

A TOUR AROUND BRIDGE

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Bridge village is situated in the Nailbourne Valley in an attractive rural setting on the old Roman Watling Street, formerly the main road between London and Dover. The village is the main settlement in the Parish of Bridge and lies 2.5 miles south east of Canterbury and 12 miles from Dover.

It is likely that the parish took its name from "Bregge" a bridge which crossed the Little Stour, a tributary of the Stour itself.

The village is linear in form having grown northwards and eastwards along Watling Street and away from the River Nailbourne which floods periodically. The older part of the village is built on fairly level alluvial and head deposits, the height of the land varying between 25m. and 50m. above sea level. In the early 1960's a significant amount of residential building took place to the south of the centre of the village at Bridge Down. This development is situated on north west facing chalkland between 50m. and 75m. above sea level.

As a result of the 1986 parish boundary changes Bridge village now lies slightly offcentre in a parish reduced in size. Although land to the north west, north east and south east was gained from Patricbourne and Bishopsbourne, more to the south west was lost to Lower Hardres, Upper Hardres and Bishopsbourne.

Bridge, like other similar villages in the locality is a popular residential area for people working in Canterbury and other nearby towns.

A SHORT HISTORY

The village of Bridge, straddling the main road from Dover to Canterbury has been an important village since the Roman occupation of England.

There was probably a Roman bridge across the river (Cf. Bruges which has a similar site and name) . The village is situated on the old coaching route from Dover to London, known as Watling Street. In the parish records there are detailed many marriages between passing travellers and local villagers.

Near by on the Barham Downs the armies used to assemble for campaigns abroad such as "The Field of the Cloth of Gold", the Seven Years War and also India in the mid 19th Century.

The church in characteristic Kentish flint was restored with money given by Mrs. Gregory in 1852. It is a feature of the village as you come down the hill from Canterbury and is even more exposed since the great storm in October, 1987.

A characteristic of Bridge are the large manor houses near the village:

- Bridge Place was the home of the Braemes family (Sir Arnold Braemes was the first manager of the Dover Harbour Board),

- Higham House, now known as Highland Court was one of the largest country houses in East Kent in the 17th Century, Count Zebrovsky of Chitty, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang fame lived in the house earlier this century.
- Bridge Hill House was the former home of the grandson of the French philosopher Montesquieu,
- East Bridge House,

to mention but a few. A little further away is Bourne Park where Mozart stayed once to attend the horse races on the Barham Downs!

There are three pubs of great antiquity. In The White Horse a famous brawl took place which is recorded in the Church Archives of Christopher Applegate, a contemporary of Marlowe.

The Post Office is a great centre of the village and was used by Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, then living at Broome Park, to send his first despatch in 1914.

One of the first work houses in Kent was built in 1837 in Union Road and the Record Book gives the names of many inmates who, often forced by poverty, took up residence there.

There are not many villages that can boast such varied architecture from Tudor to Victorian. The centre of village is a Designated Conservation Area but constant vigilance is needed to see that a high standard is maintained.

Bridge which has survived two wars mercifully undamaged, has grown since the war and with this growth has come social change and mobility. The population of Bridge was 1,297 at the 1981 Census. New houses have been built at Bridge Down and Western Avenue in the 1950's and 1960's. Riverside Close was developed in the 1970's and 1980's and the most recent addition is Mansfield Court.

One of the surgeons returning from the Battle of Waterloo, Dr. James wrote that "he was much impressed by the happiness and jollity of the inhabitants" of Bridge!

1. Description of the Parish

Triangular in shape; location of population; origin of the parish as offshoot of Patricbourne; swine pastures in the weald [*Arch Cant* 76, 1961 pp58-74: PH Reaney, Place-Names and Early Settlement in Kent] History of Burne Domesday book does not mention Bridge, as at that time it was a part of Patricbourne. The name does however occur in the Domesday Monachorum, so there was at least a Saxon church (or chapel) pre-existing. Bridge Church itself built ca end of 12th century. (like many others). Maybe this was the point at which Bridge Parish came into existence. Bridge Hundred does exist in Domesday. Was this a meeting point of the hundred, by the river?

"In Bridge Hundred Richard son of William holds Patricbourne from the Bishop [Odo of Bayeux] It answers for 6 sulungs. Land for 8 ploughs. In lordship 3 ploughs. 44 villagers

twenty years since [ie ca 1835, but according to *The Archaeological Album* about 12 years ago, ie 1833] in digging the high road above Bourne Park a quantity of Romano-British sepulchral urns were found. More recently, while excavations were being made in the low ground for a sheet of water [ie Bourne Park lake] Mr Bell discovered several Roman interments” These were both burials on coffins and urns of burned ashes.

Arch Cant, 73, 1959 p 62-74: PH Reaney A Survey of Kent Place-Names, suggests that Bekesbourne (Livingsbourne) was tenanted in 1066 by a surviving saxon family.

3 Bourne, earlier Hautbourne

Sir William Haute of Bishopsbourne involved in Buckingham’s rebellion of 1483 [pro Richard III] was the son of Sir William Haute of Bishopsbourne who had married Joan Woodville, sister of the first Earl Rivers in 1429 He was, therefore, a first cousin to the queen and brother to Sir Richard Haute of Ightham Mote, who had been beheaded at Pomfret. [William Cheney of Sheppey also involved] [Lady Elizabeth Grey d. of Lord Rivers of the Mote married Edward IV secretly in 1464] AE Conway: THE MAIDSTONE SECTOR OF BUCKINGHAM’S REBELLION. OCT. 18 1483 *Arch Cant* 37, 1925 pp 97-120. [Pedigree of Sir Richard Woodville of The Mote on p 120] Cheney, Haute & Guilford families all in it together.

Arch Cant 41, 1929, pp 181-185: WH Godfrey, BOURNE PARK, NEAR CANTERBURY : ref to Book of Bourne. Sr Anthony Aucher was Marshall of Calais, Governor of Guisnes and Master of the Jewel House to Henry VIII, Edward VI and Queen Mary, and was killed at the taking of Calais in 1558. His descendant Sir Anthony was created Baronet in 1666. Two sons inherited, and when Sir Hewitt (for whom his mother had built the house in ca 1700, Westenhanger part demolished in 1701) died (1726) title became extinct. His eldest sister married Dr Corbett who had 5 daughters, eldest of whom married Stephen Beckingham. Matthew Bell snr bought from the widow of Rev JC Beckingham, who had died in 1807. Bourne tenanted in 1844 by Lord Londesborough, brother of Marquess Conyngham.

4 Bifrons, a brief history; Bargraves; Conynghams; Patrixbourne Road

[*Arch Cant* 4; 1861 pedigree of Bargrave:] *Arch Cant* 14, 1882 p 173: suggestion that Bargrave or Bargar derives from Baracre or Beracre. Edward Taylor succeeded to Bifrons in 1767. Died 1792. Erected new Bifrons on site close to the old one. His building is the present house, but its exterior has been cased, and it has been otherwise altered.

Illustrations of Bifrons in *Arch Cant* 107, 1989, pp327-332: - The first house, and in 1794 before 19th c remodelling. Demolished 1948. First built ca 1600. Painting by Jan Siberechts ca 1705/10. new building 1767 by Rev Edward Taylor.. Minor alterations after Conynghams bought in 1830, by Thomas Hunt (d. 1831) and his pupil GH Smith in 1835. Major rebuild in 1863/64. The early Georgian House was virtually demolished. Predominant bricks in rebuild were Faversham soft reds and LBC yellows.

13 [Higham]

Is in Patricbourne.

14 The Hexagon; Star Hill; Military

Arch Cant 56, 1943 p 69: RF Jessup, MISC NOTES: "Saxon barrows inside Bourne Park mutilated by excavation in 1845 now obliterated by recent ploughing under war emergency. The Race Course... was responsible for much destruction... A small regular six-sided enclosure appears immediately to the NE of the hammer-shaped tree enclosure in Bourne Park. About 400 yards to the SE and 50 yards from the Roman road is a fairly large barrow circle, possibly Roman. Three other possible Roman barrow circles. . . could be seen in the fields between Bourne Park and Charlton Park." The six-sided enclosure (hexagon – cf aerial photo) is by no means small: It has a radius of approx 18 metres. Recent (2001-3, ongoing) excavations have revealed a surrounding ditch, and at least two graves. Date: Iron-Age, possible pre-Roman.. It lies very close to the line of Kingsbury Road as it rises up Star Hill (why the name?) 'Before quitting Barham Downs and their neighbourhood, it will be well to notice one or two other features, which are corroborative as to their having been the site of Caesar's camp.

On the brow of the hill, in Bourne Park, there are what appears to be the remains of two outposts, 400 yards apart, surrounded each by a ditch. They are of the same dimensions, and form almost perfect hexagons, each side being about 50 feet in length. They are situated in commanding positions on a hill, called locally "Star Hill," and would afford excellent stations for the guards placed before the gates of the camp, whence they could view the position and movements of the enemy. They are known traditionally as "the Forts". They are now bare of trees, but have the appearance of having been planted at some comparatively recent period.

A deep depression a few yards distant from one of these may possibly have been one of those extemporized amphitheatres with which we know Caesar sought amusement for his soldiers, when not in actual combat...'

(FT Vine: Caesar in Kent, privately printed, 1886, pp 191/2, copy in possession of R Neame, esq., Bishopsbourne)

The 'deep depression' referred to above is not, it seems a reference to 'Old England's Hole', since Vine refers to that separately on pp 167-9 of his book.

See in reference to these comments the attached MS commentary by Matthew Bell of Bourne House (transcribed by Martin Vye). Mr Bell refers to a Scotch Fir plantation. 1838 tithe map identifies Star Hill, but no woodland is marked. 1801 map is too unclear to tell, 1764 map too unreliable.

The hexagons were evidently visible on the ground in 1886. They appear on no maps. I do not know where the second one may be, but the one in the photo is currently invisible to the amateur eye. The ground is covered in long dry grass at the moment. If mown and put to sheep it might show something. Photo was taken in February 1982.

As an enclosure to a plantation the hexagon is too regular: indeed it seems too mathematically precise altogether. The rounded corners I detect appear to be centred on the angles of the inner dark hexagon. It is situated on a high (but not the highest) part of the hill. A small tower (25ft or so) would give an uninterrupted 360 degree panorama, over the top of any trees. Wishful thinking?

The scale of the photo I have judged to be 5cm : 9m approx., which gives a maximum diameter to the feature of 36m - rather large - it looks more mediaeval than Roman!.

15 Mediaeval facts

Arch Cant 346, 1934, p 33f: Will of Joan widow of John Denys late of Welle next Littlebourne 8 feb 1441: To the fabric of the churches in Bekesbourne, Patrykkesbourne and Bregge 6s 8d each

Arch Cant 50; 1938 THE REGISTER AND CHARTULARY OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST LAURENCE, CANTERBURY p 48: "Warin Brends, son of Osborn of Pette, near Rodweye, grants to the brothers and sisters of the hospital of St Laurence all his lands in Bregge [Bridge] to be held of grantor at a yearly rent of 16d, a payment of 31d to Ralph Clerk, 1d Romescot, 1 hen and 3 farthings, 'and he that carries the hen shall eat it there or bring it back' (qui illam portaverit illuc manducabit vel reportabit). . . ." (ca. 1331).

16 Old Englands Hole

[FT Vine: CAESAR IN KENT, 1886 p 169; 2ND EDN 1887, Elliot Stock p 172;] "Never forget, my son," said the father of him whose researches and suggestions have done so much to inspire the writer of these pages, "Never forget that this is 'Old england's Hole' and that here a last stand was made for liberty by your British forefathers." . . . The rampart and ditch by which [the oppidum] was surrounded may still be traced. An agger or mound. . . still remains. . . Watling street. . . runs close to the enclosure, below the modern road by which Bridge Hill is now ascended [not true] The rampart of the oppidum on this side is even now of considerable height, and must at one time have been at least twenty feet high [2nd edn - not in 1st] Other evidence: "When the present road on Bridge Hill was dug out in 1829 five or six Roman urns, with six or eight human skulls, were discovered about five feet below the surface, embedded in the chalk. The remains of a horst in a ferruginous condition were found within the oppidum by some boys about fifteen years ago [1872]. There is still a slight bank surrounding the Hole, though it is probably a chalk pit, partly filled in by Matthew Bell. It is too small (and badly positioned) to be a defensive position. Alec Detsicas in *The Cantiaci*, p.2 (1983) remarks: "The Hill-fort at Bigbury, the precursor of Belgic Canterbury, controlled the crossing of the Stour". Bigbury is SE of the Stour, *before* the crossing. Sheppard Frere, writing in 1967 (revised ed 1987) says "In the early morning he reached the Stour and easily drove the Britons from the

crossing. The principal ford lay at the future site of Canterbury. No settlement yet existed on this site [but later, Frere refers to Belgic Canterbury: did it appear between 54BC and 43AD??], but a hill-fort lay on the heights above at Bigbury, one and a half miles beyond the ford." Evidence has been found for Belgic settlement at Canterbury. The town is more than twice as far from Bigbury as suggested. And why should Caesar cross the river *before* attacking Bigbury? A romantic solution might be that he did in fact encounter Britons at Old England's Hole, who then retired to Bigbury along the Kingsbury Road. The river would then be the little Stour. But C. doesn't then mention the Stour crossing. None of these arguments quite work.

Old England's Hole

This is most probably an old quarry, cut into the side of the old road to Dover out of Bridge at about the lowest practicable point of the hill where chalk is available. It is however also a source of much romantic speculation. The theory that it is the site of an encounter between Britons and Romans is of relatively recent (early 19th century) origin. The following account is almost wholly fanciful (Caesar died of course in 44 BC. His second British expedition was in 54 BC. Nero was Emperor in AD 56).

'At the summit of the... rise out of Bridge, the road, running exactly on the site of the Roman Watling Street, comes to that bleak and elevated table-land known as Barham Downs, the scene of Caesar's great battle with the Britons on July 23rd, AD 56. Twenty-seven thousand Roman soldiers, horse and foot, met the wild rush of the Britons, who, with the usual undisciplined and untaught courage of uncivilised races, flung themselves upon the invaders and were thrown back by the impenetrable wall of the serried phalanxes. Recoiling dismayed from this reception, they were instantly pursued by the Roman cavalry and cut up into isolated bands, who fought courageously all that fatal day in the dense woodlands. Protected by mounds and trenches defended with palisades of stakes cunningly interwoven with brushwood, they prolonged the hopeless contest until nightfall, and then fell back. Caesar, describing these woodland forts as *oppida*, gives especial attention to one troublesome stronghold. "Being repulsed," he writes, "they withdrew themselves into the woods and reached a place which they had prepared before, having closed all approaches to it by felled timber." This retreat was captured by soldiers of the Seventh Legion, who, throwing up a mound against it, advanced, holding their shields over their heads in the military formation known as "the tortoise," and drove out the defenders at the sword's point.

This, the last place to hold out, is, despite the eighteen and a half centuries that have passed, still to be seen in Bourne Park, on the summit of Bridge Hill, and is familiarly known in the neighbourhood as "Old England's Hole." "Never forget," the old countryfolk have been wont to impress their children - "never forget that this is Old England's Hole, and that on this spot a last stand for freedom was made by your British forefathers."

Every one in the neighbourhood knows Old England's Hole. It is seen beside the road, on the right hand, just where the cutting through the crest of the hill, made in 1829, to ease the pull-up for the coach-horses, begins. At that same time the course of the road was very slightly diverted, and, instead of actually impinging on this ancient historic landmark, as before, was made to run a few feet away. Now the spot is seen across the fence of the park, the old course of the road still traceable beside it as a slightly depressed

green track, plentifully dotted with thistles. The stronghold consists of a crater-like hollow, encircled by earthen banks, still high and steep. A great number of ash-trees and thorns, some very old, gnarled and decayed, grow on these banks, and cast a dense shade upon the interior.'

(CG Harper: The Ingoldsby Country, 1904, pp63-6)

In 1846, during excavation for a lake in Bourne Park, Samian pottery and other articles were found at a depth of 10-13ft. Also, nearby, Roman interments, including a large urn containing ashes at the same depth. Also three skeletons with large nails near the shoulders, hands and feet. A few Roman coins. Faussett in 1771 mentions over 100 tumuli on Hanging Hill, in front of and between Bourne Place, Bishopsbourne and the Roman road; others had been ploughed down. These were Saxon. (Wright).

17 Bourne Gatehouse

Built in 1857 by Matthew Bell of Bourne House as Gate Lodge to Bourne. Bourne Park Road was until after WWII a gated road at both ends. One post on the upper side of the road remains here. It is probable that there was a previous lodge on this side to guard the entrance to the park. And Ogilby's map of the Dover Road of 1675 marks 'The Greyhound' on this site in the corner of 'Sir Anth. Aucher's Park'

Aucher owned Bourne Estate at the time. The Lodge has a number of ghost stories attached to it: one concerns a Victorian coachman in his greatcoat who was seen at the window by a young boy in the 1970's; another is of a young woman being brought into the house severely injured after her coach had turned over on the hill. A motorist on the hill is also said to have had to swerve on the hill outside to avoid something apparently crossing the road, although closer inspection revealed nothing there.

Some ghostly anecdotes

Mystery at Bridge

On Sunday February 14, I was driving home from Whitstable, the evening was dark and I passed through the village of Bridge at approximately 7 pm. I had commenced the run up the hill leading from the village to Dover, when a dark shape, which I took to be a van without lights, crossed the road from my left to the right about 20 yards ahead, moving quite slowly. It did not turn down the hill towards Bridge, neither did it go up the hill, but seemed to disappear into the churchyard. I thought that perhaps I had imagined the apparition, but my friend sitting in the front passenger seat remarked: 'He had no lights nor was there any noise.' We were both very puzzled by the incident, and were convinced that we had seen something unnatural, although we were unaware of any previous reports of this type of encounter. We have since mentioned it to friends and two of them have stated that this has been reported as being sighted before.

Our wives were in the back seat, and being busy talking noticed nothing unusual and were inclined to treat our statements as a leg pull. The only drink we had was tea, and I assure you we were not joking. I have since passed through Bridge at night and have carefully noted that it could not have been a shadow.

This statement can be confirmed with my friend, Mr F Pursey, of 7 Pilgrims way, Dover.

If you are aware of any history likely to be connected with this, if in book form, I should be much obliged to know the author and title of same

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