







Horse & Cart man Les Cowell

## BRIDGE FIRE BRIGADE

Bridge Fire Brigade appears to have been formed in 1873 because it held a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1923. The following is taken from *Bridge as Portrayed in Historical Times Prior to 1939*, a manuscript held by the Local History Department of Canterbury library.

Victorian Bridge acquired its own Fire Brigade, which was established around 1874. The fire engine was presented to the village by the Conyngham family and operated with a reasonable degree of efficiency. Its services were demanded as early as 11 July 1874 when

"a barn at Bridge, in the occupation of Mr Huxstep, and the property of the Marquis of Conyngham, was struck by lightning. Immediately it was discovered that the head of the barn was on fire, the Bridge Fire Brigade was summoned. They arrived in ten minutes with their engine, under the command of Mr Verrier and owing to their exertions the fire was quickly extinguished, very little damage being done."

A more serious fire broke out two years later at the farm of Mr Collins, and was started when sparks from an engine, working with a threshing machine, blew onto the roof of a large barn which contained 300 quarters of corn. The Bridge Fire Brigade and the Canterbury Volunteer Brigade, on realising that they could not save the barn and its contents, directed their efforts to saving threatened farm buildings nearby and, apart from the end of one range of one range of stabling, the fire was prevented from spreading. The buildings belonged to the Marquis of Conyngham and had been insured for £1,000. Mr Collins' personal loss was estimated at between £800 and £900, a large proportion of which he was unlikely to recoup.

There were occasions when the fire brigade's presence was not required, as and when,

"a fire broke out on the premises of Mr J S Clayson, grocer. Mr Clayson had been in bed some time when he found that a portion of his house was on fire. Ready assistance was given him by Mr Harnden, builder, Messrs F Sutton and J H Verrier and Police Constable Goldsack, and by their efforts the flames were prevented from spreading.

The cause of the fire was entirely an accident."

In order to improve this operational efficiency the Bridge Fire Brigade undertook drills, which tested appliances so as to discover how far they could be relied upon in all sorts of emergencies. On one occasion the object behind the drill was to concentrate on buildings which were situated some distance away from sources of water supply.

"The result of the trial was very satisfactory. Within four minutes from the word being given the engine was at work and a jet of water from a source 450 feet away was issuing from the pipe. Several drills were gone through with double deliveries, showing that in case of need two fires could be attacked at the same time. An attempt to reach the church was also fairly successful. The members afterwards dined together at the Red Lion Inn."

It has been said that the original fire station was at the Red Lion Inn, being relocated to the rear of the Plough & Harrow in about 1904.

The summoning of the fire brigade by setting off a maroon was commonplace until the early twentieth century and was a system still in use by Bridge Fire Brigade in 1910. On 31<sup>st</sup> March that year, a fire which destroyed four cottages broke out at Pett Bottom. The Brigade's second engineer, Mr John Fenn, aged 29, of 6 Albert Terrace, was the first man to arrive at the fire station after the alarm had been raised and, in the absence of a more experienced man, assumed responsibility for firing the maroon. The usual two explosions were heard but a few moments later other members of the brigade found Mr Fenn lying on the ground unconscious "with the left side of his face completely fractured." No-one saw what happened but it is thought that somehow the maroon exploded before Mr Fenn could get clear and struck him in the face. He died of his injuries leaving a wife and two children. He had been connected with the Brigade for seven years and by trade was an engineer and cycle dealer [*Fire & Water, May 1910, p.45*].

Mr Fenn's funeral on 3<sup>rd</sup> April was a notable event in Bridge and was attended by 5,000 people including representatives of the "Kent" and the "County" fire brigades from Canterbury, the Wingham and Herne Bay brigades, as well as the Bridge brigade. Honours were conferred by the band and firing party of the East Kent Yeomanry.

According to *Bridge as Portrayed in Historical Times Prior to 1939*, in 1918 the equipment of brigade comprised a Merryweather manual pump and 1,200ft of hose. The engine was drawn by the same horses that were used for funerals and delivering coal, or pulled by men using drag lines. The firemen, mostly local tradesmen, at one time included two grocers, the cycle agent, a publican, the draper, two gardeners, the coal merchant and the blacksmith. There were twelve sets of helmets, tunics and axes. If a tall man left the force to be replaced by a short man, the latter would have to endure an ill-fitting uniform.

Count Louis Zborowski, owner of Higham Park, Bridge, demonstrated a continued philanthropic interest in the affairs of the village when consulted about the local fire engine. This engine, housed in Brewery Lane at the rear of the Plough & Harrow public house had recently demonstrated its inadequacy and Count Zborowski agreed to consider how the situation could be improved. In 1921(?) he donated a Roland-Pilain motor car (CE 1037) [*this is a Cambridgeshire number issued between Jan. 1904 and June 1922*] and had this converted to a fire tender. Sidney Maslin, one of the count's employees, worked on the chassis and Blythe Brothers, coachbuilders of Canterbury, adapted the body to accommodate 10 men and a mile of hose. The appliance, with a top speed of 60mph, is believed to have been powered by a Mercedes-Benz engine developing 75hp. Real gold leaf lettering was applied to the sides of the vehicle, which towed a 2-wheeled manual pump, but it was another 15 years before Bridge Fire Brigade owned any ladders.

William Martin, Count Zborowski's mechanic, was appointed driver of the new tender with his son, Len Martin, as deputy driver. Arthur Easton was appointed assistant. Maintenance of the fire tender was assisted by contributions from insurance companies although in 1902 it is documented that the Rural Council increased its annual contribution to the brigade from £16 to £20. It is said that the Brigade would resent the presence at small fires of the Canterbury and Sturry brigades, who would be soaked on arrival.

On one occasion in haste to return it to its shed behind the public house, the Roland-Pilain was reversed into No. 1 Brewery Lane and the damage to the wall of that cottage can still be seen today. The tender was often seen on Friday evenings in the Brewery Lane meadow, when the crew would undertake drill, and was sometimes pressed into service to water the cricket pitch.

Bridge Fire Brigade held a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1923. The event was chaired by Mr C. Wills, (?) assisted by Mr Mason and Mr Wass. Mr Wills, then captain of the brigade, said he had been a member of the brigade for 47 years. He was also a churchwarden and secretary of the gas company. In July 1923 the brigade's anniversary celebrations were further marked by a fete held at the rear of the Plough & Harrow.

Count Zborowski, a car and motor racing enthusiast, was killed at the age of 29 while racing in the Italian Grand Prix at Monza in 1924. Higham Park was bought from his estate by Walter Whigham in 1928 and, in turn, he donated a 1911 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost fire tender (LS 164) [*this is a Selkirkshire number issued between Dec. 1903 and March 1964*] to the village some time after that. Photographs exist of this appliance towing what appears to be a Merryweather Hatfield trailer pump.

Chief Officer Charles Wills retired from the Brigade in April 1931 at the age of 83, with 55 years' service to his credit [*Fire, June 1931, p13*]. He bought his uniform, which he wore for 53 years, in about 1885.

The Rolls-Royce was used at the funeral of former fireman, John Friend, on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1936 and was present at the Carnival Queen event in 1937. A Bedford tender (JG 8598), which also towed a Merryweather Hatfield trailer pump, succeeded the Rolls-Royce and this was in evidence at the 1935 Jubilee celebrations, suggesting that both appliances were in service simultaneously during the mid-1930s. *[JG 8598 is a Canterbury number which should have been issued in 1936.]* The Bridge brigade featured in a Merryweather & Sons Ltd catalogue of Hatfield trailer pumps published in May 1935 when Brigade Secretary, J. Friend, announced that the pump had behaved excellently at each fire to which it had been turned out.

In April 1934 the brigade attended a fire at Downs Farm, Barham occupied by Mrs G. Evans, the Burmese wife of a British medical practitioner stationed in Malta. The estimated direct loss from the fire was £6,000 and incendiarism was suspected *[Fire, June 1934, p.17]*.

The first statutory duty of local authorities to provide fire protection came with the Fire Brigades Act 1938 when responsibility for the Bridge brigade would have passed to Bridge Blean Rural District Council. As a result of World War Two, the fire service was nationalised on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1941 and a photograph exists of the Bridge crew with an Austin K2 auxiliary towing vehicle and trailer pump in the grey livery of the National Fire Service. The fire station remained at the Plough & Harrow and was one of 79 taken over by Kent Fire Brigade when the service was denationalised and returned to local authority control on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1948. The appliance then stationed at Bridge, and crewed by part-time retained men, was a Fordson water tender fitted with a Tangye pump (GXM 255) originally built in 1943 as a heavy pumping unit for the National Fire Service. The fire station was closed in 1956 and Bridge today is afforded fire cover from the whole-time station in Canterbury

To this day the stable at the rear of the Plough & Harrow bears the names "Baby" and "Queenie" painted on the inside wall. These are believed to be the horses used to draw the village fire engine before the Roland-Pilain was donated.

Roger C. Mardon, Bridge, Canterbury, 22.2.99 (rev 6.9.2000)

Sources: Amanda Harris-Deans & Patricia Gibb, Higham Park, Bridge  
Kent Fire Brigade Museum  
Chris Maclean, Plough & Harrow, Bridge  
Bernard Price, Bridge  
Bridge millennium exhibition, Sept. 2000

## BRIDGE FIRE BRIGADE CREWS

The crew shown on the horsed manual pump in a photograph of 1899 are

	Edwards	Page	Banks	Arter
	Carpenter	Gilbert	Foord	Friend
Officers -	Crouch	Lieut. Wills	Capt. Chapman	

Source: Kentish Gazette, 10 Feb 1961/Local History Dept, Canterbury Library

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Members of the Brigade, who may be the same as those mentioned above, have included William Ford of Park Villas, Bill Foord, carpenter (the same?), Tom Crouch, plumber, Frank Gilbert of the forge, Bert Edwards, butcher, George Small, gardener, 'Dicky' Friend, coal merchant, whose business was later taken over by Cllr. Albert Taylor.

In 1910 the captain of the Brigade was a Capt. Guy Gamble of Lynton House.

Source: Kentish Gazette/Local History Dept, Canterbury Library

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The crew shown on the Roland-Pilain tender in Brewery Lane in a photograph of 1920 are

Alfred Vinton	Fred Hogben	William Ovenden	Bert Jones	Frank Down	Harvey Price	Albert Taylor
	Driver - Herbert Price		Officer - Jack Friend			

The man with the horse and cart in the background is Les Cowell.

Source: Kent Fire Brigade Museum

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The crew shown on the Roland-Pilain tender outside the Brewery Lane fire station in a photograph of 1926-28 are

Fred Hogben harness maker	Albert Taylor coal merchant	Jack Friend ex-pub landlord	Sidney Gilbert forge owner
Frank Down cycle shop owner	Len Honey plumber	William Ovenden head gardener	Albert Jones dairy owner
	Driver - William Martin mechanic to Count Zoborowski		Officer - Charles Wills retired baker

Source: Bridge millennium exhibition, Sept 2000

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The crew shown on the Rolls-Royce tender outside Bridge Place in a 1930-31 photograph are

B Jones milkman	F Hogben sadler	F Downs cycle shop	A Vinten Bridge Blean RDC
S Gilbert blacksmith	A Taylor candlemaker	H Price grocer	Plough landlord
	H T Price, Engineer haulage contractor, C & G Yeoman	C Wills, Chief Engineer retired	J Friend, Engineer retired publican, Red Lion

Source: Bridge millennium exhibition, Sept 2000

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The Auxiliary Fire Service crew in a group photograph are

Hawkins	Arthur Hawkins	??	Patterson	Cyril Cricket
Jimmy Fenn	Charlie Clements	Harvey Price	Leonard Reynolds	Alf Minter (?Vinten)

The officer-in-charge at this time was Sid Gilbert and the driver was Harvey Price.

Source: Bernard Price, Bridge



# FIRE RELEASE

One organisation of vital importance was the Bridge Volunteer Fire Brigade, whose equipment in 1915 included a Merry-Weather manual engine and about 1,200 feet of hose. The Fire engine was horse-drawn being pulled by the same horses as were used for funerals and for delivering coal. The firemen were mostly local tradesmen and at one time included two grocers, the cycle agent, a publican, the draper, two gardeners, the coal merchant and the blacksmith. The men were summoned by a maroon flare, and one was killed in 1926 when looking over the flare, supposing it to have gone out. There were twelve sets of helmets, tunics and axes, and if a tall man left the force to be replaced by a short man, the latter had to endure an ill-fitting uniform. The force entered the motorised age when Count Zborowski donated a motor appliance, registration number CE 1037. It was kept running largely through the donations from insurance companies, whose outgoings would have soared but for the Volunteer Brigade's existence and devotion to duty. The Brigade would resent the presence at small fires of the Canterbury or Sturry Brigades, who would be soaked on arrival. The Bridge Brigade had no ladders until shortly before the last war, while early hoses were made of leather and thick rubber. The Fire Brigade remained independent up until the Second World War.

Author: Crispin Wilding - UKC Group Research Project 1976

Bridge fire Brigade: engine house, Plough & Harrow P.H.; consists of a motor engine & trailer & about 1,200 feet of hose; Charles Eills, lt. & sec; number of men 10.

Kelly's

An interesting interlude whilst the Count was at Higham concerns the local fire brigade. In 1920 its chief had complained that their horse-drawn appliance could not reach fires in outlying districts in time to be effective. The Count, hearing of this, presented them with a car along the lines of the Chittys. Blythe Bros. adapted the body to accommodate 10 men and a mile of hose. With a rating of 75 h.p. and a speed of 60 m.p.h. this was probably the fastest of its kind in the country at that time. For his generosity the Count was made Honorary Captain of the Brigade.

## The Fire Maroon Tragedy at Bridge

One of the most momentous events in Edwardian Bridge, at least, to judge from the coverage it received in The Kentish Gazette, was the early death of young Mr John Fenn, of 6 Albert Terrace, second engineer of the Bridge Fire Brigade, on 31st March 1910.

It appears from the inquest that a fire had broken out at Pett Bottom. It was the job of Mr Fenn Junior to light the maroon to call together the Fire Brigade. On the fatal afternoon at about 12.30 he left the 'Plough and Harrow' and asked his brother for a match. This, his brother provided and then went off 'round the corner'. Almost immediately there were two simultaneous explosions and Mr Fenn's cap was seen by a witness to 'go right up in the air'. The witness hurried to the scene and found Mr Fenn lying outside on a pile of straw. Details of his injuries are graphic: "profuse hamorrhage (Kentish Gazette's spelling), left eye completely gone...." Mr Fenn lived for only twenty minutes after the explosion.

It emerged during the inquest that second engineer Fenn had not fired a maroon before, and that instead of lying down to fire it, he had stood over it and hence received the fatal blow to the face. There seems to be some uncertainty as to whether the maroons were faulty, and in order to satisfy himself on this issue, a representative of Messrs Brocks "took train to Bridge" and inspected the scene of the accident. He subsequently declared that the maroons were of

the best quality, similar to those fired at Crystal Palace since 1865, and asked permission to fire the remaining five. He later contended that the maroons were not defective, thus clearing the name and reputation of Brocks.

Mr Fenn's funeral was a stirring occasion. According to the Gazette: " Never before had the village of Bridge felt a disaster so keenly... April 3rd will stand out in the history of the village as a day never to be forgotten...."

5000 people thronged the narrow street, overflowing into the surrounding fields. Most of the gentry were present at the graveside, though the Conynghams were not mentioned, presumably because they worshipped at Patribourne. The dead man was given a military funeral with a firing party from the East Kent Yeomanry. The coffin was borne by six foremen and followed by 65 members of other Fire Brigades. "It was a mournful procession indeed as it wended its way up the hillside and... there were but few dry eyes...." The grave had been prepared under the shadow of some tall trees bordering the road and "sympathetic hands had lined it with primroses and ivy.

At evensong after the funeral the Rector of Bridge Rev. H Knight referring to the tragic death of Mr Fenn said that God took us out of this world for two reasons. Either we were well ready for entry to the heavenly Kingdom or else we were 'so hardened' that it would be futile to give us any more chances. It was clear that the former case applied to Mr Fenn and that the finger of God had singled him out to lay down his life for his friends. It is to be hoped that such fatalism afforded some comfort to his relatives and young widow.



BRIDGE, 3. AP. 1910