

CANADIA



Canadia is a settlement just to the east of the road leading from Watch Oak to John's Cross – once the turnpike towards London and now the A2100. Its name has intrigued many observers. What, if anything, has it to do with Canada? Is it connected with the presence of Canadian troops at Battle in the Second World War or possibly the First?

The answer lies rather earlier. The first mention of Canadia is on 2 August 1913. There is an explanation – and it relates to Canada.

By the end of the nineteenth century the government of Canada (which by then included all of modern Canada except the self-governing British colony of Newfoundland) was beginning to worry about the size of the dominion's population. The reasons for this are no doubt to be found in detailed histories but it is likely that among them were the opportunities offered for greater agricultural exports – a market in north America heavily dominated by the United States – and a fear of the USA renewing its old calls for more territory, citing the very undeveloped future provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The obvious place to find immigrants was the UK, which was believed to be badly overcrowded and suffered from unemployment, and where agriculture was in depression. There may, too, have been a racial undertone: Britons were of 'the old stock' and were not French or middle to eastern Europeans escaping the conditions there. In 1902 the then Minister of the Interior, Sir Clifford Sifton, began an organised campaign to recruit Britons, primarily into agriculture, to populate the middle-western provinces to be.

Fifty Canadian farmers were found who came to the UK to persuade men to emigrate to Canada. Among them was R J Talmay, born at Hurstpierpoint; the records are not wholly clear but if he was Richard, born in about 1835, then in 1861 he was listed as a bricklayer and builder. In February 1903 he addressed a public meeting at Hastings in which he listed the benefits likely to accrue to the 16,000 or more agricultural labourers wanted by his new country. Each existing farmer might engage men at £40 a year with added board and lodging. If they worked hard, then they could expect a government grant of 160 acres. Those without agricultural experience would expect to get some £25 a year, again with board and lodging. The Canadians came to Battle twice in March 1903 and again in April; they were covering the whole county. The local newspapers carried monthly advertisements by the Canadian authorities headlining the offer of 160 acres.

There were also major efforts being made by charitable bodies to encourage emigration, not only to Canada but also to Australia (which, as the decade wore on, appeared to be increasingly worried that its own potential immigrants were diverting themselves to Canada); there was a less popular move towards South Africa, where the Boer War had just ended. Dr Barnardo's published a report that they had assisted 4,000 children to emigrate.

Locally Lord Brassey was active in identifying and assisting likely emigrants. National newspapers referred to other bodies, concentrating on 'waifs and strays'.¹

It is unclear how effective the immigration campaign was in the Battle area, where unemployment was not a serious problem. One might have thought that it would have had an appeal in the workhouse, and by the turn of the century those living there were surely targets. But of those under 21 at the 1901 census there appear to have been no takers.

These efforts continued throughout the decade and up to the outbreak of war in 1914, and by 1913 companies had joined the authorities in offering their services – Pickfords in particular. By then there had been an apparently large drop in those wishing to go to the USA, but a great increase for Canada – 'a big rush' was reported in March.

Then in August 1913 there was the report of Mr R J Rae setting up business as *Canadia* a mile or so north of Battle town. He was a former architect and farmer who had arrived in the UK in February from Toronto and bought land; he had very quickly built his own house and by the time of the report he had established a farm concentrating on rabbits, geese, ducks and chickens. The distinctive feature of the farm was that he built Canadian-style sheds and used Canadian machinery and followed Canadian farming practices in so far as they differed from the English. He demonstrated publicly the values of Canadian farming and offered training for intending migrants at £5 a month. There are photographs of Rae outside his 'house' (below) and of his wife tending an American-style oven inside it, in *Bygone Battle* (Aylwin Guilmant, 1983).



The house built by Rae at what became Canadia. Rae is on the left and his wife and daughter by the door to the house.

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Already by July 1913 the name Canadia was being used for the area, and *Canadia Drive* (now Canadia Road) was being referred to in advertisements. Clearly it stuck.

There were five men recorded as belonging to Battle in Canadian records of the First World War (setting aside the special case of a Canadian who married a Battle woman), three of whom died in the conflict. No record of their passage across the Atlantic can be found for any of them.

¹ It may be noted that this emigration process continued until well after the Second World War, not always to the benefit of the children. For the worst side see the moving book *Oranges and Sunshine* (originally *Empty Cradles*) by Margaret Humphreys (1995), describing actions for which the British Government has since formally apologised.

This appears to be the end of the story. While Canadian troops were certainly stationed at Hastings in the First World War there is no hard evidence that they were at Battle, let alone at Canada itself; yet the story persists that they were. They were certainly stationed at Battle in the Second World War, but at Telham.

And there is no reference to Rae in British newspapers or public records after August 1913. His farm seems to have been taken over very shortly by people of another name, and although some people by the name of Rae were recorded as living at Hastings and Worthing in 1939 the assumption must be that he returned to Canada, leaving only the name behind. It has not yet been possible to identify him from Canadian records: Rae was a common name and farming was a major occupation. On the ground there appears to be no remaining trace of Rae's brief settlement. This reminds one that there are always more things to discover.

Sources

The Hastings and St Leonards Observer

The Sussex Agricultural Express

The Times

The 1939 Register

Kelly's Directory of Sussex 1915

George Kiloh: *The brave remembered* (BDHS, 2015)

Aylwin Guilmant: *Bygone Battle* (Phillimore & Co)