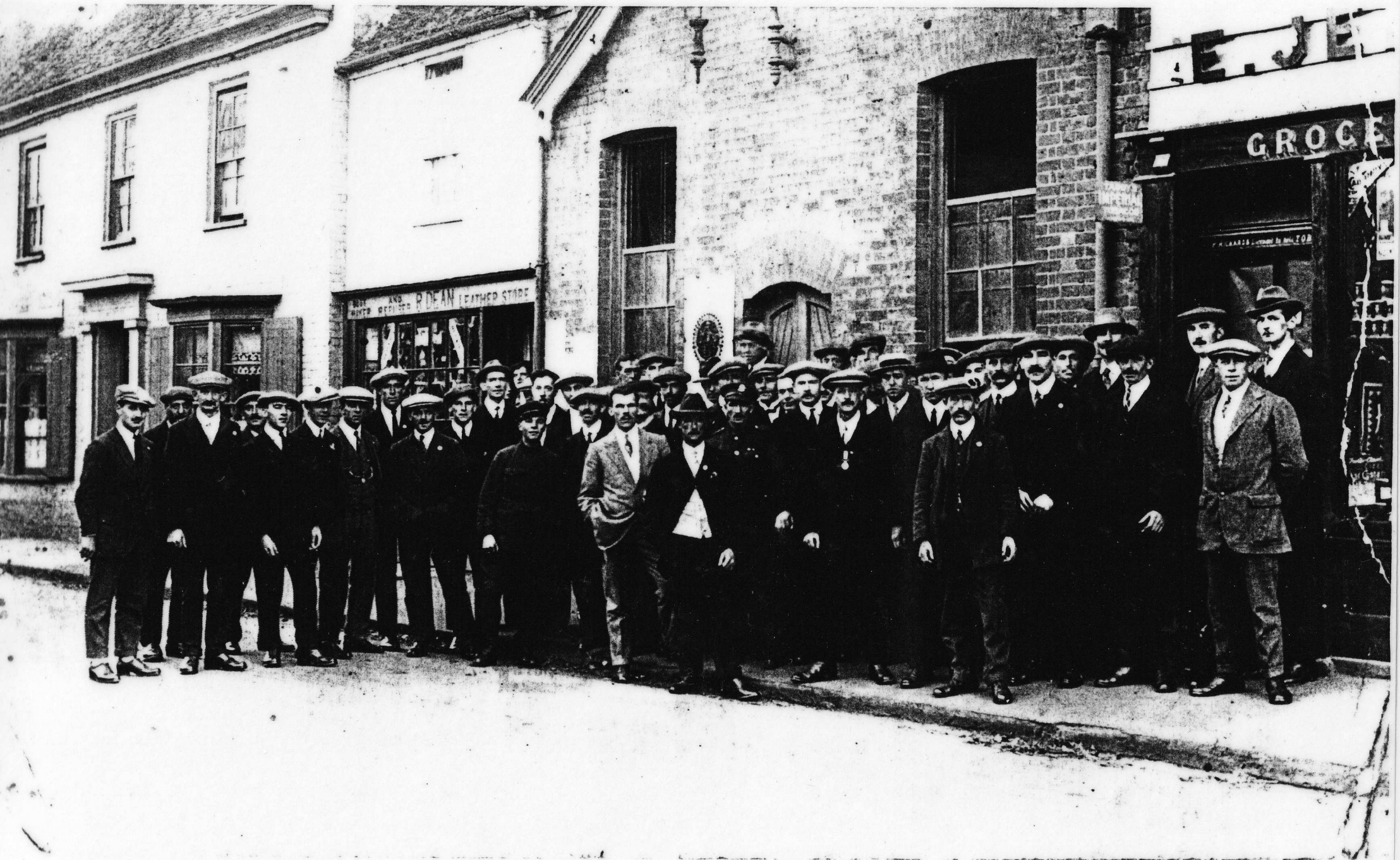






Bridge - Dover Road.



Village recollections

Often villages are shown as clusters of houses and shops merely providing a slumberland for commuters and retired businessmen. This illusion of rural stagnation is immediately destroyed when visiting villages such as Bridge, whose villagers care - sometimes passionately - about the future of their go-ahead community.

Bridge, with its rising population, has found itself coming to grips with the influx of new blood. Modern houses and bungalows have appeared on both sides of the village's main street and now its population is heading for about 2000.

Only about three miles from Canterbury. Bridge houses many people who come to the city to work but prefer the village to provide their home life. Business houses and factories Bridge may not have; shops to cater for its needs it certainly has.

Apart from a wet fish shop and a bank. Bridge has every type of shop needed to make it self-contained for the housewife.

Some villagers are pressing hard to get a bank and, if they are as successful with this project as they have been with past demands, Bridge should have one in the not too distant future.

Yet that is looking ahead and Bridge is proud of its past. It takes its name from what is now the 18th Century brick bridge straddling the River Nailbourne in the High Street.

For many of the older residents an evening is often well spent recalling life in the village at the turn of the Century. Anyone wishing to know of the Bridge of decades ago is immediately directed to the home of Mr Herbert Price at Lynton Cottage.

Formerly the village's representative on the Bridge Blean Rural District Council he retired because of ill-health but is still an active member of the Parish Council, which he joined in 1930. He is also Chairman of the managers of Bridge and Patricbourne Church of England Controlled Primary School.

Mr Price has almost a lifetime of recollections of the village. He remembers the days when the High Street was uncluttered by cars and when the Elham Valley Railway line was in operation.

Some of his fondest memories are of the old Bridge Volunteer Fire Brigade, started by the Marquess of Conyngham in the 1890's. In the early days the brigade's manual pump was horse-drawn, but in 1925, when Mr Price joined the brigade, they had a motor tender which proved to be extremely efficient and was often called into Canterbury to help with city fires. Later a Rolls Royce chassis was converted for use and in 1929 the brigade got its own motor pump. In 1938 the Rolls Royce was replaced by a Bedford.

Of the changes in the village. Mr Price said: "Years ago the road was narrower near the bridge and we had a fine set of lime trees down the street. What is now the Red Lion public house's car park was stables, and the White Horse's car park was a lawn. We used to hold open-air dances there.

"The Village Hall belonged to the Marquess of Conyngham but in 1952 he let the village have it on a 50-year lease at 6d a year, to be rented by a committee delegated by the Parish Council. At present we need a new hall and are looking for a suitable site."

Looking back at the village characters he has known, several names came to Mr Price's mind. He said he could clearly remember Mr Jack Friend, a former landlord of the Red Lion, who organised the village's King George VI Coronation celebrations. He also had vivid memories of a former village baker Mr Charles Wills, and Mr Chas. White, who was the chairman of the Parish Council for many years.

During his recollections Mr Price never fails to remember the day Bridge was packed with people. It was at the funeral in 1910 of Fireman J. Fenn, who was killed while firing a maroon.

"Bridge has never been as full as it was on the day of Fireman Fenn's funeral. The streets were lined with masses of people who came from miles around to pay their respects to this popular fireman," said Mr Price.

Another person who has many memories of Bridge is Mr Harry Hawkins, owner of the ladies' and men's outfitters and the newsagents. His father came to Bridge in 1907 and he was born in the village.

Over the years he has seen the great housing developments in the village and is particularly proud of the way local tradesmen have risen to the occasion to meet the demands of the expanding population.

"There is," said Mr Hawkins. "everything for the shopper. Really there is very little reason for anyone needing to go out of the village for their shopping." With its shops, character and friendly atmosphere, Bridge obviously provides a popular base for young families in search of the country, but at the same time not wanting to be too far from the town. But what can these newcomers, together with the well-established villager, expect of the future?

Like any community, Bridge has its problems to face. But it is lucky in having a great number of people interested enough in its future to spend hours of their time striving to make the village more accommodating to growing needs.

Traffic is an almost constant menace to the village High Street. Cars stream through, coming or going to the continent, and Bridge is desperately trying to speed up plans for a by-pass to weed out this traffic problem from its doorstep.

Recently the A2 group was formed to demand a by-pass. The campaign secretary, 23-year-old Mr Brian Lewis, said the group was started when some members of the old Bridge youth Club became appalled at the road conditions through Bridge.

About 20 young people arranged a protest march through the village and at the same time they joined forces with another resident, Mr John Purchase, who was conducting his own campaign with letters to the Ministry of Transport.

With the Youth Club members teaming up with Mr Purchase, protest demonstrations were arranged, aiming at a plan for an extension of the M2 from Brenley Corner to Dover. Because of their near-militant protests and pestering of local authorities and the Ministry... ..

(incomplete: Kentish Gazette, no date, Williamson 215)

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