock by coach for Dover [where] we were again merrily entertained by Mr Walter Braems, the son of Sir Arnold Braems.

On the 12th. . . we left in the afternoon for Bridge, and safely arrived in the evening to a friendly welcome. Sir Arnold Braems gave us a room where we both could stay as long as we remained there, in fact we stayed for three months.

This estate of Sir Arnold Braems lies in a valley of outstanding beauty; it contains, in addition to his own fine residence, a large number of rooms, chambers, halls and other good apartments; there is also a large deerpark with many deer and does, woods, a rabbit warren in the hills [which still exists], and very beautiful, well kept pleasure grounds with fruit trees, well watered by a fast flowing, fresh sparkling stream of wonderfully clear sweet water. This splits up into several branches and rivulets, also some fishponds, in which a certain kind of fish called trout is bred, which is very similar to a large carp, and, prepared in the English manner, tastes very delicious. There are also some vineyards round the house and gardens, producing yearly two or three hogshead of wine. There is a dovecot like a chapel, in which are at all times so many young pigeons that throughout the whole summer and longer 12 to 14 dozen can be taken out every week to put into pies or prepared otherwise. His people go out hunting every day and catch a lot of partridges and pheasants, which we had every day on the table, besides a choice of other delicate food, all with the most delicious English sauces; there is an ample supply of drinks, different kinds of wine and perry, which is made from pears. He also has his own brewery, bakery, wine press, hop garden, barns, stables, oxen, cows, sheep, pigs, geese, ducks, corn and fruit, everything that one can desire in such an establishment. And because he is, with all this, so kind and

hospitable, and keeps such a princely table, he has so many visits from noblemen, gentlemen and ladies, so that his table is always surrounded by his own people and outside guests. The church stands not far from his house, and he has the right to nominate a minister of his choice for it. He has planted a fine avenue of lime trees from his house to the church, under which one is protected from rain and sun. His lands and his annual income, which amounts to a considerable sum, had suffered much damage in the war between the king and parliament, but is now all restored to him. As we now had the freedom of the place we went walking and drawing every day in the countryside and in the villages in the neighbourhood. . . .

On the 6th October a general muster of seven or eight companies of the militia [Braems was a Major in the East Kent Militia] was held on the hill above Bishopsbourne, which lies at the bottom of the valley, each company 200 men strong. They were brought on and off, skirmishing in one or two groups, firing spiritedly at each other, commanded by numerous officers on horseback and on foot. They started in the morning, but had to stop it all towards evening because of strong winds and oncoming rain. All the men get a drink allowance to refresh themselves. This muster usually takes place about once a year. Every parish and household has to supply and arm as many men as it is able. . . .”

As further proof of Sir Arnold’s conviviality, and his connections in high places, it may be noted that Samuel Pepys mentions him three times in his diary: on 15 November and 27 December 1660, and 5 October 1661, each time in relation to a drinking party.

Sir Arnold’s relief at the Restoration must have been considerable, for since the beginning of the civil war until then, as a staunch supporter of the Royal cause, he had been put to much expense. This was summarised in *The humble remonstrance of Sir Arnold Braems of his services and sufferings* (PRO SP 23/9) in which he catalogues his expenditures on behalf of the King: so for instance, forbidden by parliament, he sent a ship loaded with 300 tons of rye to Dublin, resulting in its confiscation, together with its returning cargo, and a loss of ‘above £2000’, including 20 guns; in other instances he was, ‘before 1648 several times plundered for refusing commissions from the parliamentary power’; then in 1648 he paid for 40 barrels of gunpowder spent in the service, as the leader of the Dover petitioners to parliament. He later maintained supplies and provisions to the castles in the Downs [Sandown and Walmer] which were holding out; obtained 14 chests of sugar, which were sent to Zeeland in Holland, to be turned into 100 tons of beer, for which he had to pay; lost more than £4000 in a seized ship in Lisbon, and rendered many other services at his own expense.

For all these costs he was now claiming restitution. In spite of Schellink’s belief, it is likely that what he principally received as his reward was his knighthood. This loss of revenue, together with his obvious high level of living, clearly made life difficult for Sir Arnold’s successors, and with his death the glory days of Bridge Place were over.

His son Walter Braems, born 3 October 1633, was, as a high-spirited young man, heavily involved in the Civil War. He is said to have laid a plot to seduce the Governor and betray Dover Castle to Prince Charles (Dover was predominantly on the Parliamentary side). It is practically certain that he and other Kentish gentry were involved in the assassination of Dr Dorislaus in May 1649. Similarly, he was one of a number of Kentish cavaliers concerned in Gerard’s Plot of 1654, leading to the most serious insurrection of the Interregnum, the Penruddock Rising of 1655. He married in 1663 Mary, daughter of Sir John Jacob Kt of Bromley, Middlesex and was promoted Colonel in King Charles II’s army. He became Comptroller of HM Customs at Sandwich, having petitioned the king that he had been ‘at 14

years of age fetched out of his sicke bed by your Majesty's Enemies carried & imprisoned in Dover Castle which hath since esteemed for an honour to crown his fidelity to have been ye youngest prisoner in England for your Majesty's service'.

Walter later became Comptroller of HM Customs at Dover, but under Charles II the opportunity for profit seems to have been more circumscribed than previously, and in 1690 he was obliged to petition the king for six years' arrears of salary: life in the big house was becoming expensive.

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steking Thomas*
When Colonel Walter, father of at least 14 children, but several of whom did not survive childhood, died in September 1692 his family could no longer afford to maintain the house nor, presumably, did they wish to live in it.. His eldest son Jacob (b.1664) was a professional soldier, as was another, Walter (b.1670), who later settled in St Stephens, Canterbury.

In June 1695 the Bridge estate (including the home farm in Bridge street, and Pett farm) was sold to John Taylor (1665-1729), son of Nathaniel Taylor, a Shropshire barrister. John had purchased Bifrons only in the previous year. Preferring to stay at Bifrons, he demolished two-thirds of Bridge Place, and converted the remainder, presumably into a dower house. It is from this time that Bridge Place ceased to be the principal residence of its owner, and reverted for the next 250 years or so to accommodating a long series of (frequently elderly) tenants. Taylor himself died at the age of 64, thirteen years after his wife Olivia. It is unknown who lived at the house between 1695 and 1729, but until 1708, according to the Churchwardens' accounts he was himself liable for the parish rate. It is possible that at least for some years the occupier was John Bowtell DD, vicar of Patricbourne and Bridge, who had succeeded John Mackallar on the latter's death in February 1697/8 and who married Olive, Taylor's eldest daughter. Between 1708 and 1713 no rate was levied on the house. But thereafter, the 'Bridge Place Land' was assessed as the liability of various tenants, while a new figure, Farnham Aldersey, Gent. appears as perhaps the tenant of the house itself. By 1720, Taylor was again assessed in his own right, and this continued until 1726, when again no mention was made of Bridge Place until 1735 when John Philpot jun. was assessed. This tenant farmer remained in possession, John Taylor's eldest son Brook having died in 1731, and ownership having passed to the Rev. Herbert Taylor, until 1742 when tenancy reverted to the family in the person of John Taylor's daughter Mary, born in 1690, who resided there from 1742 until her death in 1771. Here she attended to the upbringing of her niece, the daughter of Brook Taylor, the first secretary of the Royal Society, who had died while she was still under age.

Thereafter, the house was let to John Hardy, probably a relative of the Halletts of Higham, who had just married the daughter of the vicar of Bekesbourne, the Rev. William Bedford. He died in 1778, but the widow Hardy continued there until her death in 1783. She was followed by William Hougham, who later moved to his family home in Longport, now known as Barton Court.

In 1766, at the time of Mary Taylor's occupancy under the ownership of her brother Herbert, who was by now himself vicar of Patricbourne and Bridge (since 1753), the Bridge Place Estate was described as:

All that capital messuage or tenement situate and being the ville of Blackmansbury within the . . . parish of Bridge. . . together with all Houses, Edifices, Buildings, Outhouses, Orchards, Gardens, Courts, Yards, Lands Arable Meadow Pasture and Woodlands. . . containing by estimation 40 acres or

thereabouts. . . sometime in the tenure or occupation of Nicholas Heniker or his assigns [Heniker is nowhere else mentioned] and late in the tenure or occupation of Walter Breames or his assigns with all warrens for coneyes and grounds inclosed for coneyes to the same belonging. . .with the two. . .tenements thereupon theretofore built by William Partherick Esq deceased whereof one of the same tenements is within the said furclosed grounds commonly called Hounds Pitts [Great Pett] and the other is in a close called Whitehill [?Middle Pett] in Bridge near the highway leading to Dover.

William Hougham remained at Bridge until 1791, when the following notice appeared in the Kentish Gazette:

To be LET.

A Mansion House called BRIDGE-PLACE, now in the occupation of William Hougham, Esq; jun. Consisting of an eating parlour, 22 by 16½; a drawing-room, 22 by 17, and a small room. -On the second-floor, good bedrooms; and four garrets, with proper offices for a family; a coach-house with stabling for seven horses, and eleven acres of very fine pasture; two gardens; and a cottage, consisting of a brewhouse, laundry and dairy, with good lodging-rooms over them.

It is situated in the neighbourhood of Barham Downs and three miles from Canterbury.

For particulars enquire of Mr. DILNOT, Patrixbourne.

(Kentish Gazette, March 1st 1791)

Whoever took the property, if any did, did not stay long, for two years later Bridge Place was again advertised, this time with its description subtly enhanced, presumably to encourage enquiry.

BRIDGE PLACE

To be LET.

Either for two or six years, from Michaelmas next

BRIDGE PLACE, three miles from Canterbury, fit for the immediate reception of a family, with twelve acres of meadow land surrounding the house, and two walled gardens well cropt; coach houses for two carriages, and very good stables for seven horses, with other convenient offices for cows, pigs and poultry. - The whole has lately been put into complete order. - The fixtures, and all or any part of the furniture, may be had with the house; and also four excellent cows, pigs, &c. with the coals, wood and hay. - Immediate possession will be given.

N.B. There is a trout-stream runs through the meadows.

For further particulars, and to see the house, apply to the Rev. JOHN FRANCIS, Mint Yard, Canterbury.

(Kentish Gazette, August 27th 1793)

This time the tenancy was taken up by Lady Elizabeth Yates, after the death of her second husband in 1793. Here she stayed until her death in 1808. Her daughter, married to Col. Cholomeley Dering lived nearby at Howletts in Littlebourne. She was followed by the Rev Charles Hughes who became vicar of Patrixbourne and Bridge in February 1813, but who took up residence meanwhile at Bridge when the house became vacant.

In 1829 the whole property of the Taylors, including Bridge Place, which by now was reduced to 'containing by estimation 11 acres or thereabouts', was sold to the first Marquess of Conyngham for £97, 475. Of this, Edward Taylor, grandson of John Taylor, had to contribute £18, 083 19s 8d in settlement of outstanding debts. Under the Marquess's ownership Bridge Place was let to farming families. From 1826 to the 1850's it was occupied by Richard (born 1783) and Sarah (born 1789) Brice. He is described in the Land tax returns as 'yeoman' and in 1849 was vice-chairman of the Board of Guardians of Bridge Union Workhouse. They were still resident there in 1851 (census return), together

with four unmarried daughters (Ann 35, Eliza 33, Ellen 30, Jane 26) and an eight year old grandson (Thomas). Four servants (two men, two women) are also recorded.

In the later 1850's the house was occupied by George Athill, another farmer, whose three children were all baptised at Bridge on 18 August 1857, after their father's death aged 50 in February the same year. One of them, Charles Harold Athill MVO (1853-1922) became Clarenceaux King of Arms in 1919. They did not stay long, however, for in 1861 the census records William Aldwith, aged 32, Curate of Patricbourne and a native of Scotland, together with his wife, an elderly aunt, cook, parlourmaid, housemaid and coachman. He also remained only a few months. In 1862 George Henry Conyngham (1825-1882), Lord Mount Charles and later (1876) third Marquess of Conyngham for reasons as yet unexplained moved in, staying until 1867.

1871 records a retired Major-General, George Briggs, born in 1808, and who seems to have spent most of his military career in India, where both his wife, his daughter and three grandchildren were born. They however kept but three servants – a cook, housemaid, and nurse for the fourth child of a mere two months, born in Bridge. In 1878 the contents of the house were sent for auction, but they were said to be the property of Walter Gipps Esq., who was leaving the neighbourhood.

By 1881 the house had been taken by another military man, the retired Lieutenant-Colonel George Billington, born in 1833, whose last posting was probably in Ireland, where his six year old younger daughter was born. He lived there with his wife, two daughters and four female servants, but again only for a few months, for by 1882 Bridge Place was in the possession of Col. Moyle Billington.

By 1891 a break had been made with military tenancy, and for a few years (1890-98) the house was occupied by a more exotic character, Oscar de Satgé, described as a 54 year old 'Retired Australian "Squatter" and sheep farmer', and a native of Switzerland. He had brought his wife, 20 years younger, and three small children under eight, together with no fewer than seven female servants, all except himself however of British stock. In 1901 the census reveals another change, but equally notable: a disabled gentleman of cosmopolitan experience, St John Butler, aged 47, married to an Englishwoman (Agnes) born in Russia, with four servants, including a footman from Germany and a French maid. The census also happened to catch a visitor from India.

The tradition of providing a home for retired military or widowed persons returned with Mrs Wilson, the mother of the then Bridge medical practitioner Arthur Wilson. She stayed until 1907, to be replaced by Seymour L Harries (1907-12 – an American?), RHB Hammond-Chambers a WWI Naval Lieutenant-Commander (1919) and Julian Hedworth George Byng, General and later Viscount Byng of Vimy, with whom the Duchess of Albany (daughter of Queen Victoria) stayed after opening some official event in Canterbury. At some time in this period the house was also rented by William Howard.

Some greater stability was achieved by Mrs Ethel Penn, who with her daughter, Miss N. Penn tenanted the house from the mid-1920's until her death in 1949. Malcolm Pinhorn records that in the course of her tenancy the wall between the dining room and the entrance staircase collapsed, destroying in its fall one of the three remaining original fireplaces. The number has however recently been restored by the discovery (by Peter Malkin) of another, which had been hidden behind wainscoting. Miss Penn survived until 1952. In 1954 the long ownership by the Marquess Conyngham came to an end when the freehold of Bridge Place, now reduced to 6 acres was bought by the Hon. Mrs Neame. One further tenant (Harold Wyles) is recorded for 1955, but in 1962 Mrs Neame sold to Malcolm Alan Pinhorn, Fellow of the Society of Genealogists and of Phillimore & Co, who undertook archaeological work at the house, and to whom a great deal of the present work is very much indebted. He in turn sold Bridge Place to Peter Malkin in 1967, with whom it has remained until the present (2005), and who established there a Country Club, with bar and dance floor in the semi-basement, and who now, after the closure of

the Club has just opened a restaurant. We may say that the ghost of conviviality, established so long ago with the hospitality extended by Sir Arnold Braems, has once again returned to haunt old Bridge Place.

Principal Sources:

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- 1 Title – Blackmansbury & Bereacre 1
- 2 Bridge Place today – suitably shrouded in obscurity. Note bottom r.h. windows, recently altered to accommodate a new kitchen. On r.h. end a 19th c. addition. A house still evolving.
- 3 Taken in 1960's
- 4 Closeup of details: pillars and string courses all in brick 4
- 5 Elaborate and large overhanging cornice
- 6 Doorway not original
- 7 Window; brick surrounds painted to resemble stonework (though some are now wooden frames) Bars & diamond panes more authentic 7
- 8 So, when built & what is history of the site? Court Lodge of Partherich, but in mediaeval times probably a water mill. Straddles stream. Remains of the court lodge in semi-basement destroyed in the 1970's . This house built in 1638. Symonson 1596 8
- 9 Flint wall all that remains of the old house & grounds
- 10 Clearly shows where the house has been cut off: beginning of gradual decline. 17th c wwere the glory days
- 11 Original front aspect. Regular window frontage of 2 floors and a semibasement. House on slight mound to avoid flooding.
- 12 Bridge Place in its heyday, ca 1640-1690 (50 years only) Built by Arnold Braems Brief biography. Adrien Ocker, 1670's picture just after the restoration, taken from about same position as previous pic. 12
- 13 Some close-ups. Terrance with statuary, balcony with two figures, entrance gate on Bourne Park road.
- 14 A smart carriage just leaving Braems was a keen entertainer. Schellinks' description. 14
- 15 Hunting, shooting & fishing 15
- 16 AB and his lady: certainly in Carolingean dress. Also hawking. 16
- 17 Plan of the original house.
- 18 As it is now. New entrance on right. Effect of the demolition makes current house all out of proportion. Causes of demolition Braems family support of Royalists in Civil War, money not well restored afterwards. Knighthood instead 18
- 19 Closeup to show terrace and windows
- 20 A rather plain staircase – looks more Victorian than original to me.
- 21 One of two friezes that survived until one was destroyed in fire in 1974. 21
- 22 Bethersden marble fireplace, one of two
- 23 Closeup of courtyard window from outside (now bar area) note bars & painted brick
- 24 Ditto from inside – a rare photo of the restaurant!
- 25 Schellinks' drawing of house front 7 garden. Same two people on the balcony? Modern carpark is to the right.
- 26 A general view of the garden: formal layout with topiary and summer house.
- 27 Aerial view (1946) layout of garden in relation to house. Bourne Park road left, Kingsbury road at top. Paths pond, maze.

- 28 What's left? Remains of garden wall.
- 29 Schellinks' picture of Bridge in 1662 – note farm, White Horse, bridge
(Courtauld)
- 30 View from top of Town Hill. Bridge Place visible in distance
- 31 Robert Bargrave 1584-1649 by Cornelius Janssen, another visitor to Braems'
Place. (Now in Church). **31**
- 32 Braems' signature 1671
- 33 Walter Braems' signature 1691 Bridge Place downhill from here on
- 34 Estate gradually shrinking. Ad from 1795, enhanced over 1793 version.