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Kentish Ways **FREE**

A fresh view of life in Kent

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Bridge

A historic Kentish village

The village of Bridge is situated in the Nailbourne Valley on Watling Street, the old coaching route from London to Dover. In the Domesday Book it appears as 'Brige' and it probably comes as no surprise to learn that the name means 'a place at a bridge'. Over the years the village has grown away from the River Nailbourne, which floods periodically. The village has a long and varied history dating back to before Roman times. Julius Caesar first defeated the Britons here at 'Old England's Hole'; it is said that the ghost of an Ancient Briton, complete with chariot, can sometimes be seen crossing the road into the village. On nearby Barham Downs the armies would assemble before campaigns such as Field of the Cloth of Gold and the Seven Years War.

The centre of Bridge is a Designated Conservation Area to protect the many examples of period architecture, some dating back to Tudor times. One of the first workhouses in Kent was built in Bridge in 1837 and is still there today. However, nowadays the original residents would hardly recognise it since its attractive conversion to provide retirement homes. The church of St Peter, at the bottom of Bridge Hill, still retains many of its Norman features after restoration in 1852; the church has two unusual

sculptures, one of a skull with a snake crawling through the eye socket and the other a stone figure of a priest, Macobus Kasey, who was vicar of the parish in the 1500's.

Bridge has had its fair share of famous residents and visitors. Field Marshall Lord Kitchener apparently sent a dispatch from the Post Office when living at Broome Park and Mozart was a guest at Bourne Park whilst attending the races on Barham Downs. Nearby, Higham House was once the home of Count Louis Zbrowski, possibly one of the best-known amateur racing drivers of his day. In 1921 Count Zbrowski and his engineer, Captain Gallop, built the first of three cars all named, Chitty Bang Bang. It is generally thought that the car originally got its name as a result of the noise from her exhaust, however there is another theory that she was named after a rather risqué soldier's song from the First World War.

Until the completion of the M2, the A2 was considered a major road and the ever-increasing London to Dover traffic thundering through the village caused no end of problems. The villagers had been campaigning for a by-pass for some time, convinced that some sort of tragedy was inevitable. They were proved correct when, in 1962, pensioner George Smith was knocked down and killed outside the village shop and in 1963 two lorries and a bus collided in the centre of the village. Although a by-pass had been promised, nothing materialised and by Easter of 1964, the residents of Bridge had had enough and took to the streets, blocking the traffic and causing severe delays. There were other demonstrations including a sit-down protest in 1969. An accident in 1972, when a young girl was trapped and a lorry driver killed, prompted another sit-down protest with 300 people blocking the road. At the next demonstration over 1,000 people joined the protest and closed the village to all traffic for an hour – apparently the tailback was quite impressive. Finally the Government promised action, approval for the by-pass was granted and the village returned to a quieter way of life.

Bridge and the surrounding area are popular with both residents and visitors alike. There are many places to stay from hotels to B&B at prices to suit all pockets. Canterbury with its fascinating history is only a couple of miles away and Cheriton and

Dover are just a short drive. Howletts Wild Animal Park at Bekesbourne is definitely worth a visit. Howletts, in conjunction with Port Lympne and the John Aspinall Foundation, is devoted to saving rare and endangered animals and is home to the largest captive breeding colony of western lowland gorillas in the world, with over 80 births to date. Howletts also have the largest breeding herd of African elephant in the UK. It is the Park's aim to breed and protect endangered wildlife with the intention of eventually returning them to the wild. Most animals breed successfully in the natural surroundings of the parks and other notable breeding successes in recent years include Canadian Timber Wolves, Przewalski horses, tapir, bison and several species of rare antelope and deer.

Bridge has grown in size over the years and has become a popular residential area due its attractive rural setting and close proximity to Canterbury and other towns. This is a thriving community with many societies and organisations ranging from Adult Ballet and Art through to the Women's Institute and Youth Group. Art in Bridge started in 2001 with a one-day exhibition in the village hall, since then there have been exhibitions every year as part of the Canterbury Festival. There are no less than three excellent pubs, The Plough and Harrow, The White Horse and The Red Lion, although the latter has recently closed for refurbishment. A second Folk and Roots Festival was held in June of 2005 and proved to be as popular as the first with excellent attendances. In 2005, Bridge won the 'Older People' section of the Calor Village of the Year Competition. Bridge was also 'Highly Commended' in three other categories: Young People, Business and Information Technology.

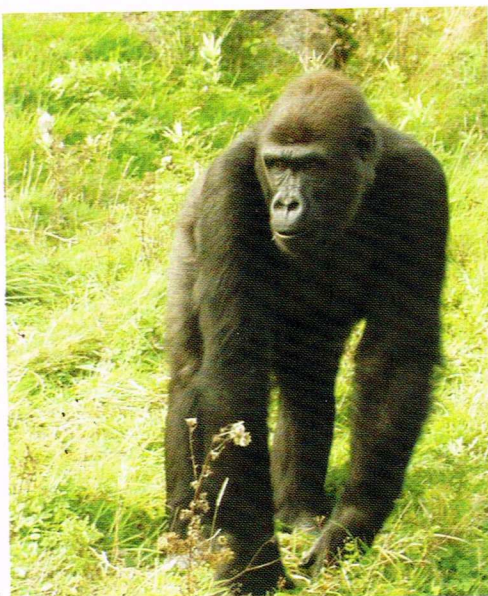
Returning from the Battle of Waterloo a surgeon, Dr James, wrote that he was "much impressed by the happiness and jollity of the inhabitants (of Bridge)". It would seem that some things might have changed over the years, but perhaps not everything. ☐

www.bridgevillage.org.uk

Howletts Wild Animal Park
Information: - 01227 721 286
www.howletts.net



Bridge High Street



Gorillas at Howletts