

"Links Edge,
347, Victoria Drive,
Eastbourne,
East Sussex,
BN20 8XR.

Dear Mr Cornfield,

Bridge & District History Society's Millennium Project.

My wife and I are members of the above Society. I left Bridge at the age of 12 years in 1936, I have received the form requesting Rouse/site information and that I am not able to help in this specific connection, however I do have some recollections which might be of some value, Mindful of my age on leaving the village and the time distance between then and now you might feel obliged to check some of the details.

I remember some of the horse drawn vehicles around at the time, The milk delivery from Mr, Jones farm (I believe it was called Brickfield Farm) was by horse and float. The milk would be bailed out from the churn in a measuring scoop straight into the jugs which would be brought out by the customers, I seem to recall that we paid him weekly, The coalman (a Mr. Hollands who lived I think in Union Road) had a flat truck and he would deliver coal to the houses. We lived in one of the small terraced cottages opposite the Union, I seem to remember the coal being kept in the cupboard under the stairs, Another horse drawn vehicle, which as boys we called the soup cart was a barrel shaped container on wheels into which the toilet bucket were emptied, Incidentally, our toilets were located at the far end of the communal back yard In a terrace of loos. Also in the yard was the pump, fed from a well, from which all the cottages drew their water, Another horse drawn vehicle was the ambulance in which I was transported to the fever hospital in Bokesbourne when I had scarlet fever, The Ambulance was 'garaged' within the union grounds located between the main buildings and the gardens which extended to the end of Union Road, I think the Eardens were tended by some of the 'permanent' male residents.

At the top of Union Road on the left (leaving the village) was a wind mill (which I can never remember working) with some out buildings one of which was a stable, Somewhere in the village there was a riding stable and there was a forge Rear the White Horse Inn.

Between the Wars the village had a branch of the British legion (pre Royal) which had a number of local members. My father was one of these and he was also a member of the Canterbury Branch of the Old Contemptibles Association. The badge of this association is on my father's gravestone in Bridge churchyard.

I attended The Bridge and Patricbourne School and of interest to us lads was the large brewery lorry which was steam driven topping up its water supply from the River Nailbourne right opposite the school.

In retrospect I realise just how close we were to nature in those days. I am horrified to think that after school we would sometimes 'call in' to one of the two slaughter houses (which in those days were part of the butchers shops) just to see what was going on. The thought of doing that today would 'turn me up' but it was in many ways a fairly basic life. Many of the men in the village would go 'rabbiting'- it was a cheap meal and my mother with some of her friends would go 'wooding' in the woods to collect 'chips' (small pieces of wood that were left behind when trees were chopped down).

My father was gassed in the First World War and was frequently 'on the panel'. He was a baker by trade and when he was able he would work in Mr. Castle's bakehouse (opposite the Red Lion) but at other times he would seek casual jobs. I remember him working as a night watchman on road works, doing stone breaking for road construction and work as a beater during the shooting season. At home in our small kitchen and on a paraffin stove he would make doughnuts and on his bicycle would take them to sell in the hop gardens.

The Master and Matron of the Union were Mr. and Mrs. Honey. I would imagine them to have had a supportive staff but they also employed a number of local ladies who would have jobs in various departments of the establishment. My mother, Betty O'Connell was one such lady. She was in charge of what she called the needle room in which some of the female 'permanent' residents would repair linen and clothing. I recall another lady, Ada Wilson who worked in the laundry. I would imagine there were others who worked in other departments.

When I have read of the harsh regime of The poor law I have been reminded of the poor 'tramps' (as they were referred to) making their way to The Union to secure a bed for the night. As young people we were a bit afraid of these men and generally kept out of their way.

One final memory I have is of excitement and adventure created when electric light came to the village - it was electric light that was important up to now some houses had gas lighting and others were dependent on oil lamps. That reminds me, we had an oil man, I think he came from Canterbury and I think he may have had a house(sic) and cart as well.

This has been a memory 'jogging' experience for me. I'm sorry about the standard of typing but I think it might be more legible than my writing might have been.

I hope this letter might be of some value. My thanks and good wishes to you and all concerned in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Vic O'Connell.

13th december 1998