

Police Sergeant F A Blee

History

Frederick Blee was born in Sheerness on the 16th of April 1908. Following the death of his Father, one of 352 men killed when H M S Princess Irene exploded off Sheerness in 1915, he started work in the dockyard aged fourteen.

Joining the Police Force in 1929 he was stationed at Sevenoaks, Chatham and Deal where he served for seven years as a Detective Constable. Promoted to Sergeant in 1939 he served briefly in Herne Bay before moving to Bridge just as war was declared.

Time in Bridge

In Bridge he took over the largest rural patch in Kent. It spread from Stodmarsh to Chartham Hatch and Stelling Minnis, then Renville to Barham and Woolage Green and back through Bramling to Ickham and Wickhambreux – quite an area in the days of bicycles for the PCs and communication through the public telephone box!

Life in rural Kent was incredibly busy throughout The Battle of Britain and beyond. With lots of bomb damage and many crashed aircraft he worked closely with the emergency services even becoming quite skilled at bomb disposal himself. On many occasions day or night, Fred would go out to find out what had happened after a raid and to see what help was required, often not returning for many hours.

His keen interest and qualifications in first aid were often of life saving importance, he also instructed first aid teams for competitions, including the F Division Police team and the Coal Board team from the Kent mines.

In the post-war years the village Horticultural Society was struggling to bring The Flower Show back to life and seeing the need, Fred Blee stepped in to help quickly finding himself Chairman, a position which he held until his sudden death from a heart attack in 1956 at the age of 48.

Family memories

Fred Blee's eldest son Robin has early memories of arriving in Bridge as a four year old in September 1939 – firstly to a terrace in Main Street and then a move to Union Road. He remembers the air raid shelter being built in the back garden and wondering why he was hustled down there at night until he heard the shriek of bombs falling on Bekesbourne Aerodrome! The next day he remembers his Father showing him one of the crude whistle devices fixed to the bombs which made the terrible noise.

Communications were very basic in those days and plans didn't always work out! If enemy paratroopers landed, then church bells were to be rung. Robin says that "late one night Dad and a PC heard bells ringing, it was with relief that they realised what they were hearing was two separate village clocks striking twelve one after the other!"

Robin recalls that his father was called out to many varied incidents, once a dog had fallen down a disused well which was fortunately dry. You can guess who went down with a sack to bring the poor animal out!

His father also had a good singing voice and would occasionally sing in public. When the war ended and VE Day (or night) was celebrated he was faced with getting the pubs empty. He organised a "band" complete with cornet player, sang a song or two and led a Conga up the A2 from one pub to another. After the third pub and safely going up Union Road he thought that the job was done, only to find that the revellers kept going right round into the village again!

The second son David was born in 1940 and remembers there being piles of "safe" bombs and ammunition in the garden, to say nothing of the various guns that he used to play with! On one occasion his father caused quite a stir by driving home with a large bomb strapped to the boot of his car! He had a great sense of humour and once a departing bomb disposal team left him a leaving present on the front lawn in the middle of the night – a particularly large bomb! Apparently some people were too scared to walk past on the road!

His third son Michael was born just before war ended in 1945 and recalls that policing was very different in those days – "I can remember that it always seemed to snow every winter, every child in the village had a toboggan and I remember Dad (in his uniform) towing a whole string of us up Union road behind his car on our way to Collards fields!"

The Clock

Following his death a decision was made in the villages to do something in his memory. Money was collected and used to erect the clock which still keeps time on Bridge Village Hall over sixty years later.

SEPTEMBER 6th, 1957

Sergeant Fred's memorial

FOR 17 years Sergeant Fred Blee was the police force in the little Kent village of Bridge.

But he was more than a policeman. He never stopped working to help the villagers, who grew to love their sergeant.

A few weeks ago, while organising the local flower show, he died after a heart attack. He was 48.

Now the people of Bridge are honouring his memory. They plan to erect a clock outside the village hall, with a plaque in memory of the sergeant.

Mr. Harry Hawkins, chairman of the parish council, said yesterday: "When he died we realised what a great loss to us he was.

"He was always on duty and would always put himself out to help the many people who used to visit his home with their problems."

Sergeant Fred, who had 27 years' police service, left a widow and four children.



THE FAMILY of the late Sgt. F. A. Blee, of Bridge, look on as Major J. T. Prestige unveils the Village Hall clock erected in his memory. The ceremony, on Sunday afternoon, was followed by a service of dedication in the hall.

Bridge

P.S. BLEE'S FUNERAL.—

The respect and affection in which Police Sergeant F. A. Blee, of Bridge, was held was evidenced on Thursday afternoon by the very large attendance at the cremation ceremony at Barham. The impressive service was conducted by the Rev. V. Evans. Mr. Blee's sudden death was reported last week. In addition to the widow, sons and other family mourners, the congregation included the Chief Constable of Kent (Sir John Ferguson), Assistant Chief Constable N. Fowler, Supt. G. Beslee, Chief Inspector H. N. Tebay, inspectors, sergeants, and constables of F Division. Special Constabulary representatives and Police Pensioners, and Ald. Mrs. G. R. Hews, also representing the Mayor of Canterbury (Coun. W. S. Bean). A large number of the officers and members of the Bridge and District Horticultural Society attended, together with numerous residents of the area of which P.S. Blee had charge.

BRIDGE MOURNS P.S. BLEE

Sudden Death Shock

The news of the sudden death on Monday of Police-Sergeant Frederick A. Blee, of the Police House, Bridge, came as a great shock not only to his colleagues in the Force, but to the many friends he has made in the area of which he was in charge.

Returning from a trip to the seaside on Monday, he was taken ill and collapsed and died in the kitchen. He leaves a widow and three sons, one of whom was by his first marriage.

Sergt. Blee, who was only 48 and a native of Sheerness, joined the Kent County Constabulary in April 1929, first serving at Sevenoaks. In March 1932, he went as detective-constable to Chatham and was transferred to Deal in October of that year. He remained there for six years before being transferred to Seabrook. In January 1939, he was promoted sergeant to Herne Bay and came to Bridge in September 1939, where he had remained ever since.

A popular and efficient officer with a keen sense of humour, he will be sadly missed. He was keenly interested in first-aid and acted as trainer of the 'F' Division team. He was chairman of the Bridge and District Horticultural Society, the success of which in the post-war years has been largely due to the drive and energy he put into the work. He was always the life and soul of the outside events at the annual shows.

Cremation took place at Barham yesterday (Thursday) afternoon.

The faithful policeman gets a memorial in his village

MEN and women of a small village are honouring the memory of their policeman, who never stopped working for them till he died suddenly last month.

They have decided to put up a clock outside the village hall with a plaque naming the man who served them so well, in and out of uniform, for 17 years—P.-Sgt. Frederick Blee.

Sgt. Blee went to the Kent village of Bridge (pop. 713), near Canterbury, at the beginning of the war.

VERSATILE

He was soon busy dealing with raid damage, organising first aid classes, covering his country beat and taking part in village affairs.

"He would always put himself out to help the many people who visited his home with their problems," Mr. Harry Hawkins, chairman of Bridge parish council, said yesterday.

"When he died just before the horticultural show he was running,

people kept asking me what they could do to show our appreciation of his work."

Sgt. Blee, who was 48 and had 27 years' police service, left a wife and four children, two of whom are at school.

"He took part in the many sides of social life

and was accepted by everyone as a friend," said the vicar, the Rev. Geoffrey Church.

"A very good sergeant, who achieved the distinction of really belonging to the locality," said Kent's deputy chief constable, Mr. R. C. Jenkins.

Pastor told 'Your wife's safe'

AN anonymous telephone call told Derby police that a pastor's wife, missing since Wednesday, is safe with friends.

But the message did not say where she is, so pastor Richard Knill set out early on Saturday to look for his wife Ethel who fled, he believes, from evil spirits.

He questioned postmen and tradesmen in Derby and showed them a photograph of his wife.

Later he went to Nottingham, Duffield and Alfreton. He conducted open-air gospel meetings in market squares in the hope of attracting his wife's attention.

"I will comb the whole of the Midlands to find her," he said.

When Mrs. Knill dis-

appeared last week her husband said he thought she had been made to flee from their home, Overton Hall, near Ashover, Derbyshire, by evil spirits.

Yesterday police decided it was not a matter requiring their attention and called off inquiries.

CAPTAIN

Daily Sketch Reporter

A CAPTAIN changed into gold-braided uniform on a Hull dock-side yesterday, set his cap at the right angle, and spoke two words: "Scuttle her."

