

such occasions, the nationally-known writers mixed with those who had gained success in a small way, or indeed, those who had never been published. Since its formation there had always been a number of loyal members who wrote purely for pleasure.

An activity which was also of a social nature was inviting members of local amateur dramatic societies to take part in sketches which Guild members had written. This was first tried out at the Archbishops' Palace with a group from Sittingbourne. Later, on a much more in-depth level, members of the Willington Players were sent scripts in advance so that characters could be chosen by the actors and rehearsed prior to the evening the sketches were performed.

As well as writers and poets, the Guild has invited local councillors, librarians, clergy, curators and historians to join us. And those most important people, editors, were asked to come and tell us how to avoid receiving rejection slips.

It would be difficult to name all the visitors who, as far as one can tell, have enjoyed spending an evening with MWG. It is impossible to pay tribute to all the members.

There are still founder members. Poet Pam Wood, Margaret Bolton who writes children's stories, and Frank Willis who will turn his hand to any subject.

Countless people joined at later times and it would not be right to mention some and not others. Many served as officers for lengthy periods. Some have sadly passed away.

Today the future of MWG hangs in the balance. It is an old-fashioned group, and although there are members who take advantage of all the modern-day ways of communicating, obtaining information and producing material, its days may be numbered.

A vast amount of work has been published and broadcast by MWG members, but the successes will probably be overshadowed by the recollection of times in the early years.

While looking for a new venue for meetings, and inspecting a small hall, three members were startled by the sudden and unexpected arrival of a group of scantily-clad men who rushed into their midst and frantically began to do floor exercises.

When holding meetings at St Philip's Church, proceedings would be interrupted by the clock booming the hours of the day.

As the saying goes, memories are made of this.

## PAUPERS IN THE VILLAGE The Early Years of the Bridge Poor Law Union

By P.G. Elgar

The establishment of new Poor Law Unions in the 1830s was the result of discontent with the management of paupers. A revised attitude was proposed and attempts made to curb mismanagement and corrupt overseers. A Royal Commission was set up by Lord Grey's Whig Government in February 1832 to enquire into the whole matter. Their report was published in February 1834 and the Poor Law Amendment Act received Royal Assent six months later. It laid down principles governing treatment of the poor for the rest of the nineteenth century.

The 15,500 parishes of England and Wales were grouped into new Poor Law Unions, administered by Boards of Guardians elected annually. They were required to enlarge existing workhouses or build new ones.

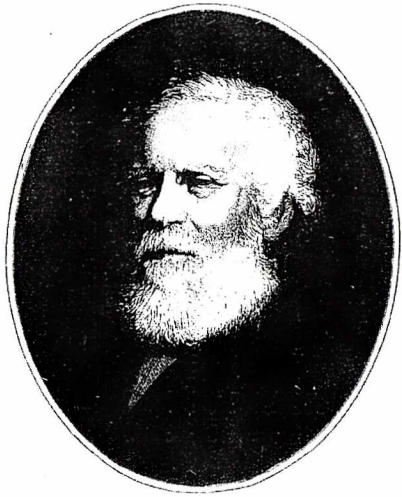
Bridge was one of the first twelve Unions in Kent to erect a new workhouse. It covered four acres, with three acres of gardens, eventually including a chapel, cook-house and other rooms, with exercise yards. It was enclosed in a quadrangle system devised by Sir Francis Bond Head (1793-1875). He was a prominent administrator, engineer and writer who later became Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. His plans were criticized by many who thought they were too like prisons. The surveyor was George Lancefield.

A series of dormitories, 15 feet by 10 feet, lit by a single window, accommodated eight persons each. Larger, L-shaped rooms were used as day-rooms.

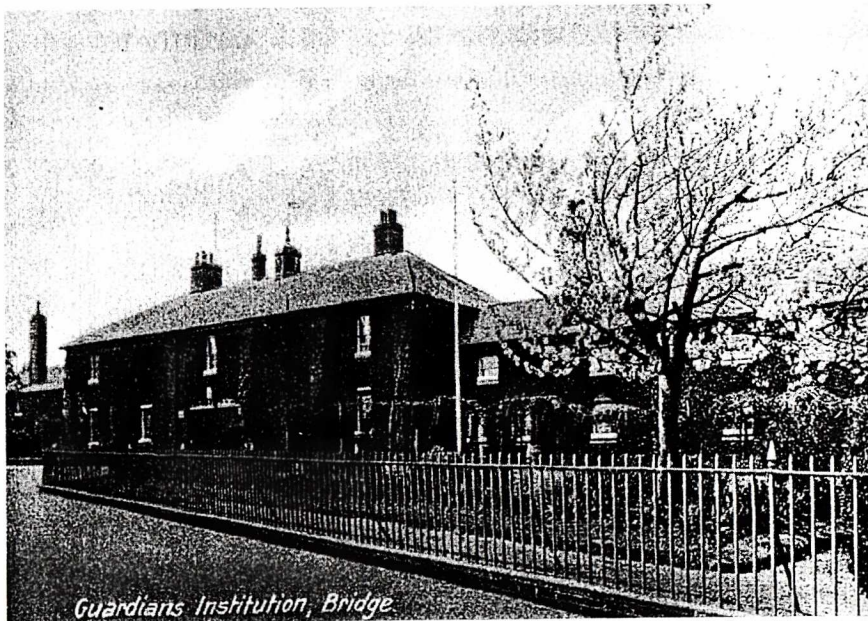
Previously each parish had dealt with their own paupers in various poorhouses, such as those at Ickham, Littlebourne, Waltham and Elham.

The Guardians' first meeting took place at the White Horse Inn, Bridge, on 22nd April 1835, and included Sir Francis Head and ex-officio Guardians George Gipps, Robert Ballard-Johnstone and the Rev. Mr Hughes-Hallett. There were nineteen Parish Guardians as follows:

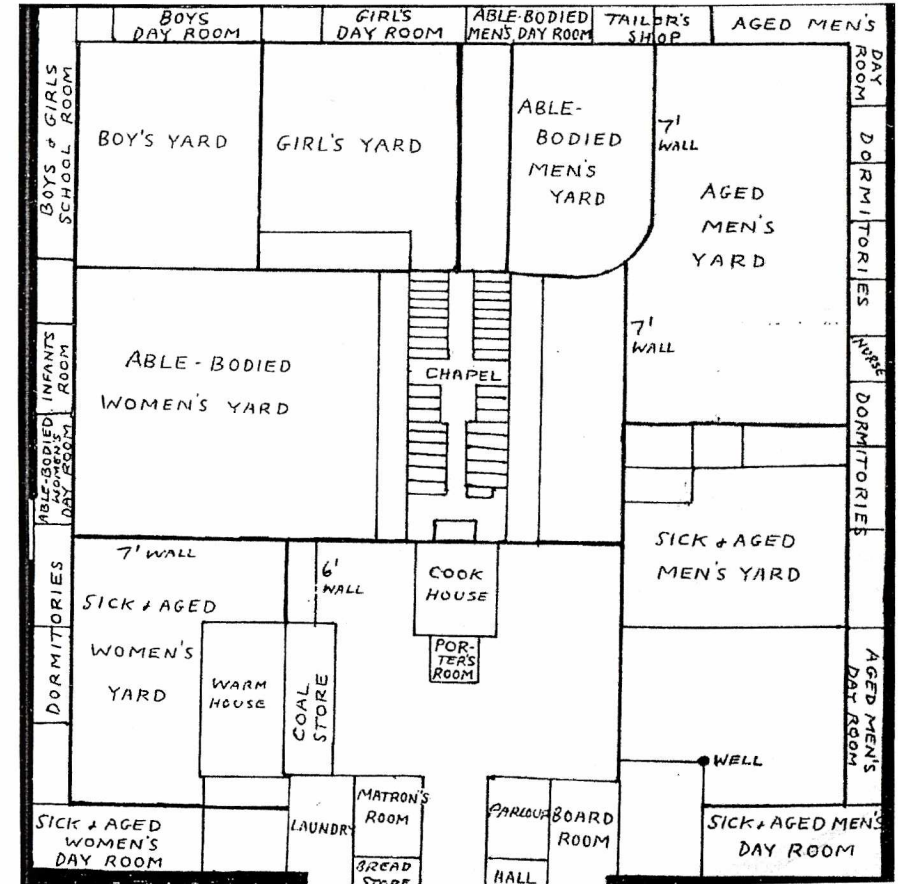
Richard Brice	Bridge
John Bushell	Ickham
Henry Collard	Patricxbourne
John Sankey	Lower Hardres
John March Hood	Kingston
Stephen Fuller	Harbledown
Stephen Gambill	Waltham
John Howard	Upper Hardres



Sir Francis Bond Head, designer of Bridge Workhouse.



View of Bridge Union Workhouse (also known as the Guardians Institution), about 1925.



Layout of Bridge Workhouse, based on a plan of 1875.

- |                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| John Harvey       | Bishopsbourne |
| Nathaniel Maynard | Fordwich      |
| Thomas Byng       | Wickham       |
| Thomas Sladden    | Adisham       |
| Edward Collard    | Stodmarsh     |
| Richard Peckham   | Bekesbourne   |
| Denne Denne       | Littlebourne  |
| Henry Mount       | Nackington    |
| Robert Lathe      | Thanington    |
| Benjamin Harrison | Womenswold    |
| Robert Owann      | Westgate      |



**BRIDGE UNION.**  
**SCHOOLMISTRESS WANTED.**

**T**HE Guardians of this Union will, at their Meeting to be held on **THURSDAY**, the 26th instant, proceed to the **ELECTION** of a **SCHOOLMISTRESS** for the Union Workhouse. The Salary of the late Schoolmistress was Twelve Pounds per annum. The continuance or increase of this Salary will depend on the competency of the person elected, as it will be regulated according to the certificate awarded upon her examination by the Committee of Council on Education. In addition to the Salary, Rations, Coals, Candles, and a furnished apartment will be allowed. The election will be subject to the approval of the Poor Law Board.

Candidates for the situation must be members of the Church of England, and attend personally on the day of Election at Eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and produce Testimonials as to Character and qualifications.

Further information may be obtained by applying to me at the Union Workhouse.

By order of the Board,  
**WILLIAM FORTH, Clerk.**

*September 13, 1850.*

Advertisement for a Schoolmistress, September 1850.

Two Guardians representing Barham and Petham were absent, so Bridge Union covered twenty-one parishes. Chartham was added in July. Richard Peckham of Bekesbourne was elected chairman and Nathaniel Maynard of Fordwich became deputy chairman. The following were chairmen throughout the nineteenth century:

C.W. Dowsett	1836
R. Lake	1837
Charles Collard	1838-41
Henry Collard	1841-46
Charles Collard	1846-64
Captain Thomas Hilton	1864-70
David Collard	1870-77
W. Sims	1877-83
T. Louis Collard	1883-94
J.D. Maxted	1894-1909

Herbert Collard was appointed clerk at £40 per annum, the first of only four who held the post during the next seventy-four years:

Herbert Collard	1835-40
William Forth	1840-65
Allen Fielding	1865-95
T. Louis Collard	1895-1909

Herbert Collard resigned in July 1840, apparently feeling his work had not been satisfactory enough.

The Union was divided into two districts, each having one receiving officer. The first district included Adisham, Barham, Bekesbourne, Bishopsbourne, Bridge, Ickham, Kingston, Littlebourne, Patribourne, Stodmarsh, Wickham and Womenswold. Captain Samuel Beechcroft was recommended as the receiving officer. The second district included Fordwich, Harbledown, Nackington, Petham, Thanington, Upper and Lower Hardres, Waltham and Westgate. Henry Illsby was appointed receiving officer. For medical assistance, supply of provisions and other matters districts were divided into four.

Other appointments were as follows:

Medical officer	£150 per annum (offered to the local doctor)
Chaplain	No details of salary
Schoolmistress	£32 per annum
Master and matron	£80 per annum, exclusive of rent, candles and living
Porter	10 shillings per week

John Weeks and his wife were appointed master and matron in August 1835 but resigned before the workhouse opened. Early in 1836 Thomas and Maria Cobb were appointed at salaries of £80 and £20 respectively.

Three cooks and three nurses completed the staff.

A committee was formed to find a suitable site, i.e. Richard Brice, Nathaniel Maynard, Robert Lathe, Richard Peckham and Denne Denne. They selected land near the Bridge-Canterbury turnpike road owned by the Conyngham family, which was purchased for £237.10s.0d. Tenders were invited and the estimate of T.F. Cozens of £4,376 was accepted. A £5,000 loan was obtained from the Exchequer.

Paupers were classified into seven groups: (1) aged or infirm men; (2) able-bodied men and youths over 13; (3) youths and boys over 7 and under 13; (4) aged or infirm women; (5) able-bodied women and girls above 16; (6) girls over 7 and under 16; (7) children under 7.

Numerous notices appeared in local newspapers, mostly inviting applications for jobs, or concerning Guardians' meetings and tenders for supplying beds, blankets, clothing and foods.

The first 100 inmates were admitted on 25th February 1836. Permission was sought to sell the old poorhouses to pay back the loan.

A common diet was adopted:

**BRIDGE UNION.**

**T**HE Guardians of the above Union are desirous of contracting for the supply of the undermentioned articles for Three Months from the 25th of December last., and Tenders for the same will be received at the Workhouse at BRIDGE, on **THURSDAY, the 17th instant, at or before Eleven o'Clock.**

Second Flour, at per sack  
Sides of Mutton (weighing 4½ stone), at per lb.

Suet, at per lb.  
Salt Butter, at per lb.  
Yellow Soap, at per lb.  
Black Tea, at per lb.  
Flat and sound Dutch or Gloucester cheese, at per lb.  
Salt, at per bushel  
Candles, at per dozen lb.  
Coals, at per ton  
Potatoes, at per cwt.

Persons tendering for butter, cheese, and soap, are requested to send samples with the same for the approval of the Board. The goods to be delivered carriage free.—Payments will be made monthly.

Also, at the same time and place, Tenders will be received for the supply of **BREAD**, made of good seconds flour, at per loaf of 2 and 4 lbs. weight each. The bread to be subject to approval or rejection by the Board of Guardians, or their Relieving Officers, and to be delivered in such quantities, and at such times and places, as they may be directed, in each of the following districts:—

**FIRST DISTRICT.**

Bridge, including the Workhouse  
Bishopsbourne  
Kingston  
Barham  
Patricbourne  
Womenswold

**SECOND DISTRICT.**

Adisham  
Beakesbourne  
Littlebourne  
Ickham  
Wickham  
Stodmarsh

**THIRD DISTRICT.**

Nackington  
Upper Hardres  
Lower Hardres  
Petham  
Waltham

**FOURTH DISTRICT.**

Thanington  
Fordwich  
Harbledown  
Westgate  
Chartham

By order of the Board,  
**HERBERT COLLARD, Clerk.**

Board-room, Dec. 11, 1835.

Breakfast and supper		Bread and cheese or butter, 6oz of bread for men, 5oz for women, with 1oz of cheese or ½oz of butter.
Dinner	Two days	Suet puddings and vegetables, 1lb pudding for men, 10oz for women.
	One day	Meat pudding with vegetables, 1lb pudding for men, 10oz for women.
	Four days	Bread and cheese, 7oz bread, 1oz cheese.
For old people		The same, plus 1oz of tea and milk for breakfast and supper.
For children		Bread and milk for breakfast and supper. Such proportion of the dinner diet for able-bodied as the Board of Guardians should decide.
For the sick		As ordered by the Medical Officer.

Subsequent alterations included a daily pint of beer for hard-working males, while the breakfast diet changed to gruel.

In the first quarter of 1847 the cost of keeping nineteen paupers was £27.8s.9d. The average weekly cost for the quarter ending Michaelmas was 3s.4½d of which 3½d was for clothing.

Other expenses could include grants enabling families to emigrate. On 27th February 1840 the Board permitted the parish officers of Upper Hardres to pay £5 to Thomas Hobbs' wife and children to emigrate to Australia. On 11th September £14.11s.3d was paid to Thomas Fairways and family of Chartham to emigrate to New Zealand.

Bridge workhouse was most used in the 1840s, when an average of nearly 200 paupers were held. Thereafter numbers declined – to 96 in the 1890s and 60 in the 1920s. Summer numbers were lower, especially at hop-picking time when the able-bodied discharged themselves.

The chaplain reported on 14th March 1842 that internal discipline was generally satisfactory and progress in educating children was good. It was said that Bridge had one of the best educational facilities in South-East England within workhouse confines.

Extensions became necessary in 1849. A cookhouse and porter's room were added. By 1866 a 'lock-up' room and lunacy house had been built and a vagrants' room was completed in 1869. Further alterations proposed in 1870 received some opposition, especially from Robert Lake, but were supported by George Dering, letters from both appearing in the 'Kentish Gazette'. Dering prevailed and twelve tenders were received in early 1872. Mr Toad's estimate of £1,925 was accepted for building casual wards, a stable and a coachhouse. Further work occurred in 1876 and 1900.

Some individuals stand out as having given exceptional service, such as the Collard family. In May 1864 Charles Collard retired after being chairman for twenty-one years, during which time he had 'discharged the onerous duty of the office with



## BRIDGE UNION.

### *Notice of the Annual Election of Guardians of the Poor.*

**T**HE Churchwardens and Overseers of the several Parishes comprised in the above-named Union, will, in pursuance of the Order of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, proceed on the 28th day of March now instant, to the Election of the Guardians of the Poor of such parishes as are prescribed in the Order constituting the above-named Union.

Any rate-payer or owner of property, being entitled to vote in any such parish, may propose as the Guardian or Guardians thereof, any number (not exceeding the number to be there elected) of persons who are severally rated to the poor rate of any parish or place in the Union in respect of property of the annual value or rental of £25, and who are not disqualified by having been dismissed from a parochial office by order of the Commissioners. The proposal must be made by a notice in writing according to the annexed Form A, and must be delivered to one of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the parish for which the Guardian is proposed, on or before the 21st day of March now instant.

In case of a contest for the office of Guardian in any of the said parishes, the votes will be given in papers to be left by the Churchwardens and Overseers two days, at least, before the day fixed for the election, at the houses of those residents in the parish who are then entitled to vote. All residents out of the parish, and all persons who become entitled after the last day appointed for leaving the voting papers, should apply in person to one of the Churchwardens and Overseers for voting papers on the day of election, and having filled up such voting papers, should deliver them to such Churchwardens or Overseers before noon on that day.

**HERBERT COLLARD,**  
Clerk to the Board of Guardians.  
FORM (A).

#### NOMINATION PAPER for the Parish of

Name of the Person proposed as a Guardian.	Quality & calling of the person proposed.	Qualification of Person proposed.		Name of Proposer.
		Description of qualifying Premises.	Amount of Assessment.	

credit to himself and advantage to the ratepayers. He ordered a dinner of good old English fare, roast beef and plum pudding.'

Later T. Louis Collard was chairman for eleven years and clerk for a further fourteen.

In July 1856 Mr and Mrs William Forth were presented with 'a very handsome silver teapot from ... Messrs Mason of this city (Canterbury) for their satisfactory work.' William died aged seventy on 18th April 1865. At times he had been relieving officer, master and clerk. A tablet was erected in his memory by the Guardians in St Peter's Church, Bridge.

The 'Kentish Gazette' occasionally reported cases involving inmates. At St Augustine's Petty Sessions in December 1860 John King and John Widderson were charged with breaking all the windows in the vagrants' ward. The prisoners, who had travelled twenty-six miles in search of work, were admitted for the night. As no food was given to them they broke the windows so as to be sent to prison. Mr Forth, the master, said that by an order from the Board he was not allowed to give food, unless in cases of extreme destitution. The two were sentenced to a week's imprisonment. The magistrate stated that he highly disapproved of the Guardians' order.

On 15th May 1860 Henry Johnson, alias 'Deaf Burke', an able-bodied pauper, was charged by the master with refusing to work. The defendant, having been previously convicted of a similar offence, was sentenced to a month's hard labour.

In October 1876 at the Petty Sessions James Kemp was summonsed with leaving his three infant children chargeable to Bridge Union since 13th July. Desertion was proved by the relieving officer. The defendant, 'a big strapping-looking fellow, who said he could not keep his children, was sent to gaol for six weeks with hard labour.'

Inmates normally joined in village festivals, thanks largely to benevolent well-to-do families such as the Conynghams. On 21st January 1868 children received a special treat when Miss Parker provided a substantial tea, following which they were entertained by Mr Linam's magic lantern, before Miss Parker and other ladies presented prizes.

On New Year's Day 1876 the inmates ... 'were liberally entertained ... a dinner of roast beef and plum pudding was kindly provided ... by the Marquis Conyngham and the wards were visited by various dignitaries who handed out tea, tobacco, snuff and cake.'

On 8th October 1878 the Earl of Mount Charles, son of the Marquis and Marchioness of Conyngham, came of age and celebrations were held. The first event took place at the workhouse where 'the whole of the inmates were entertained in a most liberal manner. Rooms and wards were richly decorated ... at 1 o'clock the old men and women and children sat down in their different wards to

**Editor's Note:** 'Deaf' Burke was a well-known pugilist, so was Henry Johnson handy with his fists?



a substantial repast of roast beef and plum pudding with beer. They were visited by the Marchioness and her accompanying ladies.'

Bridge workhouse eventually became a hospital and by the late 1960s was a care home for the elderly. The outside appearance is likely to remain unchanged as a preservation order was placed on it in 1980. Now known as 'The Close' it has been converted into attractive residences.

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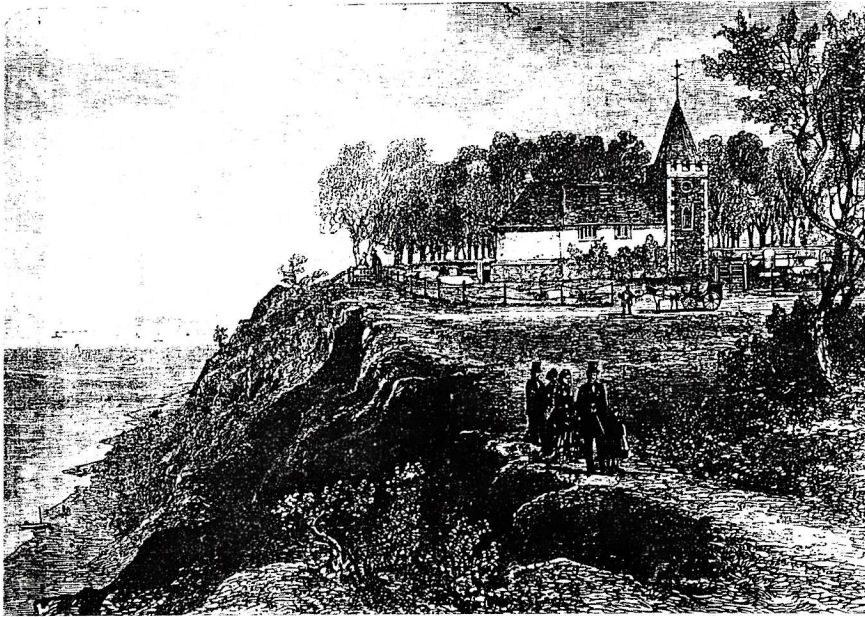
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#### Acknowledgements

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A mid-Victorian print of the cliff-top church at Warden.

## WARDEN CHURCH

By David T. Hughes

For several centuries a small church, standing high atop the clay cliffs at Warden Point in the Isle of Sheppey, presented a familiar landmark for passing sailors. None of the earliest records of the church at Warden have survived, and the date of its foundation remains a mystery. What is known is that the church was certainly of ancient origins, and in Norman times was in the possession of the Crown. On 24th October 1231, however, Henry III granted it to the hospital of St Mary, generally known as the Maison Dieu, at Dover. The church, which was dedicated to St James, remained with the Maison Dieu until the end of 1544 when the hospital was dissolved, Henry VIII taking all its possessions into his own hands. The King shortly afterwards regranted the church to Sir Thomas Cheyne of Shurland at Eastchurch. In 1559 the church was inherited by Sir Thomas Cheyne's spendthrift son Henry who, in the course of disposing of all the family possessions in Sheppey, surrendered it to Elizabeth I in return for lands elsewhere. The Queen shortly gave grant of the church to Sir Thomas Hoby of Bisham. In the centuries which then followed the church would be passed through several different hands.

Warden was never a rich parish, throughout most of its history comprising a small hamlet containing two or three cottages, an inn and the church. Dotted around lay Warden Manor, providing the only substantial house, and a few small farmsteads. The congregation of the church would never rise above some twenty persons. The lack of funds for the proper upkeep of the church, or to encourage a priest to serve it, would form a continuing strand throughout its history. The name of a few of the early clerics who did accept the incumbency have survived: William de Wrotham (on 13th January 1206), Thomas de Gillingham (16th March 1226), John de Gillingham (4th May 1226), Philip de Wigenhal (20th November 1231) and Roger de Sancto Albano (18th March 1232). In 1352 the priest was John de Maidstone.

That there was no house or other accommodation provided for the priest was a disincentive to recruitment which would never be addressed. During a Visitation of Archbishop William Warham in 1511 the parishioners complained 'that there is noo preest to syng divine service among us nor to minister the sacraments'. The situation was soon rectified in this instance but, during the subsequent history of the church there would continue to be some lengthy periods when there was no minister.

In 1529 John Bellinger of Faversham left a bequest to the church for 'a Vestment complete of green satin of Brugges, with a remembrance on the back of the giver, and Image of St James'. Apparently the roof was at this time becoming in need of some attention, in 1533 Thomas Sigar making provision in his Will for 'the Church of Wardon, a 1000 shingles'. Another benefactor of Warden would be Stephen