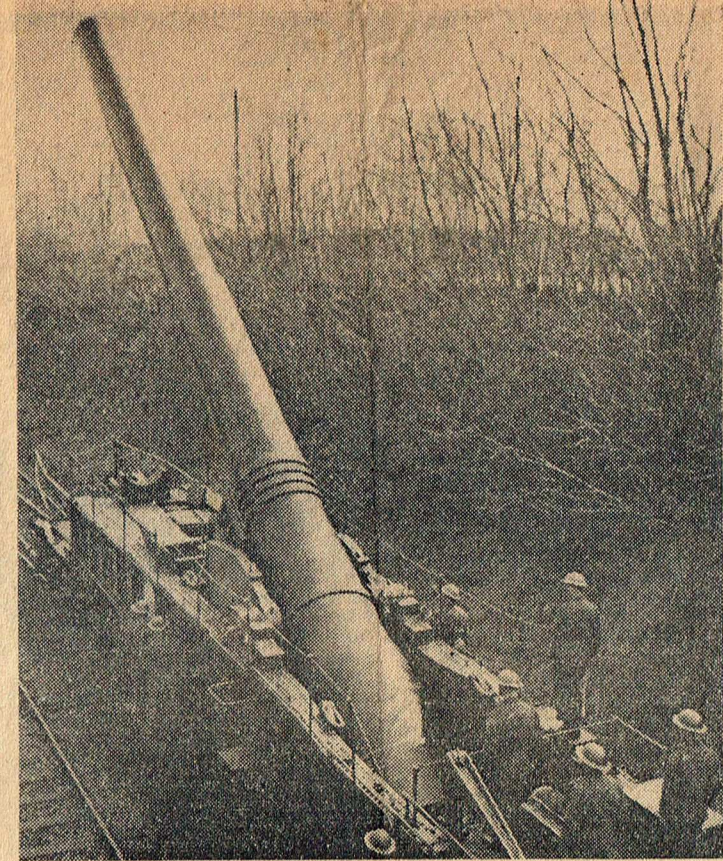
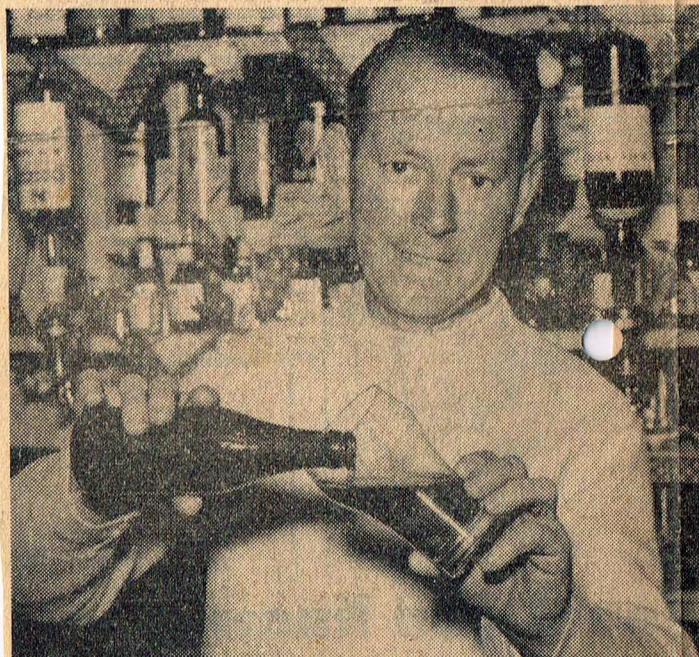


Pilot, the sheepdog, bounds along Bishopsbourne platform



The line's war-time "Boche Buster"



## A SENTIMENTAL JOUR

### Down the Elham Valley Line

IT IS 12 YEARS SINCE THE ELHAM VALLEY RAILWAY WAS CLOSED, and the track is fast disappearing under the relentless advance of weeds, trees and the plough.

But the railway which ran through 16 miles of unspoilt countryside between Canterbury and Folkestone, is still affectionately remembered by the villagers along the route, and is still referred to by country folk as "The railway."

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"Some say the rails were exported to Germany and sent back here as bombs!" he said.

Diesel engines used to pull the war-time guns, he said, and C class engines pulled peace-time passenger trains.

Also working at Bokesbourne is Mr. Walter Hogben, of Sunny side, Dering Road, Bridge. He has worked on the railways for 40 years, and is to retire in January. He started work at Elham after the First World War, and when the line was closed he was transferred first to Selling and then to Bokesbourne. Mr. Hogben's father helped build the Elham Valley Railway.

Mr. Jim Weight, licensee of Bokesbourne's Unicorn public

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It had five stations, two level crossings and one tunnel—plus, of course, the World's Wonder Bridge near Elham. It was at first a double line, but later was converted to single line from Canterbury to Lyminge.

The section from Shorncliffe, Folkestone to Barham was opened on July 1, 1887, and two years later, on July 1, 1889, the railway reached Canterbury.

There were six passenger trains a day to Folkestone, and the single fare was originally 1s. 4d. First-class fare from Canterbury West to Canterbury South was 4d., 3d. being charged for second class passengers and 2d. for third class travellers.

Third class fare (single) to Bridge was 4d., to Bishopsbourne 5½d., to Barham 7½d., to Elham 1s., and to Lyminge 1s. 1½d.

On December 2, 1940, passenger services from Canterbury to Lyminge were suspended, and travel between Lyminge and Folkestone stopped on May 3, 1943. The War Department had taken over!

Passenger services between Lyminge and Cheriton resumed on October 7, 1946, but the Elham Valley Railway was closed for good on October 1, 1947.

The little village stations are still used—as houses. The railway track, today, is used for poultry keeping, wood sawing and rubbish dumping.

Several of the line's railwaymen still live in cottages by the overgrown track. Some continue to work for British Railways.

Recently the "Kentish Gazette" made a sentimental journey down the Elham Valley line, stopping at the stations and meeting the railwaymen.

The railway branched off the main Ashford-Canterbury line at Whitehall—or "Harbledown Junction" as the railwaymen call it.

Main departure point for those travelling from Canterbury to Folkestone was the West Station. Plans for a station at Wincheap were abandoned owing to difficulties in buying land.

First station down the line, after riding along the high embankment above the marshy Whitehall meadows, was Canterbury South Station—intended primarily for Cricket Week use.

Now Canterbury City Council property it was converted into a

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### Bridge

Ten years ago Mr. and Mrs. William Crampton moved into Bridge Station as a last resort. They are still looking for somewhere better to live.

Few improvements have been carried out since the station ceased to be a station, and there is no electricity, gas or mains water.

It takes Mr. Crampton three hours to pump a week's water supply from a well.

Mr. and Mrs. W. Fuggle live in the stationmaster's house on the other side of the line with their two children and Alsatian dog. Mr. Fuggle is a nurse at St. Augustine's Hospital, Chartham.

The family moved into the railway house in June, from the Hospital estate, but in spite of the fact that the house had not been lived in for a year, and has neither electricity nor mains water, they prefer their new home.

In Bridge lives 87-year-old Mr. George Booth, poverly and later signalman on the Valley Railway. He started in 1892, and retired in 1936 after being transferred to Canterbury West.

The line's only tunnel is under part of Bourne Park. It was here that, during the war, guns were based to be driven down the valley for firing.

In the tunnel were two batteries of 9 in. howitzers, two batteries of 12 in. howitzers, and the 14 in. "Boche Buster."

Half the ceilings in Barham came down the first time it was fired!

Sir Winston Churchill made several visits to inspect the gun batteries.

### Bishopsbourne

Sir John Prestige owns the station at Bishopsbourne, and has had the building converted into a modern and comfortable home for his secretary.

When the "Kentish Gazette" called, Mrs. H. W. King, who lives there with her civil servant husband and 16-year-old daughter, was planning to move out after 3½ years to take a shop in Canterbury's Northgate. "It's too lonely here," she said.

The King family's move means that the Bishopsbourne section of the line loses its last patrolman—

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Also working at Bekesbourne is Mr. Walter Hogben, of Sunnyside, Dering Road, Bridge. He has worked on the railways for 40 years, and is to retire in January. He started work at Elham after the First World War, and when the line was closed he was transferred first to Selling and then to Bekesbourne. Mr. Hogben's father helped build the Elham Valley Railway.

Mr. Jim Weight, licensee of Bekesbourne's Unicorn public house, is another ex-Elham Valley man. He worked for the railways for 18 years—and for ten of them was trolley driver between Canterbury and Folkestone, taking men to and from work on various parts of the line.

During the war he was driving his trolley along when the gigantic "Boche Buster" approached from the opposite direction. A hurried reverse was necessary!

Many of Mr. Weight's customers travelled on the line. "One and ten return from Bridge to Folkestone it was before the war," said one.

Back at Bishopsbourne, we found Mr. and Mrs. W. Harbour and their three children living in the old stationmaster's house.

Mr. Harbour used to work for British Railways at Adisham, and rents his house from them, but now he cycles to Snowdown every day to work.

### Kingston

The next village down the line, Kingston, has no station, but the railway has left its mark there.

During the war an unexploded bomb landed on the line near the village, and halted traffic for a day or two until it was dealt with.

It was while riding an Army train on this railway that Mr. Robert Brett's son was killed when the train was attacked by an enemy plane.

### Barham

A Dornier 127 "flying pencil" crashed on the bridge near Barham School, only a short distance from the village station, where live railwayman Mr. Burt Batt, his wife and three daughters.

The station now has electricity and main water—the family are thinking of buying the building from British Railways. One of the largest of the valley stations homes, it has three bedrooms.

A man who has walked every inch of the Elham Valley line lives on nearby Railway Hill. He is 70-year-old Mr. Charlie Choules, for 22 years a patrolman between Canterbury and Folkestone. When the line closed he moved to Snowdown Station, and

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First station down the line, after riding along the high embankment above the marshy Whitehall meadows, was Canterbury South Station—intended primarily for Cricket Week use.

Now Canterbury City Council property, it was converted into a bungalow 10 years ago. It has "all mod. con."

Living there are Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Dixon, who came to the station from Biggin Hill nine years ago. Mr. Dixon is a Council worker.

The space between the platforms has been filled in, giving the family a large garden.

Nearby is what was the stationmaster's house—distinguished by the twisted 100-year-old laburnum in the front garden.

Mr. George Goodman, stationmaster from 1911 until his retirement in 1922, lived there. He died in 1930, but his three

hospital estate, but in spite of the fact that the house had not been lived in for a year, and has neither electricity nor mains water, they prefer their new home.

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The King family's move means that the Bishopsbourne section of the line loses its last patrolman—Mrs. King's sheepdog, Pilot.

Mr. Leslie Coombes, now porter-signalman at Bekesbourne Station, was porter at Bishopsbourne from 1932-1940, and his wife was a porter there during the war.

She was on the platform when the last Elham Valley train ran, and recalls that during the war Army officers had their headquarters in a coach drawn up in a siding. Frequently they had to be shunted out while sugar beet was loaded on to a goods wagon!

Mr. Coombes said that the railway was double-line from Canterbury to Folkestone until

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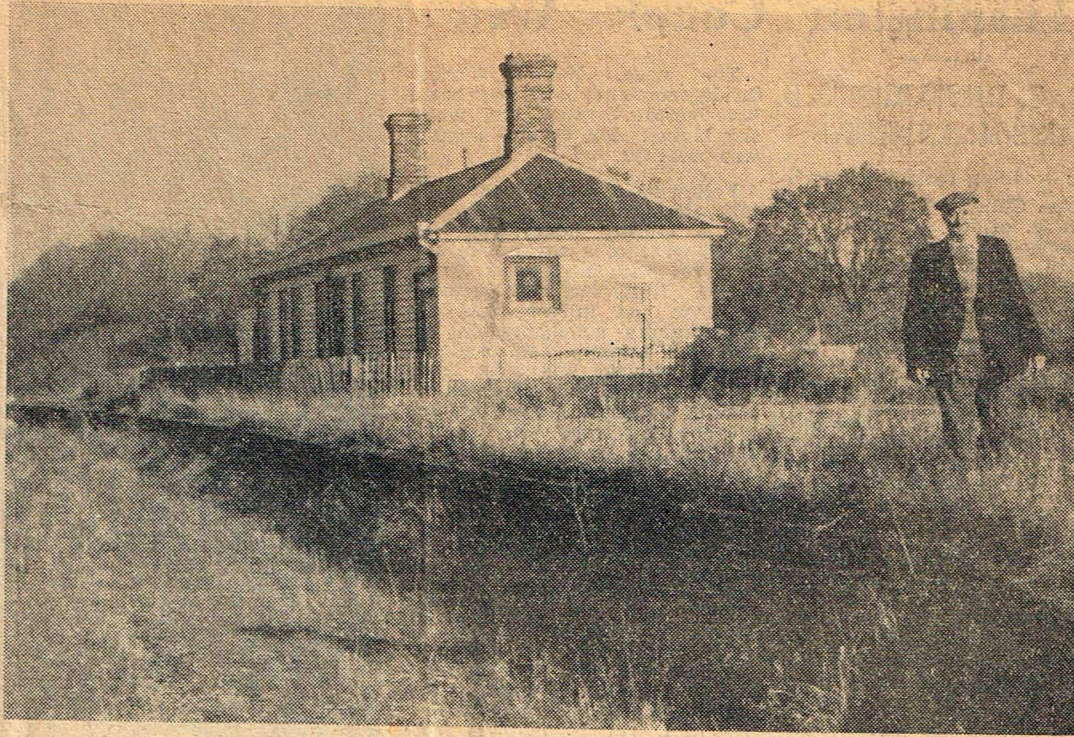
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A man who has walked every inch of the Elham Valley line lives on nearby Railway Hill. He is 70-year-old Mr. Charlie Choules, for 22 years a patrolman between Canterbury and Folkestone. When the line closed he moved to Snowdown Station, and retired 4½ years ago after 33 years of railway life.

The trains that ran through the valley had three coaches, he told us—and outlined the reasons for the railway's financial failure.

"The stations were too far from the villages," he said, "and when the buses started after the First World War people weren't prepared to walk a long way for trains when buses stopped every hour at their doorsteps."

Mr. Choules still patrols part of the track which runs past his cottage—he rents a section on which to keep his chickens!



Charlie Choules patrols the overgrown platform at Barham Station

# JRNEY

## Elham

By an old level crossing at North Elham, in a house called Crossing Gates, lives Mr. Fred Mutton, one-time ganger on the line. Three-quarters of a mile farther on is Elham Station, still British Railways-owned. Part of it is the home of farm worker William Morgan.

On the other side of the track are Station Cottages, and in one of them lives Mr. Bill Young, porter-signalman in the Elham Valley for 20 years.

He started work on the line in 1911, and left in 1931, when single-line traffic from Lyminge to Canterbury was introduced. Mr. Young retired in 1950.

He was once acting-guard on the "Linger and Die"—a train that used to start at Dover, and go to Ramsgate, Margate, Minster, Canterbury West, Elham and Folkestone—stopping at every station in between!

Mr. Young also recalls "Puffing Billy," a combined engine and coach that used to run from Dover to Elham and back.

He remembers the huge crowds that used to go to Elham from Canterbury and Folkestone on Boxing Days for the hunt.

One of his most vivid memories is of the time during the First World War when he had to uncouple a horse box in the teeth of a howling south-westerly gale.

When he had unhooked it from the train he found, too late, that the horse box had no brakes. It was blown all the way to Barham before it could be stopped!



Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Coombes outside their cottage near Bekesbourne Station. They both worked at Bishopsbourne Station.

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Elham Station had a large staff, and the biggest goods yard along the route. The yard is still used—by a coal merchant.

Mr. Cecil Caple, stationmaster at Elham for 14 years, still lives in the stationmaster's house there. He too retired when the line closed.

### Lyminge

Kent County Council own Lyminge Station. Now converted into two bungalows, it is let to two Council workmen and their families.

The Council's roads department use the disused railway track, and the yard in front of the station is a car park.

The old track swings east beyond Lyminge, and curves towards Folkestone at the foot of the steep downs behind Hythe.

At Cheriton the branch line joins the main Ashford-Folkestone Railway.

Yes, the Elham Valley Railway is disappearing. Suggestions have been made that the track be made into a road, and one of the Channel Tunnel projects suggests using it to carry train passengers from the Continent straight through to London via Canterbury.

But the track remains a wilderness—maybe it will be traced and dug up by the 30th century counterparts of today's Roman Road enthusiasts.