

MY LIFE CONNECTED WITH
THE UNION/THE CLOSE, UNION ROAD, BRIDGE

- MISS GLADYS M. LEMAR

In 1933, when we (the Lemar family) came to live in Old Mill House, Union Road, Bridge, we had relations working at The Union, Union Road. My Aunt and Uncle (Mr. and Mrs. Len Lemar) held the posts of Porter and Porteress, and their living accommodation was on the left-hand side of the main entrance (now made into two flats). They had two daughters (our cousins), so as children we were often in The Union. This gave us an insight into life that we would not otherwise have known about.

We spent many hours in the laundry, the chapel, the kitchen, and on the wards, doing little jobs when we could. The women lived on the left-hand side and the men on the right-hand side of the building. We talked frequently to the men and women who had to live there; we knew them all by name. In those days, some who lived in the Union, or the Institution, as it was often referred to, were only in their twenties and thirties. In addition there were the elderly, infirm and mentally retarded. Some women had their babies with them.

I can remember vagrants being brought to The Union, being cleaned and bathed by my Uncle, and given food. After a night's rest, some "went on their way". The vagrants always arrived at, or were brought to, a special building which was situated opposite Old Mill House. The building was demolished in 1976, and later, houses were built on the site, now Mount Charles Walk. The Union gardens were eventually sold and Churchill House and Churchill Close are built where the gardens once were.

During the early years, The Master and Matron of The Union were Mr. and Mrs. P. Honney and their living accommodation was on the right-hand side of the main entrance and above the archway.

Among the many and varied duties my Aunt and Uncle did, is one that I always remember vividly. In the main entrance, next to his desk, my Uncle had a bell-pull. He had to toll the bell many times during the day; for example:- time

to get up, time for breakfast, lunch and tea (even between the courses), also, to signify that the Doctor had arrived, and finally, of course, time for bed.

The Board of Governors held a meeting every month on the premises.

During those years I never thought that one day I would work at The Union.

After working for The Bishop of Dover (Bishop Rose) and his wife, at St. Martin's Priory, St. Martin's Hill, Canterbury, as House Maid and then Parlour Maid, for five and a half years, I came to work at The Union in 1947, as The Matron's Maid. The Matron then was Miss Eborn and I worked for her for ten years, until she retired and returned to live in her home town of Dover.

During my time at The Union (later to be named The Close), I worked for seven Matrons. Sometimes my work took on a different role as some of the Matrons had families, and then I had the children to look after as well.

During the time that Mrs. D. Upton (later to become Mrs. Holway) was Matron there was talk of The Union /The Close being closed. Matron became an active campaigner to keep the home in Bridge. None of the staff or the residents, or in fact the people of Bridge, wanted the home to move into Canterbury.

The campaign and everyone's efforts to prevent the move were successful. The Close was converted into houses/flats and The New Close was built in Conyngham Lane, Bridge.

We all moved to The New Close in 1982 and here, men and women were able to live side by side and were not segregated as in the old days.

I retired from The New Close in June 1985, having worked for The Kent County Council, at The Union/The Close/The new Close, for thirty eight and a half years. I remained a Committee Member for The New Close Amenity Fund until the middle of 1997.

10th January, 1999.



The Vinten Family and Bridge



THE VINTEN FAMILY
AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS WITH BRIDGE AND SURROUNDING AREAS

Charles Henry Vinten, his wife, Caroline Jane, and their family moved to Bridge in 1901 where they rented a small terraced cottage at 6 Brewhouse Lane (now 11 Brewery Lane).

Charles (born in Poplar, East London but brought up by his uncle in Sittingbourne when the arrival of a new baby threatened his parents with eviction from their rooms above a shipping office) had been working at Chilham as Head Groomsman.

When his employer decided to abandon horse-drawn carriages in favour of motorised vehicles, he was given the chance of learning about motor cars and staying on as driver. He turned this down because he "loved working with the horses and didn't want anything to do with those new-fangled things".

His wife, Caroline, came from Temple Ewell and her brother, Richard Friend, lived at Brookside Lodge in School Lane (now Patricbourne Road) in Bridge. He had a coal depot at the back of the Methodist Church and supplied the local gasworks as well as domestic customers, delivering the coal by horse-drawn cart. Charles Vinten took on the job of delivery man.

At the time of their arrival in Bridge, Charles and Caroline had three children - Edie, Eva and Charles. In 1902, Alf was born followed by Jessie in 1905 (the baby in the family photo) and Florrie two years later. All the children attended the old Bridge School until they reached the then school leaving age of 14.

At that time, as far as I can gather, the school consisted of two rooms separated by a partition. There were as many as four classes, known as "Standards" at that time in one room so it was possible to "eavesdrop" on other lessons. Generally, most pupils had learnt all they could by the time they were twelve so the more able ones were asked to help with the lower forms for the remainder of their time at school.

Jessie (my mother) always resented the decision of the headmaster not to enter her for the equivalent at that time of the 11-Plus because he said "her parents could not afford to send her to a Grammar School". Jessie conceded in later life that he was probably right because her parents were not well-off but the fact that she was denied even the satisfaction of sitting the exam and finding out whether she would have been good enough to go to a Grammar School remained a sore point for the rest of her life.

As recreation, the children played around the village, in the fields and river, often coming home soaked and covered in duck weed! They also used to be sent off with a picnic for the day to Whitehill Woods, something which no parent would dare consider these days. Hop-picking and haymaking were annual events with the

long school holidays fitting around this time and everyone joining in. Jessie was allergic to hops so spent this time helping on her uncle's farm at Alkham, near Dover.

For the children, Sunday was a dull day. Having been scrubbed clean on Saturday evening in the tin bath, in front of the range in winter, they were all dressed up in their "Sunday Best" to attend church THREE TIMES, once for Morning Service, followed in the afternoon by Sunday School and finally Evensong. In between times they had to play quiet games or read.

Upon leaving school, three of the girls became domestic servants, with positions at times locally at Bridge Place and Bourne Park as well as further afield. At one time Edie, Eva and Florrie all worked for Joseph Conrad, the author, at Oswalds, Bishopsbourne.

Charles (junior) enlisted for the Army at the outbreak of World War 1, much to the disapproval of his mother, particularly as he was under age and had lied about his date of birth to get accepted. He served abroad and was one of the lucky ones to come back unscathed.

Unlike his father, Charles Jnr. loved messing about with motor cars and soon came to the attention of Count Zobrowski (of Chitty Bang Bang fame) who was at that time living at Highams (now Highland Court) at the top of Bridge Hill.

Count Zobrowski was so impressed with Charles' interest in cars that he went to see his parents to ask permission to take Charles on as his apprentice at a modest sum of half a crown (12.5 pence) a week. They agreed and Charles learnt all he knew of motor mechanics from the famous car builder and racing driver.

Later, he worked as Joseph Conrad's chauffeur at Oswalds where his wife, Audrey, was nurse/companion to Mrs Conrad. At this time Jessie was working at West's, the butchers (now Wakeham's) and as part of her job had to deliver meat to various customers, one of whom was the Conrads.

One day, as Jessie approached the house, Joseph Conrad happened to be looking out of the drawing room window and remarked to his wife, "What a lovely pair of legs that girl has!". When Audrey explained that she was Charles' sister, he insisted that she pass on his praise to her sister-in-law. It was a story which Jessie relished telling all her life!

Alf was a volunteer fireman in Bridge at the time his cousin, Jack Friend, ~~was blown up by a fire rocket~~. He can be seen in the photo of the funeral procession, on the right of the coffin, second from front.

In the Twenties, there was very little organised entertainment and the family made their own fun, going for walks and bike rides, sometimes on a summer evening going all the way to

Sandwich Bay, playing football and cricket and joining various societies. Local village dances and those held in the barracks in Canterbury were well supported.

Jessie was in the Bridge Netball team (see picture from about 1920), also the Girls' Friendly Society which occasionally staged amateur dramatics in the village hall. At one performance, having clambered up on to the stage and opened her mouth ready to speak her lines, Jessie's skirt promptly dropped down around her ankles! Jessie was mortified but the audience, naturally, thought it was hilarious; Jessie was able to see the funny side later.

During the Thirties, the children were busy with their own lives and families. By then Jessie and Florrie had moved up to London. Charles had settled in the Faversham area, Edie had moved back to Bridge into one of the newly built Council houses in Bourne View and Alf had moved into one in Mill Terrace. Eva, who never married, lived at home with her parents and in 1937, they moved to Filmer Road.

In the war years, Jessie moved away from London to Woborn Sands in Bedfordshire where she was later joined by her sister Florrie and her children. They returned to London at the end of the war. The rest of the family remained in Kent. Eva had a lucky escape during the war when the air raid on the City began just as she arrived back in Bridge after shopping for some sewing materials in Canterbury.

During the Fifties, Florrie moved back to Kent to live in her husband's family home in Kingston and in 1975 Jessie, widowed since 1961, moved back to Bridge upon her retirement. In their later years, the whole family were great lovers of whist drives and the small local village bingo sessions. Eva and Jessie were founder members of the Fish Scheme and were full of praise for the movement which helped them both to remain in their own homes and maintain their independence despite their disabilities in later life.

Charles Henry and Caroline Jane are buried in St. Peter's Churchyard and their grave also contains the ashes of their daughter, Eva. Their eldest daughter, Edie, is also buried with her husband, Harold, in the Churchyard. Jessie is buried with her husband in a London cemetery and Charles, Alf and Florrie were cremated at Barham.

Eva was the last person bearing the family name of Vinten to live in Bridge, although there are still descendents of the family living in the village, in Canterbury and surrounding villages.

JESSIE MULLAN
September 1994

Analysis of Bridge Maps

Site	1764	1801	1838/41	1872/73	1896/98	1907	1977
Allotments					Allotment Gardens	Allotment gardens	
Bifrons	Befrons Palace	Bifrons	Bifrons	Bifrons Park	Bifrons Park	Bifrons Park	
Bourne House	marked		Bourn Park	Bournepark	Bourne Park	Bourne Park	
Bourne Lodge					marked	marked	
Brewery/Mill Lane	stops at ford	as now	as now	as now	as now	as now	
Brick Field				Brick Field	Brickworks	Brickworks	
Brick Kiln			Brick Kiln	Kiln	Kiln	Kiln	
Bridge			marked		F.B.	F.B.	
Bridge Hill	Bridge Hill	marked	Bridge Hill	Bridgehill House	Bridge Hill	Bridgehill House	
Bridge Hill Lodge					House		
Bridge Place	Bridge Place	Bridge Place	Bridge Place	Bridge Place(large)	Lodge	Lodge	
Bridge Station				not covered	Lodge	Lodge	
Church	marked		marked	St Peter's Church	Bridge	Bridge Place	
Flint Cottages					Place(large)		
Foot Bridge					Bridge Station	not covered	
Ford / FB					St Peter's	St Peter's	
Forge					Church	Church	
Gasometer					marked	marked	
Gasworks					Foot Br x2	Foot Br. X2	
Higham	Higham	marked	a field	Smithy	Ford, F.B.	Ford, F.B.	
Higham Lodge			Higham Park	Gasometer	Sm	Sm	
Laundry			marked	Gasometer	marked	marked	
Laundry Lane				Gasworks	Gasworks	Gasworks	
Lodge, Bridge Hill			marked	Higham	Higham	Higham	
Methodist Chapel(Primitive)				Higham	Lodge	Lodge	
Methodist Chapel(Wesleyan)				marked	marked	marked	
Middle Pett				marked	marked	marked	
Farm				Methodist Chapel	Methodist	Methodist	
Mill				(Primitive)	Chapel (Prim.)	Chapel (Prim.)	
Millers House				Windmill	Methodist	Meth. Chap.	
Nailbourne	?wrong route	?wrong route	Little Stour	Little Stour	Chapel (Wes.)	(Wes.)	
Pett Farm	shown wrongly?	Pett	(present route)	Pett Farm	Middle Pett		
Plough & Harrow Inn			Pett Farm	Plough & Harrow	Farm	not covered	
Post Office				Inn	Windmill	Windmill (corn)	
Pump (P.)				Post	marked	marked	
Golf Course				Office(Dentists?)	many	many	
Red Lion Inn				Grandstand	P.O.(Dentists?)	present site	
Renville		Renwell	marked	(resited)	many	not marked	
Saxon Cemetary (Bridge Hill)				Red Lion Inn	Golf Course	not marked	
Old School				Saxon Cemetary	Red Lion Inn	Red Lion Inn	
Side Hill Wood				National School	Renville	not covered	
Songbury Lane				Boys and Girls	Saxon Cemetary	Saxon Cemetary	
Summer House				marked	School	School	
The Butts				Songbury Lane	marked	marked	
Union				marked	marked	marked	
Union Chapel				Summer	marked	marked	
Union Road	to Pett House & Bottom	not clear	Union	House(SH)			
Village Hall			Chapel	Rifle Range			
Well (W.)			as now	Union Workhouse	Bridge Union	Bridge Union	
White Horse Inn				Chapel	Workhouse	Workhouse	
				as now	Chapel	Chapel	
					as now	as now	
					Reading Room	Reading Room	
					>4	not marked	
					x	P.H.	

D. ARATY