

# BRIDGE—Its Life and Activities. ::

## A FASCINATING HISTORY

The Manors of Blackmansbury and Bereacre

## A LIVE COMMUNITY

Many Social and Sporting Organisations

**B**RIDGE, which for the most part consists of a long main street with an unbroken line of houses on either side, is a delightful old world village, surrounded by picturesque undulating country, which pleasantly combines great and ancient traditions with modern amenities. Located less than three miles from Canterbury, it has a population of about 900.

How little, comparatively, the village has changed in character and contour in the course of the centuries will be appreciated from the following description of it which is given in "The History and Topographical Survey of Kent" by Hasted:—

**BRIDGE**

Lies the next adjoining parish to Patrixbourne fouthward, being written in old deeds, Bregge, and taking its name from the bridge, which was ~~formerly~~ over the stream which crosses it. This parish was in early times so ~~confederate~~ as to give name both to the hundred and deanry in which it is situated.

It is situated about two miles and an half eastward of Canterbury, on the high Dover road, formerly the Roman Watling-freet way, which appears high and entire almost throughout it; in the valley on this road stands the village of Bridge, with the church and vicarage in it, a low moft situation, the bourn or stream of the Little Stour crossing it under a stone bridge, built a few years ago by the contributions of the neighbouring gentlemen. At a small diftance fouthward is Bridge Place.

The hills, from which there is a most pleasing prospect, are wholly chalk, as are in general the other upland parts of it, towards the fouth especially, where the country is very barren, with healthy ground and woodland, and much covered with ftones. In this part of the parish is Goffey Wood, once belonging to St. Augustine's Monastery, afterwards granted to Thomas Colepeper Eft.

**THE ANCIENT MANORS**

Originally it appears that the ancient manor of Blackmansbury extended over the greater part of Bridge, and the manor of Patrixbourne over that part of the parish on the north side of the Dover road. The manor of Blackmansbury was originally parcel of the possessions of the Abbey of St. Augustine's, and so continued until the suppression of the Abbey by King Henry VIII. Sir Arnold Braems, who came into possession of the Manor in 1638, built a spacious and magnificent mansion which he named Bridge Place. The great cost of building this seat so impoverished the estate that the heirs of St. Thomas Braems were obliged to part with it in 1704 to Mr. John Taylor, of Bifrons, who pulled down the greater part of the mansion, leaving only one wing standing.

Bereacre, afterwards called Great and Little Barakers, was another famous manor in the parish, which, in the reign of King Edward I, was in the possession of Walter de Kancia. Eventually the manor was also acquired by Mr. John Taylor of Bifrons. Both the above manors have now been merged into other properties and have lost their identity.

The Church of Bridge, which is described in the old records as a chapel to the Church of Patrixbourne, is a building of great historic and antiquarian interest, and possesses a number of notable monuments to members of famous families who lived in the district. Hasted, in his "History of Kent," describes the church as consisting of "three ifes, a high chancel, and a north fept or chancel in the middle of the north ife; it has a fpire fteeple at the fouth-eaft corner, in which are three bells." Since then, a certain amount of restoration to the church has taken place. Hasted also records that "in 1588 there were eighty-nine communicants, in 1649, one hundred and twenty." The present

Vicar (the Rev. Hubert Knight) has been the incumbent of the joint churches of Patrixbourne and Bridge for a period of over thirty years.

Naturally, the residents of Bridge are extremely proud of their great and historic traditions; but they are, withal, conscious of the needs of the times in which they live, a very live community. Modern methods and enterprise are features of the trading and business activities of the village, and Bridge is unusually well favoured in the matter of organisations for the provision of those social amenities which are so important in the rural areas at a time of unparalleled depression in the agricultural industry.

**The British Legion**

The Bridge and District Branch of the British Legion may justly claim to be one of the most successful units in this great national organisation of ex-Service men. It is estimated that about 90 per cent. of the men in the area who have served in the Forces are members of the branch, whilst apart from furthering the specific objects of the Legion, a great deal is done to promote the welfare and happiness of the people in the district. A great part of the credit for the success of the branch must be given to Mr. S. Waghorn, the extremely able and energetic Hon. Secretary, who puts his whole heart into the work. Sir John Prestige, who succeeded the late Colonel the Hon. M. G. Talbot as President, takes a deep personal and active interest in the movement, and the branch has a most popular Chairman in Mr. H. B. Spanton. On Anniversary Day and on other occasions the members always turn out in force to pay fitting homage to the old comrades who fell in the war, and the branch is to be represented at the forthcoming Rally on June 2 at Preston Hall, which will be attended by the Prince of Wales.

The branch may be said to be almost the mainspring of the social life of the district. Entertainments, social evenings, and treats of various kinds are organised, all of which provide keen enjoyment, and the dinner which is held by the Legion every year is a memorable event.

**Seaman and Farmer**

Mr. H. B. Spanton, the Chairman of the branch, is a typical representative of the agricultural life of the county. The family originally belonged to Spanton, near Pickering, in Yorkshire. Subsequently a branch of the Spantons migrated to Norfolk; in the later years of the 18th century Mr.

William Spanton came to Canterbury, and in 1792 married a Miss Forster, and in 1792 married a Miss Forster, that time the Spantons have been very prominent in the agricultural industry of East Kent. The late Mr. Harry Spanton, the father of the Chairman of the Bridge branch of the British Legion, who served for many years at Chislehurst Court, was not only extraordinarily popular and an exceptionally good father, but in face, figure and character he was a perfect representative of John Bull. His younger son, Mr. Frank Spanton, still carries on Chislehurst Court.

Mr. H. B. Spanton, who farms some 400 acres at Lenhall Farm, Bishopsbourne, in his early years forsook agriculture for "the call of the sea," and was educated at Sandrich School, after a period "on the farm" he qualified as a master mariner, and subsequently held a commission in the Royal Naval Reserve. He was a member of the Admiralty in the Mercantile Marine, Mr. Spanton retired in April, 1912, but was mobilised on April 22, 1915, for active duty in the Great War, serving on H.M.S. *Ark Royal* and H.M.S. *Empress* respectively. He was demobilised on October 2, 1919, and returned to his old occupation on the land. After being tenant of Howletts Farm from 1922 to 1928 he took Trench Farm, Bishopsbourne, and was married to Miss Edith Petham, of the Petham Church.

**The Gentle Old Man**  
 Bridge is justly proud of Mr. Charles Wills, the village's Gentle Old Man. He will celebrate his 84th birthday next week. He has earned the gratitude of the residents by reason of his long career of useful public service. As a boy, he attended the Commercial School at Canterbury and then the Dane John Academy. He then carried on his father's bakery business, of which he assumed control on his father's death in 1896.

Mr. Wills is justly proud of his long career of useful public service. As a boy, he attended the Commercial School at Canterbury and then the Dane John Academy. He then carried on his father's bakery business, of which he assumed control on his father's death in 1896. O charming and sympathetic disposition, he has prominently identified himself with nearly every phase of the village life. For some 70 years he assisted the St. Peter's Church Choir, and in the years gone by was always a popular entertainer in the district. Perhaps, however, Mr. Wills' chief claim to distinction is his connection for over 50 years with the Bridge Fire Brigade, of which he was Chief Officer for over 30 years. Upon his retirement he was elected Hon. Chief Officer. At the recent Fire Brigades' Tournament at Canterbury his health was enthusiastically honoured by the officers of the South Eastern District.

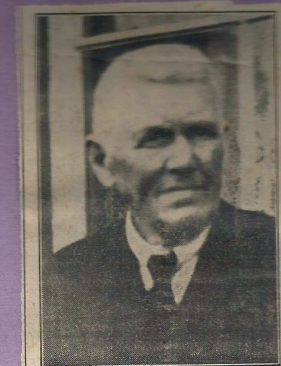
Among his official activities may be mentioned his long service on the Bridge R.D.C. and the old Board of Guardians, his chairmanship of the Parish Council, of which he had been a member since its inception, and his secretaryship for nearly half-a-century of the Bridge Gas, Coal and Coke Co.

During the war he was nightly on duty at the canteen run at the Reading Room for the benefit of the troops stationed at Bourne Park. In his youth he was a keen cricketer and turned out for the local club for many years, while upon his ceasing to take an active part in the game, he assumed the duties of scorer. Despite his 84 years, "Old Charlie" is remarkably active and vigorous. He comes of a long-lived family. His aunt, the late Mrs. Hayzen, who lived with him, was a centenarian, and it is the sincere hope of everybody in the village that he himself will keep up his wicket and run into three figures.

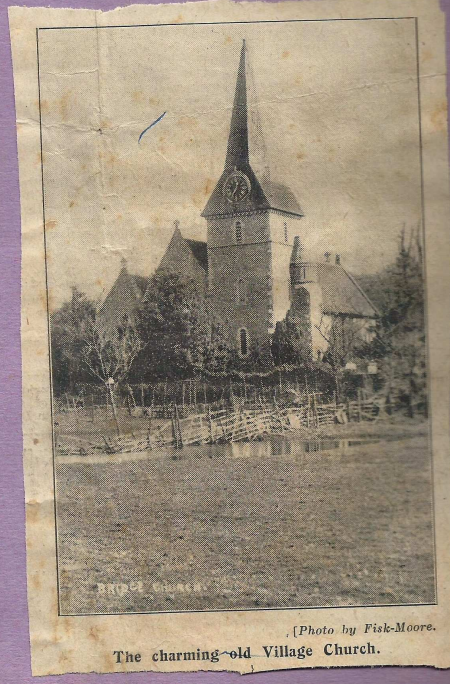
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Mr. H. B. Spanton, Chairman of Bridge and District British Legion.



Mr. "Charles" Wills, the "G.O.M."



The charming old Village Church. (Photo by Fisk-Moore.)

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