

Interview by Rosemary Whatley - 2023

I'm speaking to Martin Vye who has lived in Bridge for many years now. Can you tell me when you came to Bridge, and what brought you here?

We bought the house in Patricbourne Road in 1968 and moved here in 1969. The reason for us coming was that I had been given a job at King's School as head of Modern Languages. We had lived in Godalming in Surrey for four years I think where we'd had our first house. I decided to take up the job and we moved down here in September 1969. Dominic was eighteen months old at the time--- and Becky was born in the K and C that September!

So, you have always lived in that house except when you were a housemaster at King's. I know that there have been Vye family connections with Bridge before you came here so can you tell me about that please?

Yes. My Great Grandfather who was born in 1835 I think, had several children but the first two of them were born I think in 1860, 1862 and who allegedly died of chickenpox. Now I had that as a child and thought nothing of it but obviously the effects were serious at that time, and they are buried in Bridge churchyard. Now my Great Grandfather had been apprenticed in Canterbury although his family lived in Ramsgate. He was obviously looking for accommodation and he found it in the home of a friend of his who was a fellow apprentice. This was at 63 High Street, Bridge. The father of his friend was the local butcher and grazier---and a butcher's shop was there, under different proprietors, until very recently.

Not only did my Great Grandfather have a friend there but he also fell in love with the daughter of the house – Elizabeth Jarvis she was then. They were later married in Bridge Parish Church. I can remember in his diaries, which we still have, that after the wedding there was a storm in the Channel. They were going to Paris for their honeymoon but because of the storm they ended up in a hotel in Dover, which was very sad. They then lived in Bridge for about another fifteen years. They bought or were given the house next to the butcher's shop. Somewhere I have a photo of Henry with his oldest son Lincoln on Star Hill. You can see part of Bridge as it then was. Then they moved to Ramsgate where his family lived. They bought a bigger house and left Bridge behind.

Somewhere I have read something about a grocer's shop with the name Vye.

Yes, when we first came here what is now Bridgeway Stores was Vye & Sons and there was quite a big store in Canterbury – St Margaret's Street I think – which was also Vye & Sons. Soon after we moved to Bridge, Lipton's took it on and then it changed hands a few times until finally it became Bridgeway Stores. We thought that was good to come to somewhere where the local shop was called Vye & Sons.

It's an unusual name...

I'm certain that it comes from the West Country, from Dorset, because we have a family tree from the early eighteenth century and there is a direct line that goes back to Corfe in Purbeck, in the shadow of Corfe Castle. There is an Oliver Vye's Lane in Corfe.

The other thing before we move on – you mentioned that the grave of the two little Vye children is in the churchyard and then fairly recently we came across another grave in the churchyard of Dorcas Lott a long-time nurse and helper of the Vye family.

I didn't know about that nurse or indeed that she was buried here but obviously she was well-liked and appreciated by Henry Vye because he paid for quite a substantial memorial to her. I don't know whether she moved with them to Ramsgate, but she certainly was with them here.

Sadly, the stone cross is broken now but it was lovely to find it.

Your house in Patrixbourne Road was, I know, not new when you moved into it.

No. We bought it from, I think, Eric Williams who was a local electrician. His father had had the house built in 1926. He was clerk to the Bridge/ Blean Rural District Council. It was then called Llandogo which is a village in Monmouthshire and that is where the old Mr Williams came from. Obviously, he was a Welshman, but he had got a job in the Council. I gather his office was in the old Close, the workhouse. I met someone in Patrixbourne who was quite an old gentleman and he remembered registering the birth of his daughter at the old Close and of course he would have met Mr Williams as the clerk.

So, there was your house and one or two others maybe along Patrixbourne Road, but you probably remember bungalows being built.

I do indeed because there was a cherry orchard opposite the entrance to Riverside Close. There was the old school and then the bungalows were built along to Alan Atkinson's. I think that was a lodge house to Bifrons. There was a gas works farther along from the school.. I met up with Bob Williams a few years ago to record his stories of Bridge. He had already written an autobiography of which I have a copy. He read out loud from his book and it's in the archive about Bridge between the wars.

So that takes care of that side of the road and opposite?

Between the wars--no tennis courts, Riverside Close or the recreation ground. That was just field. I have a photograph of from the 1940s. There was snow on the ground. Looking across it was fields. I'm not sure when the recreation ground was established.

Elsewhere in the village there have been a number of houses built since you came. Was Western Avenue there then?

Western Avenue had been built recently and the Vye & Sons shop, now Bridgeway Stores was part of that development. It's a great shame that in order to build those houses they had knocked down a very old farmhouse belonging to a man known as Daddy Fagge and it's his fields on which Western Avenue was built. I think somewhere there is a photograph of a gymkhana on that site.

I'm guessing that there were other shops in Bridge that are not there now.

When we arrived, there was a Post Office right next to the bridge. The shop at the very end which I'm glad to say is again in use, was a general store which was useful. It later became the bakery. That store was subject to quite a dramatic event. The Dover Road at that time came right through the village. A friend of mine, John Purchase and another man spearheaded the campaign to get a bypass built.

During the course of the next two or three years somebody was knocked off a bike and quite badly injured. He was hit by a lorry coming along the road from Canterbury. Regarding the grocer's shop I think the driver had a heart attack and the lorry went straight on into the shop. The grocer's daughter who was about fourteen I think, was in bed at the time. The lorry crashed into the building near her bedroom and pinned her in her bed to the wall. Luckily, she was not badly injured. I can't imagine what trauma she might have had afterwards.

I think that was the one of the main reasons that Mr Crouch the local MP, took up the cause and eventually we got the bypass. I can remember when we were thinking of buying the house the solicitors had to delve into what might affect the house in the future. They told us that there was talk of a bypass being built about a quarter of a mile away, but he said, "Between you and me it won't ever happen". Well, within six years it was being built and quite rightly.

I have heard about the demonstrators sitting in the road, but what else happened to get the bypass built.

Mr Crouch did a lot of lobbying in Parliament, and he kept on battering at the Ministry of Transport. John Purchase and others kept up the campaign. I can remember being canvassed for money to support the campaign, which we did willingly.

Have you been involved in the village with committees or various organisations over the years?

Have you been on the Parish Council?

I haven't been on the Parish Council, but I was the County Councillor for the area for sixteen years with John Anderson being the City councillor. He was a different party from mine, but I got on well with him. I think between us we got the zebra crossings installed. Because I was teaching at King's I suppose I was out of the village during the day, so I didn't get involved with committees here.

What about organisations or activities that go on in the village, did you have a hand in any of those?

Yes, the History Society which is more than twenty years old. I didn't set it up. Jennifer was involved with that and so I became involved in recording senior citizens shall we call them, talking about their time in the village which has been very interesting.

Did the storm of 1987 have much impact on the village?

Jennifer was at Bridge School at the time and has talked about the hill being blocked by fallen trees. I was looking after a House at King's School at the time, so I can't relate stories about Bridge itself. In Canterbury I can remember being woken up by that old eighteenth century building shaking with the vibration of the wind. .

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I just think of all the people that I and others have recorded with their memories. Fascinating stories of before and during the wars and how Bridge has changed. I think Bob Williams' autobiography is one of the most comprehensive pictures of what it was like.

I should mention that the house where we live did have extensive grounds at the back. When Eric Williams' father died the two brothers sold off that land and it was built on. Bob Williams was fascinated by cinema. He bought a camera and projector, and he would invite his friends when he was twelve or fourteen to come to the house to see his films. He had a special shed built at the side of the house near the garage and he would show films there. There was no other cinema here of course.

Do you think the whole ethos of the village community has changed?

I remember one of the meetings in the Village Hall that we went to. It was to talk about the need for a new Village Hall. Mr Prestige who had lived in Bourne Park and then in Station Road in Bishopsbourne. He spearheaded this campaign. The plan was to build it on the Recreation Ground.

I remember at the time local people saying, “Does that mean our rates will go up?” He said of course it would and that made people turn away from the idea of a new hall because they wouldn’t consider the idea of paying more rates. I think the plan was to build it at the back of the Health Centre as you go towards the school and Conyngham Lane there was a cut out into the field. I think this is where it was meant to be.

Is that where there is a plan to build new houses now?

I think somewhere at the back of that. Certainly in the Village Plan there is the mention of thirty or forty new houses. Cantley Estates have said that in return for permission to build the houses on agricultural land they would also build a new Village Hall.

They would have to consider the question of access to the new estate because at the moment it’s all grass. I would love to see a new Village Hall.

When we first moved here the road to Patricbourne was a country road. At the moment the A2 bridge is closed for repair, but normally now, there are cars and vans going by often travelling too fast. I should like to see some traffic calming measures, perhaps a mini roundabout to the new estate.