



ST. PETER'S CHURCH  
— BRIDGE —

*Cover picture: detail from  
roundel in the east window.*



*Bridge Church from Bridge Place.*

“It is situated about two miles and a half eastward of Canterbury, on the high Dover Road, formerly the Roman Watling-street way, which appears high and entire almost throughout it; in the valley on this road stands the village of Bridge with the church and vicarage in it, a low moist situation, the bourne or stream of the Little Stour crossing it under a stone bridge, built a few years ago by the contributions of the neighbouring gentlemen”.

*Hasted: “The History and Topographical Survey of Kent”.*

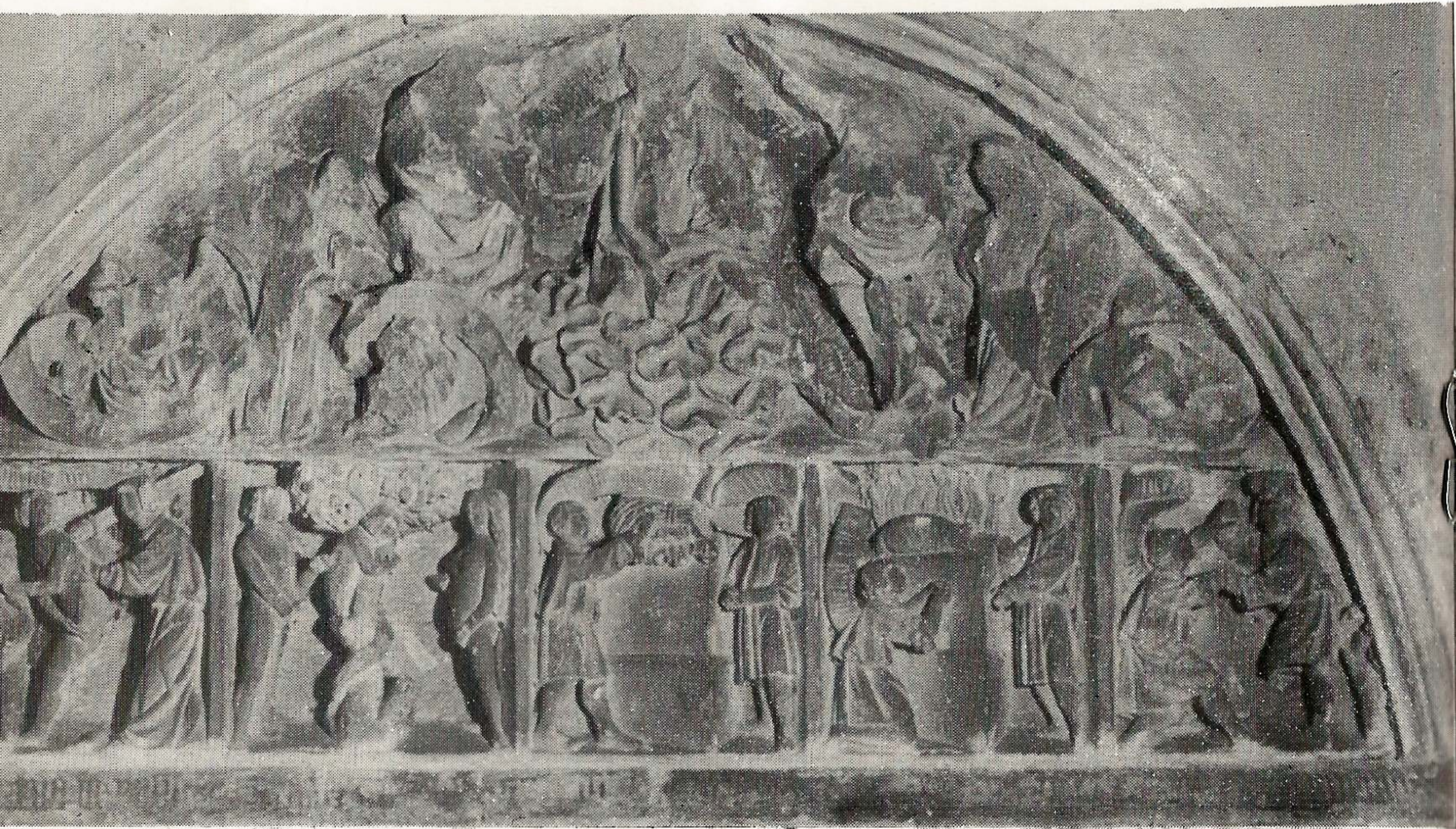


*St. Peter's Church, from the west end.*

The village of Bridge, straddling the main road from Dover to Canterbury, has been an important village since the Roman occupation of England. There was probably a Roman bridge across the river (cf. *Bruges* which has a similar name and site). There is however no village mentioned in the Domesday Book but there is a "Hundred of Brige" i.e. a meeting point for the villagers on the "Burne" Bishopsbourne, Patixbourne and Bekesbourne and hence perhaps it had its chapel (not a chantry) built. There was certainly a Chapel on this site in Norman times, as may be seen from the history of the parish displayed in the church and from the Norman base of the tower as well as the arch over the West door, but it was in the Parish of St. Mary, Patixbourne, then an important place since the Archbishop's Palace was there. The Hundred of Brige was part of the manor of Blecknersbury and was part of the possessions of St. Augustine's Abbey until the suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII. In 1258 the church at Bridge was appropriated by Archbishop Boniface to the Prior and Convent of Merton in Surrey in which patronage they remained until the middle of the 15th century.

Bridge church has three aisles and a chancel with some Norman features remaining in the tower and the western doorway. There are three bells and there is a board above the belfry stating that the church and steeple were repaired by one Samuel Hills, Churchwarden in 1787. The pillars which separate the aisles are large for this size of church; the east end of the north aisle was formerly partitioned off for a school room. The font is small and though it appears to be old has nothing peculiar on it.

In the Chancel on the North wall there is a fine semi-circular Norman carving, all that survives of a lost doorway. It shows scenes from the Book of Genesis; in one sequence Adam and Eve in Eden listening to the Devils and then driven out by the Angel; in another the story of Cain and Abel. Below this carving is the stone figure of a robed priest, apparently cut in two, and reclining in two small recesses. He is Macobus Kasey, Vicar till 1512, and the carved scrolls on the opposite side of the Chancel must have been part of his tomb.

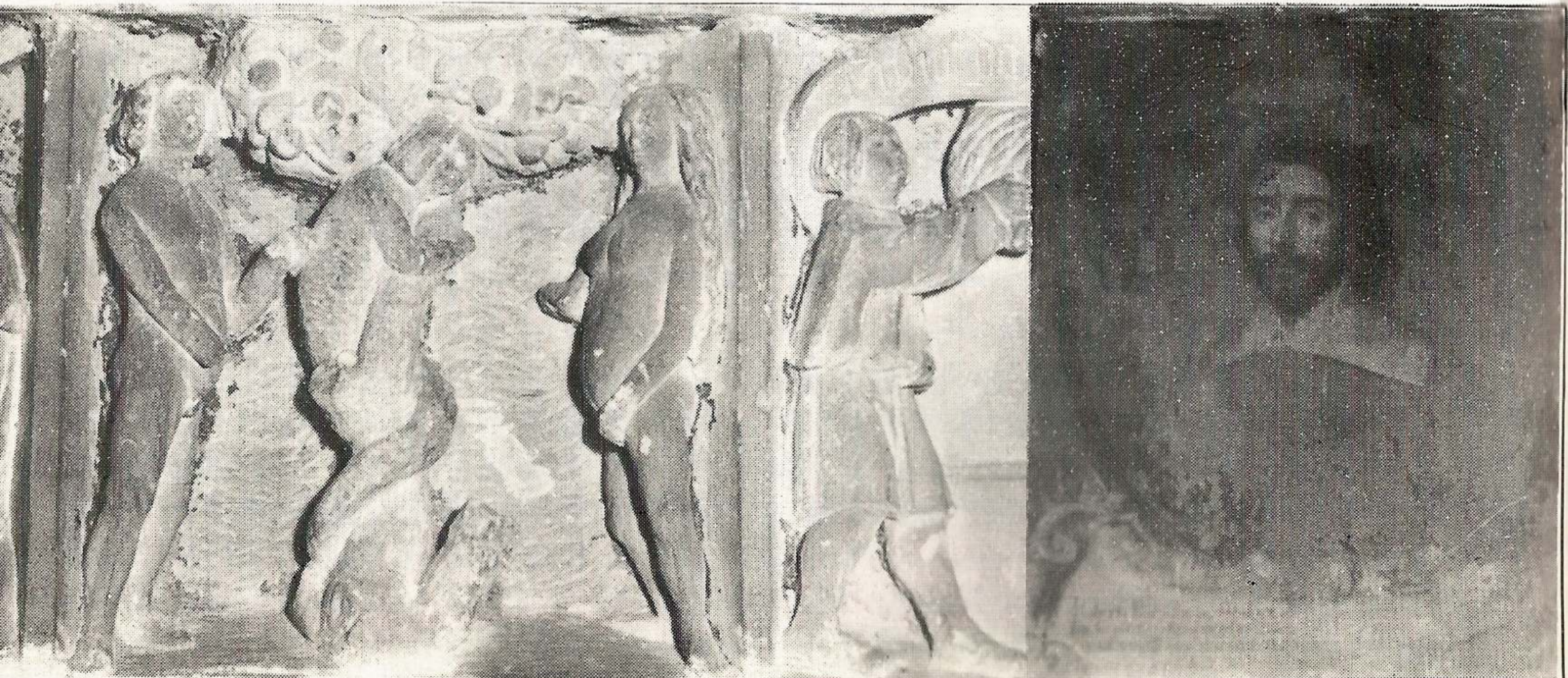


*The Norman carving in the Chancel, on the north wall.*

High on the East wall is a portrait thought to be the work of Cornelius Jansen, a noted painter of the time of Charles I, who is known to have stayed with Sir Arnold Braems of Bridge Place, who built Dover Harbour. His first wife Joan has a plaque on this same chancel wall. Her memorial is flanked by two marble carvings, one of a skull through which a serpent twines, the other a coat of arms. These are probably all we have of another forgotten tomb.

*Detail: Adam and Eve and the Serpent.*

*Painting by Cornelius Jansen.*



There are several interesting tablets in the Church – in the middle of the Chancel lies buried the second daughter of Sir Dudley Bigges of Chilham Castle, Master of the Rolls in 1643. Notice also in the left side aisle the tablet to Mr. Sicard who is one of the many people who lived in the village with Huguenot forbears. The church was restored by Mrs. Gregory of Bridge Hill in the middle of the 19th century and it is to her that we owe the striking Kentish flintstone of the exterior. She was not a native of the village but the daughter of Nathaniel Pattison of Congleton in Cheshire and whose grandfather founded the first silk mill in Congleton in 1752.



*St. Peter's Church from High Street; the road began life as Watling Street.*

The village of Bridge if you have time and inclination, is worth further study. In 1793 Zechariah Cozens wrote: "The parish of Bridge is but small and the soil in general is but chalky and barren, producing in several places heath and coppice wood, though throughout the whole extent of the parish there is a beautiful variety of hill and dale. From the woods around Bridge we have a most delightful view of the Vales which are adorned with many a gentleman's seat," and in 1815 Dr. Haddy Jones, Assistant Surgeon to the 1st Life Guards returning from the Battle of Waterloo wrote that the "neatness of the farms and the mode of agriculture much impressed him between Dover and Canterbury."

A small distance to the south of the church is the house built by Sir Arnold Braems of which only the wing remains of the original structure: recently drawings of the original house were discovered in Amsterdam Museum and after Chilham Castle it was the largest country house in East Kent in the 17th century and had a large deer park and aviary. At a later date it belonged to the Reverend Edward Taylor of Bifrons who was a friend of George IV and Jane Austen. Much of the house is built with hand-made Dutch brick which was brought over from Holland and landed at Sandwich. A little further up the road from the church toward Dover lies "Englands Old Hole" which is reputed to be the place where the seventh Roman legion captured and slew the Britons in their last attempt to stem off the Roman invasion.



*Bridge High Street in the quiet years earlier this century.*

In 1829 when excavations were made, a number of Roman arms and skulls were discovered at a depth of five feet. The circular earthwork of the redoubt still remains in very good preservation after a lapse of more than 1900 years. The village main street has not changed a great deal since the middle of the 19th century. There is a fine example of a Tudor cottage in the middle and the White Horse public house is the scene of the famous brawl of Christopher Applegate, a friend of Christopher Marlowe who became famous in the English Army in the early 16th century. This incident is mentioned in the Canterbury Court records of 1598. Further up the street at the post office is the place where Field Marshall Lord Kitchener sent his first dispatches at the beginning of the First World War.

A little further up the road is Dering Road, named after Colonel Dering who raised the Duke of York's Own Regiment in 1794. He subsequently bought Howletts, a fine Palladian villa between Bridge and Littlebourne which was sold in 1816 to George Gipps a founder of the Canterbury Bank. In Union Road is an old workhouse founded in 1835 now maintained by the Kent County Council as an old age home.



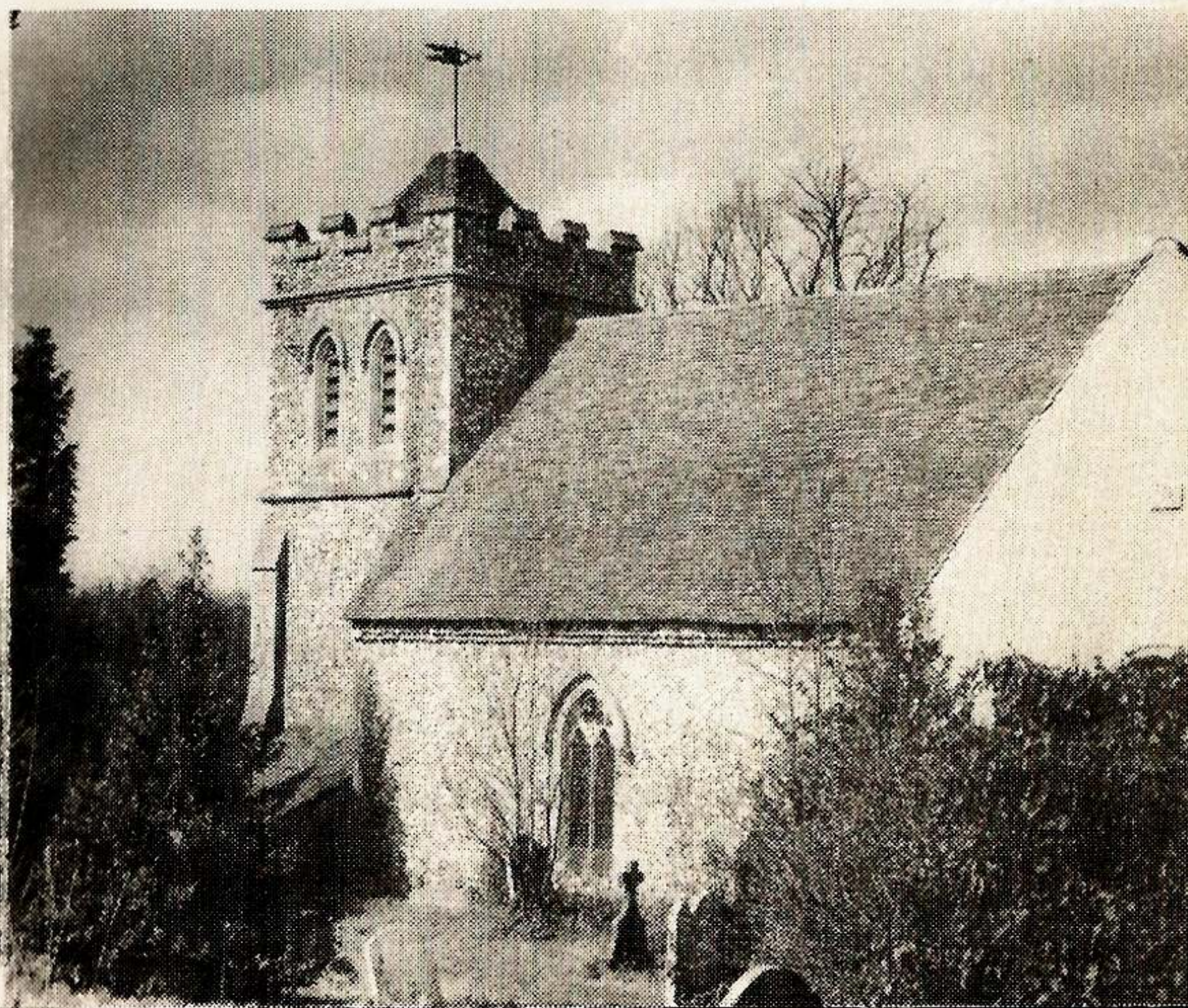
St. Peter's Church, Bridge, is part of the plurality of three churches, having been linked for many years with St. Mary's Church, Patrixbourne, and St. Peter's at Bekesbourne. Given opportunity, both churches repay a visit.

Patrixbourne Road leads directly after an eight-minute walk up the pleasant Nailbourne valley to the church of St. Mary's, Patrixbourne. This was once the more important church, and it boasts a wonderful Norman doorway, a mass clock outside and a fireplace inside, a 16th century Dutch screen (now at the west end) and some wonderful stained glass including 18 panels of Swiss glass in Bifrons Chapel, probably the work of Peter Bock of Altdorf, and Martin Moser, two of the best Swiss glass painters of the 16th century.

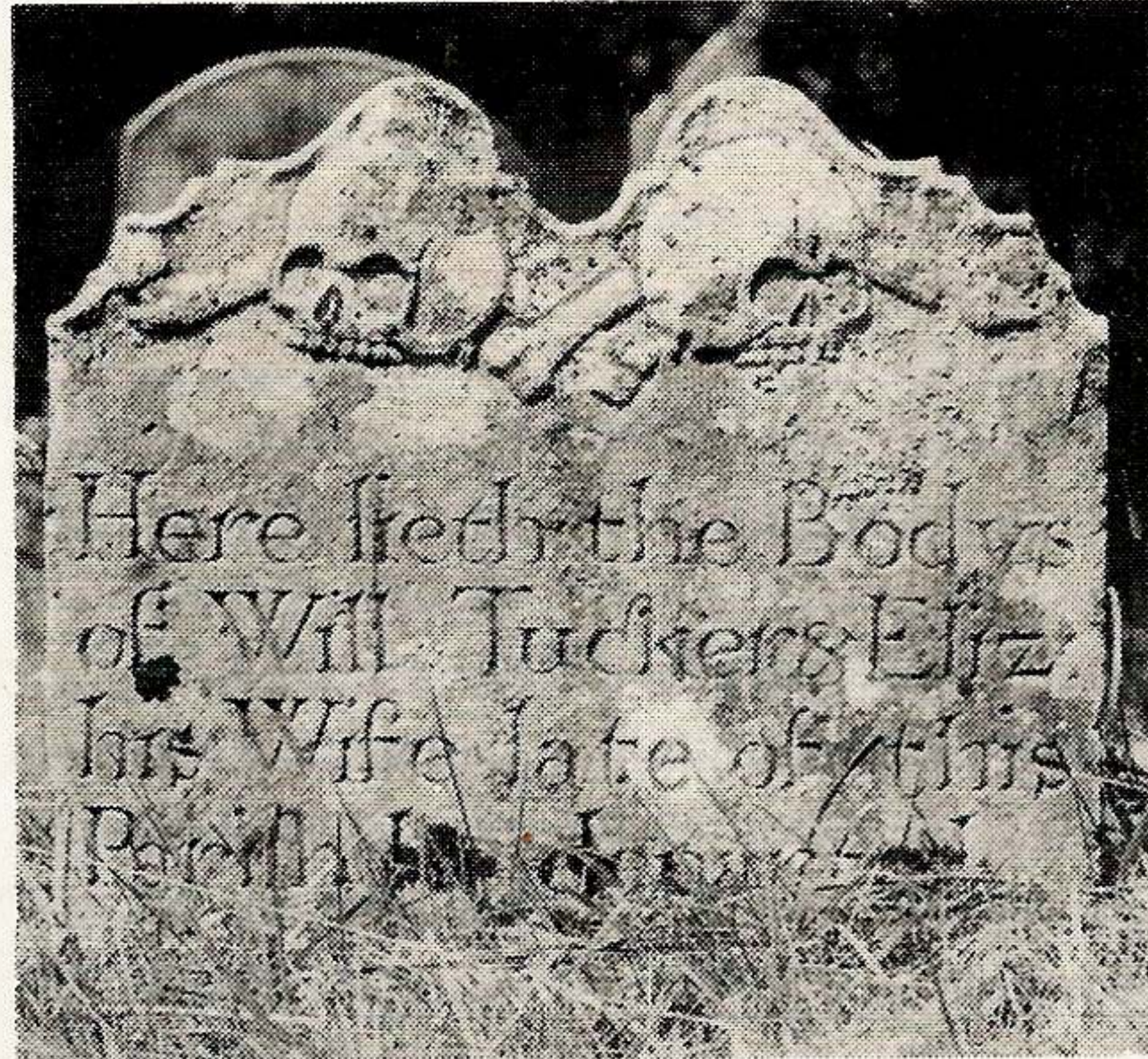
Following the bed of the Nailbourne stream further up the valley, a further five minutes brings you to St. Peter's at Bekesbourne, standing in a proud position on the hillside. The Chancel is 13th century and the tower has a ring of six bells. By the ropes beneath is a fine Elizabethan monument of a kneeling man at prayer, Sir Henry Palmer. Dr. Beke is buried in the churchyard, the explorer who mapped 70,000 square miles of Abyssinia and explored the Nile basin in the mid-19th century.



*St. Mary's Church, Patrixbourne.*



*St. Peter's Church, Bekesbourne.*



*An 18th Century double stone  
memorial in Bridge Churchyard.  
William and Elizabeth Tucker  
died in 1715.*

*Research: John Williamson*

*Graphics: John Purchase*