

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 Patrixbourne 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 Aikham, 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 Zborowski (of Chitty Bang Bang fame) who was at that time living at Highams (now Highland Court) at the top of Bridge Hill.

Count Zborowski 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, died. 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
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