

BATTLE AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*From a map of Sussex by John Nordon, augmented by John Speede.
a.1616 d.*

Newsletter

FOREWORD

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This is our first effort for your approval.

You will find a reminder of past lectures and their presenters, also details of the Summer Programme. It has proved difficult to obtain a text from speakers but you will see at the back of this issue a full report on Captain Malins talk on Catsfield, the only text available, in future a member of the Society will record a few notes on each lecture.

Two annual parties have been held, one in October for the Commemoration weekend in the Abbey School Hall by the kind permission of the Headmaster, Mr. Teale, and the Summer Party held in various venues when our hosts have made us feel most welcome.

Suggestions for improving the format of the newsletter will be appreciated, and the Committee recommend it should be an annual issue not bi-annual as this one. We would wish to record our thanks to George Creek for compiling these contents.

Lorna Sanders,
Chairman.

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Affiliated to the Sussex Archaeological Society,
the Sussex Archaeological Trust, and the
South-Eastern Federation of Museums and Art Galleries.

Officers and Committee 1980-81

President:

Miss I. Hope Muntz, F.S.A., F.R.Hist.Soc.

Vice-Presidents:

Mrs. E. Webster, Mr. A.E. Marson, M.B.E.,
Prof. Dorothy Whitelock, C.B.E., D.Litt., F.S.A., Prof. Eleanor Searle,
Prof. H.R. Loyn, Right Rev. H.R. Darby, Bishop of Sherwood,
Miss J.E.S. Robertson.

Chairman: Mr. E.G. Creek

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Mr. K. Reader, Mr. J.E. Sanders, Mr. R.S. Langrish,
Miss J.F. Mackenzie, M.B.E., Mrs. E. Bay Tidy, O.B.E.,
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WINTER PROGRAMME 1980-81

The following lectures were given during the winter season 1980-81:-

"Old Hastings" - Mr. Barry Funnell

"The Novocentenary Celebrations of the Battle of Hastings" -
Mrs. Freda Bishop

"The Brassey Grandees" - Mrs. Pamela Haines

"The History of the British Motor Industry" - Mr. David Hance
"Pestalozzi"

"Your House - the outside view" - Mr. Ralph Wood, A.R.I.B.A.

"The Ancient Greek Games" - Mr. Robert Stainton

"Tills of Battle" - Mr. Robert Day

"Historical Landscape in and around Ewhurst" - Mrs. Gwen Jones

SUMMER PROGRAMME 1981

Quebec House, Edenbridge & Rotherfield (20th May)

We visited Quebec House at Westerham. This square brick gabled house at the foot of Westerham Hill is maintained as a Wolfe Museum by the Memorial Trust. The house is fine of its kind and worth preserving on its own account.

After tea in Edenbridge we returned to Battle via Rotherfield Church, which was built about 790 by the Saxon Duke, Bertwald, and dedicated to St. Denys as a thank offering for his restoration to health having invoked the aid of St. Denys' monks in Paris. Noteworthy features are the Norman font with a 16th century cover, the embossed head in the Nevill Chapel, the Jacobean Pulpit, the drawing featuring St. Michael weighing souls, the 13th century sedilia and the Talbot hound.

Jane Bridge

Bignor Roman Villa & Arundel Castle (24th June)

This was our second visit to Bignor (the previous visit was in 1962). The Roman Villa was first discovered in 1811. It can be assumed to have been the centre of a large estate and is one of the largest in Britain. The mosaics rank in design and execution among the best found in the country and many are in rooms heated by hypocausts. It is likely that the owners would have been men of prominence in provincial society and will have played their part in the administration of the "Civitas" of the Regnenses at Chichester.

After lunch we visited Arundel Castle. This magnificently situated castle overlooking the River Arun was built at the end of the 11th century by Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Arundel and has been the seat of the Dukes of Norfolk and their ancestors for over 700 years. In 1643, during the Civil War, the original castle was very badly damaged. It was later restored in the 18th and 19th centuries. It has among its treasures a fine collection of furniture dating from the 16th century, tapestries, clocks, and portraits by Van Dyck, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Lawrence, etc.

Jane Bridge

Appledore, Hornes Place & Church and Stone-in-Oxney Church (15th July)

We were privileged to be received at Hornes Place by Mrs. Tennant, the present owner and to view the Chapel there, which was consecrated in 1366 after permission was given to William Horne by the Bishop of the Diocese for Divine Service to be said there. After many years of neglect it was made the subject of a preservation order in 1951 and restored by the Ministry of Works, Ancient Monuments Division between 1955 and 1957. Sir Gilbert Scott said that the architect who designed this remarkable domestic chapel was probably a Frenchman and certainly a poet. It has a curious "squint" or long slanting hagioscope pierced through its southern wall at about 7 or 8 feet from the ground outside and other interesting architectural features.

The Vicar of Appledore, the Rev. Anthony Towse, then conducted us round his churches. Firstly the church of St. Peter & St. Paul in Appledore.

This church was built in the 13th century, possibly on the site of its Norman predecessor and by tradition, within the area of the Danish encampment. The most prominent surviving features are the Early English arch in the tower, and in the same style, the arches and pillars of the nave and chancel. The roof, screen, walls and framework of the windows are 14th century. The tower may have been used as a "Muniment tower" against the French and it contains a peal of 8 bells one of which is of mediaeval origin.

Secondly Mr. Towse showed us his church of St. Mary the Virgin, Stone-in-Oxney, the oldest part of which is the chapel of St. Nicholas. The chapel of St. Katherine contains some 15th century glass. The church contains a 3rd century Mithraic altar. The former church was destroyed by fire in 1464 and was rebuilt in the Perpendicular style.

Jane Bridge

Scotney Old Castle, Lamberhurst and Haremere Hall, Etchingham

(19th August)

The old castle, now owned by the National Trust, was originally a fortified and moated Manor House, built at about the same date as Bodiam Castle, in the latter part of the 14th century. It was altered and added to in the 16th and 17th centuries, the wing of the latter date being carefully demolished and lowered as part of the landscaping of the whole area when the New Castle was built in the first half of the 19th century.

At the time of our visit the 16th century wing housed a delightful exhibition of children's books of date 1800-1920, which was an added attraction to the justly famous and romantic grounds and buildings.

Haremere Hall is a 17th century Manor House containing many beautiful rooms and fine panelling and furniture. It is at present owned by Lady Killearn who welcomed our party. The house also contains many mementoes of the late Lord Killearn's diplomatic and ambassadorial career.

D. Beaty-Pownall

Knole (22nd September)

Our guided tour of Knole began in the Stone Court, where evidence can be seen of the development of the house in each century from the 15th through to the 19th.

The exterior of the vast house is mainly based on the work of Archbishop Bouchier, who built it on the site of a much earlier manor. After he died it became the home of Archbishops of Canterbury until Henry VIII took it over, greatly enlarged it, and it was finally given by Elizabeth to Thomas Sackville, 1st Earl of Dorset, whose descendants have lived there ever since. The present Lord Sackville gave it to the National Trust in 1946. Knole is famous for the woodcarving, painting and plasterwork by the greatest craftsmen in each generation. There is a unique collection of early English furniture. In each period this was added to, especially perhaps in the 17th century, when the Sixth Earl, in his capacity as Lord Chamberlain, acquired it from the royal palaces. Beautiful porcelain and glass is displayed in many rooms and carpets from famous places in Persia and India can be seen on the floors. The renowned Knole collection of pictures hangs on the walls.

Tapestry, needlework and famous textiles are preserved in this great house and in fact one can trace the development through the centuries of whatever branch of art or craftsmanship interests one most.

Esther Martin

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OBITUARIES

Miss J.E.S. Robertson

The Historical Society and the Museum sustained a grievous loss by the death of Miss Robertson in a car accident in September 1982. "Transactions" record that she was elected a member of the Committee at the Annual General Meeting in 1959. The 1960-61 number shows that she was Secretary of the Museum Committee then and she continued to be Secretary right up to her death. She could be seen almost daily at the Museum, carried on a most extensive correspondence and frequently guided school parties round the exhibits. Such enthusiasm and devotion is rare and she will be greatly missed.

Miss J.F. Mackenzie

Miss Mackenzie had been a member of the Committee since November 1976. She gave two talks to the Society on the history of the British Drama which were very popular and she hosted the sub-committee which arranged the winter programmes. Although handicapped in getting about she regularly came to meetings and lectures and distributed notices. Her sudden but peaceful death in July 1982 was a great loss to the Society.

WINTER PROGRAMME 1981-82

The following lectures were given during the winter season 1981-82:-

"An East Sussex Roman Bath House"

Mr. Gerald Brodribb

"Shakespeare and his Dark Lady"

Dr. A.L. Rowse - The Commemoration Lecture

"Life in Tudor England"

Miss Joy Thwaytes

"The Prince of Wales - Past and Present"

Mrs. Joy Tunnicliffe

"Bygone Catsfield"

Capt. Malins, R.N.

"Captain Swing & Mr. Cobbett - Agrarian Disturbances
in Battle in 1830"

Mrs. Elizabeth Blackman

"Brick and Tile Making in East Sussex"

Mrs. M. Beswick

"Murray of Beauport"

Mr. Brion Purdey

"London Bridge"

Mr. L.W. Groome, City Engineer, City of London

SUMMER PROGRAMME 1982

Nettlestead Place and Nettlestead Church (12th May)

The first outing of the season attracted 50 members and was favoured with a bright afternoon.

Situated above the Medway, Nettlestead Place comprises manor house, gateway and outbuildings which together with the neighbouring Church of St. Mary the Virgin form a good example of a compact mediaeval complex, the extant buildings being ascribed largely to the period between the 13th and 15th centuries when the manor was in the possession of the De Pympe family. Their origins, however, are much earlier, the house perhaps standing on the site of a Roman or Saxon dwelling. The present church is mainly of 15th century construction, new Perpendicular period, with an earlier west tower; but there is a 1086 Domesday reference and the similarity of the proportions of the nave and chancel to those of a simple Norman church suggest the re-use of old foundations. Masonry at the foot of the west tower is possibly Saxon.

The church is known chiefly for its stained glass, dating 1425-39, which was put into the nave about 1438 under the patronage of John Pympe; and it is clear that the nave, itself dating 1420-30, was built as a framework to take the glass, the north and south wall space being almost wholly occupied by four tall three-light windows set between deep gabled buttresses. Chancel glass dates from the 1460's. The glazing remained complete until largely destroyed in a storm in 1763 and much is of recent restoration; remaining original glass includes figures of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence, part of a series of the twelve apostles, small scenes from the life of St. Thomas Becket and coats of arms of Kent families.

An unusual feature is the pair of memorial effigies of the two wives of Sir John Scott, owner of the manor in the 16th century. Also of interest is the fact that one family, the Allens, has since the Restoration provided an unbroken line of churchwardens.

Nettlestead Place was previously visited by the Society in 1960 and there is an account of the house and the families connected with it in Transactions No. 9. In 1977 it was purchased from the Vinson family by Mr. and Mrs. Tucker who generously invited us to look all over it and to view the interesting collection of paintings which they have incorporated. After tea at Butcher's Mere, Collier Street, the party returned by way of the Kent Blossom Route.

Maureen Millar

Greenwich National Maritime Museum (16th June)

Our June outing took us to the Maritime Museum at Greenwich. The buildings together with the Royal Naval College, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, form the finest architectural group in Britain. The immediate neighbourhood has royal associations spanning 500 years, for under the lawns and buildings of the Royal Naval College are the remains of Bella Court and

the palace of Placentia. In the centre of the main building is the Queen's House, a small palace designed by Inigo Jones for Queen Anne. It was begun in 1616, but not completed until 1635 for Queen Henrietta Maria. The Queen's House is linked by colonnades to the East and West wings, built after Trafalgar to the design of Daniel Alexander.

After the death of Henry V his brother Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester became regent and realising the strategic importance of Greenwich for the defence of London built a Watch Tower where Flamsteed House now stands. He also built himself a manor house by the river, calling it Bella Court. Later it was extended and turned into the Palace of Placentia.

It was the favourite resort of the Tudor monarchs and the birthplace of Henry VIII, Mary and Elizabeth. Charles I lived in it, but under Cromwell the palace decayed. Charles II on his restoration aimed to replace it with a new one, but he only managed the King's House, built by Webb in 1666.

William and Mary preferred Hampton Court and donated Greenwich for a Naval Hospital similar to the Army Hospital at Chelsea. They insisted that the two Royal Houses and the view to the river be preserved and Wren achieved this by altering the course of the river and incorporating the houses in a magnificent symmetrical design. The building took 25 years to complete and involved many other famous architects. Each block was named after a monarch. Only the Crypt, probably the wine cellar, remains of the old palace. The hospital held 3,000 pensioners. It closed in 1869 and in 1873 the Admiralty took over the buildings for use as a College to provide science education, needed in the new age of steam and steel. It is now in effect the Navy's University providing advanced education in defence, staff work and nuclear science and technology. Under an Admiral President there are students of both sexes and of all ranks from Captain to Sub-Lieutenant.

It was not possible to see more than a small portion of the Museum in one visit. The Queen's House was unfortunately closed and alternatively we had a short guided tour of some of the galleries displaying service medals, 13th and 14th century seals, ships models and plans, and the development of wooden boat building, working and pleasure boats, including the restored and regilded Prince Frederick's barge of 1732, Queen Mary's Shallop of 1689 was also on display. In the archaeological research centre three principal finds are displayed of the ancient boats which had been made in Britain. The Ferriby boats on Humberside, dating from the Bronze Age are the oldest boats found anywhere in the world outside Egypt, the Sutton Hoo ship found in a burial mound near Woodbridge, Suffolk, and the Graveney boat excavated jointly by the National Maritime Museum and the Department of Mediaeval and Antiquities of the British Museum, in the Kent marshes in 1970. Following through the galleries we saw a display illustrating the work of James Cook in his exploration of the Pacific Ocean between 1768 and 1779, which has as its centre one of the guns carried

on the Endeavour, jettisoned by him when the vessel was almost wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef in 1769 and recovered 200 years later. A portrait of James Cook painted by Nathaniel Dance in 1776, shortly after his second great voyage is also displayed. Finally to the Nelson story. Here among numerous paintings, much silver, porcelain, china, presentation swords, relics and commemorative pieces is Turner's painting of the Battle of Trafalgar. The most famous of the many relics in the care of the museum is Lord Nelson's undress uniform coat which he was wearing on 25th October, 1805. The hole on the left shoulder made by the French musket ball, which also carried away part of the epaulette can be clearly seen.

We later went on to the Naval College for a guided tour of the Painted Hall and the Chapel.

The Painted Hall was built between 1696 and 1704 and painted between 1708 and 1727. The paintings by Thornhill tell the story of British greatness, based on Maritime Power and Protestant Succession through three reigns. The artist was paid £1 a square yard for the walls and £3 a square yard for the ceilings - £6,685.2s.4d. in all. The Hall served as a dining hall - pensioners in the lower hall (106 x 50½ x 45½ feet) and the Hospital officers in the upper hall, but not for long. Nelson lay in state in the upper hall after Trafalgar before his burial in St. Paul's Cathedral, as did Collingwood, and in 1824 all the lower windows were blocked in to allow conversion to a picture gallery. In 1939 it became a Dining Hall once more for the officers of the college, resplendent with floodlit ceilings and silver electric candlelights. It also serves as a Banqueting Hall for the Crown, the Government and the Admiralty Board.

The Chapel of St. Peter and St. Paul was designed by Christopher Wren and Ripley, "Athenian" Stuart and William Newton in Rococo style with Wedgwood pastel colours. The curved ceiling was substituted and the Altar Apse blocked off. At each end matching pairs of Corinthian columns in imitation marble support richly carved architraves. The ceiling, 45 feet high, is a delicate pattern of rosettes and panels, but dominating all is a huge canvas above the altar painted by Benjamin West, P.R.A. This depicts the preservation of St. Paul after shipwreck at Malta. The Chapel was built for the Pensioners and in the centre aisle the marble floor has a pattern of ship's ropes and a mariner's compass containing the Navy's crest, a fouled anchor whose crown points North. The altar silver is by Durbin, the Maltese Cross and candlesticks are memorials to a College benefactor and Lloyds members who served in the War. The altar rail, an exquisite symbol of the bread and wine of the sacrament dates from 1787. Lady Duff Cooper gave the altar book in memory of her husband, who as first Lord of the Admiralty, was Governor of the College. The lectern, candelabra and flower stands are 18th century work though much repaired, and the Bible is one of the few Coronation Bibles. The pulpit of

limewood mahogany and oak is the top of a three-decker made by Lawrence. Its fine curved handrail is skilfully laminated and the medallions of Coade stone, a synthetic substance of which the secret has been lost. The organ, rich in tone and fully modernised, was built in 1787 by Samuel Green. The case itself is of wood painted to imitate marble. The Chapel is in daily use and it is used a lot for concerts because of its acoustic qualities.

Betty Thomson

Firle Place (14th July)

Firle Place has been the home of the Gage family since the 16th century when Sir John Gage built a large Tudor mansion in the area which had certainly been occupied since Saxon times. Some evidence of this Tudor architecture remains and an inventory listing the goods left by Sir John in 1556 gives an idea of the size of the house. For instance 40 feather beds of varying quality from "two large ones of down of the beste sorte, eight of a lesser sorte, 22 of a meaner sorte".

In the 18th century extensive alterations were made so that what we see today appears to be a magnificent Georgian mansion. Inside the decoration of the splendid main rooms was carried out in the 18th century style and elegant French furniture has taken the place of the "tables of beche set on trescelles dormant with lyke forms" listed in the Tudor inventory.

There are fine portraits of the Gage family and pictures by famous Dutch and Italian artists, collected by the third Earl Gage in the 18th century make Firle the home of "one of the finest collections in the South of England".

Charleston Manor Gardens

These gardens provided a contrast to the wide sweep of park land which surround Firle Place. The general impression was one of green peace. Visitors wandered from one grassy area, partially enclosed by hedges, to another. Superb old trees grew here and there till one reached the far end of the garden, where the paths trailed off into woodland glades. There were few flowers but roses had been planted to climb through some of the trees.

Esther Martin

Down House (10th August)

Down House near Biggin Hill was the home of Charles Darwin. 1982 was the centenary of his death. In this quiet and secluded house set in quiet countryside he lived and worked for nearly forty years.

Inside we were able to see the rooms on the ground floor. The Old Study where most of his work was done. Here are bottles, books and many specimen drawers. The room is decorated and furnished almost as he knew it, including a little curtained alcove where are stored a shallow bath and a few other toilet articles. The New Study was added in 1877, a much brighter room than the Old Study, and Darwin used it from about 1879.

It is now used to demonstrate by means of large murals the various stages in the process of evolution, starting about 4500 million years ago, and ending at the Holocene era, which was the beginning of civilisation. A display case in the middle of the room shows the stages by which the Darwinian theory of evolution was reached.

The Charles Darwin Room, originally the drawing room, and subsequently the dining room, has pictures and photographs of the family, a model of H.M.S. Beagle, hats, a hygrometer and a barometer used by Darwin on the voyage of the Beagle. There are also a list of the officers and men dated October 1836 and notebooks kept by Darwin during the voyage.

The Erasmus Darwin Room houses much pertaining to Darwin's grandfather, a physician who was considered to be the finest doctor of his time in England. Exhibited are books on gardening and botany written by the doctor, letters to friends, his family tree and his prescription book - "20 drops of Elixir of Vitriol in small beer twice a day for two weeks".

Pictures on the walls include copies of two pictures by Stubbs.

The Drawing Room, large and sunny, was added in 1858 and is as nearly as possible as it was in Darwin's time. The grand piano, couch, chairs and bureau are part of the original furnishings. There are many Wedgwood mementoes. Mrs. Darwin was a Wedgwood and a first cousin.

Members proceeded to Biggin Hill for tea and then visited Chevening Church.

Of special interest in this church are the many Stanhope memorials, one of which in white marble is considered to be one of the masterpieces of the famous sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey. It is to Lady Frederica Stanhope, who died in childbirth in 1823.

Hilda Shaw

Hever Castle (21st September)

Possibly the threat of the sale encouraged 46 members to take this opportunity to visit Hever. We set off from Battle in pouring rain but were blessed with perfect sunshine as we approached Hever and for the remainder of the afternoon.

The oldest part of the Castle was built at the end of the thirteenth century and consisted of a fortified farmhouse and yard surrounded by a moat and approached by a wooden drawbridge. Two hundred years later a Tudor dwelling house was incorporated inside the protective wall by the Bullen family.

Sir Thomas Bullen inherited the property from his father in 1506. His daughter Anne became the King's unfortunate wife who was executed in 1536, having failed to produce a male heir. It was she who aroused Henry VIII's passions and brought about the breach with Rome and the religious reformation in England. She was also the mother of the great Queen Elizabeth I. After Anne's death her father remained at Hever until 1538 after which Henry acquired the Castle for his divorced wife Anne of Cleves.

The Castle remained in obscurity thereafter until it was acquired by

William Waldorf Astor, later created 1st Viscount Astor of Hever. He restored the fabric of the Castle and redecorated the interior. He also enlarged the house by adding a village in Tudor style, and also constructed a beautiful lake, and gardens. Overlooking the lake a loggia was built with a colonnaded piazza and behind that Italian gardens with fountains, cascades and grottoes. In 1918 the property was inherited by William Waldorf's younger son, John Jacob, who was elevated to the peerage as 1st Baron Astor of Hever. He died in 1971 and was succeeded by Gavin, the eldest of his three sons to whom Hever was handed over in 1962. Rising costs and high taxation have necessitated his now putting it on the market. After tea in the Pavilion we returned to Battle travelling along the picturesque road to Hartfield and through Ashdown Forest.

Jane Bridge

Bygone Catsfield

Capt. Malins, R.N. (8th January 1982)

Let us begin with the name of the village. There is no doubt that this has its origin in very ancient times. I personally favour the theory that the village takes its name from a North Saxon or Belgic tribe called the 'Catti' who were known to have settled in Sussex in Roman times.

This part of Sussex was thought to have been pretty thinly populated during the Iron Age, most of the recorded sites being in West Sussex. I think that clear evidence that Catsfield may have been a small Iron Age hill fort or perhaps Saxon fortified village can be seen today in the fields to the north and east of the present church and manor. Man-made earth ramparts have survived and are still awaiting expert attention from the County Archaeologists.

The earliest written record of Catsfield is contained in the Domesday Book, since nicknamed thus because "it spared no man, but judged all indifferently as will be all on that great day".

Catsfield was one of the 41 manors recorded under the Rape of Hastings by the Count of Eu. The main entry for Catsfield reads "Wrenc holds of the Earl CEDESFILLE, Elfalm held it in the time of King Edward and could go with his land where he pleased. Then it vouched for one hide and a half, now one hide and one rod. There is land for 7 ploughs. In demesne is one plough and 11 villeins with 2 bordars have 8 ploughs. There is a little church and one mill serving the hall. There are 4 acres of meadow and wood for 3 hogs and herbage for 5 hogs. In the time of King Edward it was worth 50 shillings and afterwards 20 shillings. Now 60 shillings".

The entry could be paraphrased thus "Wrenc holds the manor of Catsfield which suffered as a result of the Battle of Hastings and before the Conquest was held freehold by Elfalm who was then assessed for tax on 180 acres. After the Conquest it dropped to about 80 acres but is now some 200 acres. The lord of the manor has 8 oxen and the villagers have 64. There is a little church and a watermill. For the right to keep hogs in the woods the

lord demands 3 as rent but in pastureland he requires 5".

From other entries in Domesday Book we know that Wrenc was a priest and a very substantial landowner.

Domesday Book does enable us to construct a mental picture of Catsfield as it may then have appeared. The population would probably have been between 100 and 150 people. They would probably have lived in shacks no more elaborate than this representation in the open air museum at Singleton.

Saxon houses were built mainly with wood, while the Normans had a passion for building their castles and churches in stone. In a place like Catsfield the buildings of the people would then have been thatched or had shingled roofs with no chimneys, leaving the smoke from a central hearth to escape through the eaves.

As no spring or stream was available in the vicinity of the church and manor the villagers of Catsfield must have relied on wells, using ponds for their cattle. Without doubt this poor supply of water must have resulted in the village moving towards both the Green and the Stream, where springs with good water were available.

The church of St. Laurence is undoubtedly the oldest building in the village today. It is said to date from 1310. There is what seems to be a Norman arch leading to the south doorway, but the rest of the fabric is in the Early English style. Its low shingled octagonal spire is a fine example of mediæval carpentry set on a 14th century tower. The tower buttresses were built in the 15th century when three bells were also added. The first and third bells were probably cast in the vicinity of the tower about 1408-1418 by William Woodward of London. The second bell was said to be the largest to be cast in Sussex by William Hull of Hailsham. None of the bells can now be rung, but the tenor can be tolled for services and by the clock to mark the hours.

The early history of a village like Catsfield is inevitably bound up with the fortunes of its various manors. A tax return of 1296 lists the 13 principal landowners in the parish, the largest being Petronella de Somery, widow of Simon de Somery, then lord of the manor. Others were Richard de Frikele, Ancelm de Henlegh, Galfo de Bromham and John de Telton, all Normans, who have left their mark on the Catsfield map today.. For instance we have Frickley Hollow and Henley Down.

On the death of Petronella, widow of Simon de Somery, the manor of Catsfield was divided between their five daughters, two of whom Isobel and Agnes seem to have married out of the area, their portions going to the other three. Manor Orchard round the church formed part of the inheritance of Maud, the eldest, who married William de Swaylham, and which by 1347 had passed to Thomas Le Vett to become known as the Manor of Catsfield Levett. During the 17th century the Manor came into the hands of a family called Markwick, three of whom were named James (to confuse

the researchers) and were notable 18th century clockmakers in the City of London, making and exporting watches and clocks especially for the Turkish market.

The present charming Queen Anne mansion must, I think, have been built about 1715 (there is an old fireback in the house with that date) by the second James Markwick who in 1720 was the Master of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. In 1735 he married a Mary Eversfield, thus uniting two wealthy landowning families who between them owned much of the property on which St. Leonards was later to be built.

James and Mary Markwick's eldest son, William, born in 1739, was an ardent naturalist and noted collector of scientific and travel books, some of which can be seen today in the Hastings Museum. He lived the life of a well-to-do country squire who kept his own pack of hounds and was a contemporary of Mad Jack Fuller and of Gilbert White of Selborne. Markwick kept a detailed diary between the years 1768 and 1793 that contains a wealth of information on wild flowers, animals, birds and weather of the area. The illustrations show that he was an accomplished artist. The 1802 edition of White's Natural History of Selborne is known as the Markwick edition because it includes comparisons with William's similar Sussex records. Neither he nor Gilbert White knew what swallows did in winter. Markwick regarded the ruins of Battle Abbey as a specially favoured place for swallows to hibernate.

On the death of his aunt Olive Eversfield in 1803 William inherited a large estate, Dene Park, near Horsham on condition that he changed his name to Eversfield.

At some time a Georgian addition was made to the old Queen Anne manor house, which could have been built by William Markwick about 1780 when he inherited from his father, perhaps to make an appropriate setting for his library.

While referring to the various manors of Catsfield we should not overlook the Domesday reference to the 'mill serving the hall'. Watermills were introduced to Britain by the Romans, the first recorded windmill being in Suffolk in 1191. There can be little doubt that the Domesday Catsfield mill must have been a watermill and probably on the site known by that name today. On the 1853 Ordnance Survey this watermill was shown as a corn mill, (a corn windmill was also shown at Henley Down).

In 1376 John Potman, described as 'a freeman and stranger from Burwash' acquired 25 acres of copyhold land, which in 1587 was described as 'The Iron Forge and Iron Myll, with buildings, offices and pounds' when purchased by Thomas Allfraye. It was not included in the list of forges and furnaces in Sussex dated 1653 so presumably it had by then been closed. Thomas Allfraye, lord of the Manor of Catsfield, also rented a much larger forge and furnace just outside the parish further down the Catsfield Stream at Buckholt. Both Buckholt and Potmans seem to have gone out of business

about the same date for it was recorded in 1664 'Buckholt is laid aside for want of fuel and only used sometimes'.

To return to bygone Catsfield and its various manors. The third de Somery daughter, Alice, who married Henry de Garland, inherited as her share the property known today as Broomham. The present house (or parts of it) dates from the end of the 16th century, so could have been built by iron master Thomas Allfraye. Thereafter the property passed through several different families until it was bought in 1664 by the Earl of Ashburnham whose family fortunes began to rise after the Restoration of Charles II.

The manor of Broomham Parkgate became a separate property. It was a gate to Battle Abbey Park and was known as Catsfield House. The right hand side of the house was clearly added in Georgian or perhaps Victorian times. Parts of the timber framing may be original Tudor, as may be some of the old beams inside the house which has been recently restored. There is what seems to be a Tudor chimney and fireplace.

Broomham barn also has some very ancient timbers and has been carefully restored and reroofed in recent times.

The youngest de Somery daughter, Jane, married John de Lunsford and seems to have inherited that part of the Manor lying towards Catsfield Down and Crowhurst, now known as Catsfield Place.

In 1584 Catsfield Place was purchased by Edmund Pelham, member of the old and influential Sussex family who had in 1412 been granted the Manor of Crowhurst by Henry IV. It seems to have been rebuilt in the 17th century by Sir Nicholas Pelham whose initials and family crest of a buckle can be seen on the large fireback in the charming old hall. Sir Nicholas' mother Margaret, widow of Sir Thomas Pelham, gave to St. Laurence's Church in 1677 a chalice and engraved paten used today at Holy Communion.

Catsfield Place has a period staircase with the date 1675, which some people think may have started life in another building. At some time during the 18th century the house was encased in brick which gives it the somewhat austere Georgian appearance it has today.

From the 15th century onwards the village must have been less dependent on the fortunes of its various manors and by then, possibly on account of a shortage of water, moving in the direction of Catsfield Green and Catsfield Stream. Several events contributed to the decline in the influence of the manorial system. The Black Death (1350) seriously reduced the population and forced changes in farming methods with a sharp increase in the number of sheep. Somewhat naturally these changes in farming practice led to many peasant uprisings, a man called Jack Cade leading the main rebellion in this part of Sussex, but despite support from the then lord of the Manor of Catsfield (John Mavesyn) and the Abbot of Battle, Cade was caught and hung at Heathfield in 1450.

Alas, there are few records until we come to the 18th and 19th centuries. A census of population has been held every 10 years since 1801. It shows

a steady growth in population following the Napoleonic wars, followed by depression in the 1830's and 1840's when British agriculture suffered from free trade and imported food. There was a small increase when Tom Brassey began building Normanhurst in 1861.

While on the subject of population it might be appropriate to mention the churchyard and cemetery. None of the remaining tombstones in the churchyard are earlier than 1670 and none later than 1870, when the cemetery across the road came into use. One tombstone which clearly marked the grave of one of the Markwick clockmakers recently came to light in a rockery in Powdermill Lane.

The oldest map of the village to be found in the Sussex Record Office is dated 1724 and shows very little detail other than roads, woods and streams. I have often wondered how the most attractive lane we know as Frickly Hollow came to be so deeply cut in the sandstone. Another map maybe gives us a clue, for the road was clearly marked on it bypassing both Catsfield and Ninfield. In 1768 the road from Battle to Lewes was authorised as a turnpike. This road through Frickly Hollow neatly bypasses both Catsfield and Ninfield tollgates and it seems quite likely that the wily long distance carriers may have avoided tolls by using this lane to reach Standard Hill.

The Catsfield tollkeeper's house is still there but the special upstairs window overlooking the road to Battle is now bricked up. The word 'Post' now commonly used in connection with the mail derives from the actual posts set up in the 17th and 18th centuries on highways and turnpikes to mark those places where horses could be changed, parcels and letters left and tolls paid. Tradition has it that Pleydells which is right alongside the tollgate was the first Catsfield Post Office.

The next map precedes the first Ordnance Survey and is dated 1806. The only point of interest is that the village was still marked as being in the vicinity of the church, Catsfield Green and Catsfield Down being shown as separate places.

The map, known as Schiffners, dated 1813, was the first to be generally put on sale. It adds little detail, but if you want to trace the history of your property you should first consult the Tithe Maps of 1839. As a result of the Tithe Commutation Act 1836 maps of all parishes were drawn with a schedule showing the names of owners or occupants of land, field names, acreage and its use, with the tithe payable. The first Ordnance Survey map published in 1853 gives more detail.

In olden days all villages, so far as they were able zealously guarded their common rights and village greens. Often only wells (and sometimes blacksmiths and wheelrights shops) were allowed to be built on village greens. Houses were, of course, permitted to be built round the green. It is interesting to reflect when and why this long tradition came to be abandoned in Catsfield. All the early maps show a few properties on the village green.

The title deeds of an old house called Orchard House on the Green make it clear that in 1598 the Green was owned by Sir Edmund Pelham and that he then regarded it as waste land. This house was sold in 1843 to John Winborn, a blacksmith for £60, but it seems probable that blacksmiths had lived in it for many years for the path beside it is known as Blacksmith's Lane. The 1853 Ordnance Map shows 13 houses on the Green, including a Methodist Chapel and the Parish Workhouse.

In 1723 parishes were encouraged to build what were at first called 'Houses of Correction' but later became known as 'Workhouses'. The Catsfield Workhouse (now called Briar Cottage) was probably built about that date on the village green by the Vestry by arrangement with the Pelhams. It was a substantial 18th century building.

In 1782 the government of the day made an attempt to humanise the administration of poor relief and the Overseers were permitted to grant what was known as 'Outdoor Relief', but amid much sorrow, anger and riots this was abolished in 1834 on the grounds that it encouraged laziness. At the same time all village workhouses were then amalgamated into 'Unions'. Catsfield together with 14 other villages (including the village of Bexhill) became part of the Battle Union. One of the first decisions of the Battle Guardians was that only four workhouses need be retained, Battle for the able-bodied, Catsfield and Ewhurst for the aged and infirm, and Bexhill for children of both sexes. In 1836 there were 16 paupers in the Catsfield workhouse, with 21 in 1837. On 8th January, 1841 the Guardians decided to close and return the building to the Catsfield Vestry. The Vestry promptly sold their workhouse, using part of the proceeds towards building a new village school.

The old school could not have been very large for it was sold for £27.10s. when a contract was signed with John Saxby giving him four months to build a new school (with a house for the Headmaster) at a cost of £320 subject to a fine of 20s. for each day after 30th September, 1843 that the work remained uncompleted. The school opened on time.

It is now time to introduce the Brasseys who, for almost 60 years, had a marked influence on Catsfield amounting to something approaching a feudal lordship.

A year after Queen Victoria's accession in 1837 there were only 500 miles of railway in Great Britain, yet within a few years there were 5000. Among the engineers and contractors responsible for this railway explosion was Thomas Brassey. He became the leading British railway contractor constructing many miles of line not only in Britain but all over Europe, Canada, India and Australia. He also built some 40 miles of railway in the Crimea which was largely responsible for the successful outcome of that otherwise disastrous campaign. During his working life he kept no permanent home but lived wherever his work lay, but in 1865 at the age of 60 he decided to retire in Sussex where he purchased land in Catsfield from the Earl of

Ashburnham and the Fuller family of Brightling, on which he constructed a large country mansion with every up-to-date modern convenience which he called Normanhurst Court. The house was built in the style of a French Chateau, presumably because he admired french architecture when engaged in 1850 on the construction of the Rouen to Paris line. Tom Brassey died of cancer before Normanhurst Court was completed. The eldest of his three sons, Thomas, who inherited it extended the property to well over 3000 acres. He developed a deep love for the sea and ships. He trained as a lawyer, but never practised and entering politics was for 20 years Liberal M.P. for Hastings. His love of the sea led him to yachting and he built the large (and for its day most beautiful) auxiliary three masted schooner yacht 'Sunbeam'. In 1876 he and Lady Brassey circumnavigated the world. The diaries which Lady Brassey kept on their voyages liberally illustrated with drawings, made her into something of a literary lioness. In 1887 the 'Sunbeam' made a further long voyage to India, Burma, South East Asia and Australia where Lady Brassey became seriously ill. She died at sea on the way home. Her memorial in Catsfield Church depicts the famous yacht.

Lord Brassey (as he later became) married again and was for 5 years Governor of Victoria. On Sunday 2nd August, 1908 (the year Lord Brassey was appointed Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports) a fire broke out in one of the maids' bedrooms at Normanhurst. It took so long for the Battle and Bexhill fire engines to arrive that Lord Brassey saw to it that he had his own fire engine thereafter.

When Lord Brassey's son, the third Thomas, known to his friends and in the village as 'Tab' married Lady Idena Neville in 1889 they were given Parkgate as a wedding present and in 1910 Lord and Lady Brassey gave them Normanhurst when they themselves moved to Chelwood Manor, Nutley.

During the First World War the large interior tennis court at Normanhurst was converted into a V.A.D. hospital with Lady Idena as Commandant.

'Tab' was most interested in politics. Sadly, only nine months after the death of his father in 1919 he was hit by a taxi near the House of Lords sustaining injuries from which he died. His widow moved back to Parkgate until she died in 1951 and Normanhurst became a girls' school in the 1920's. It was used by the army and for prisoners of war in the Second World War, and demolished in 1954.

Commander Sydney Egerton, eldest son of Lord Brassey's eldest daughter, Mabel, who had married Mr. C.A. Egerton, inherited the property and his grandson owns it today. It was he who persuaded Lord Brassey to patronise the East Sussex Hunt and build the kennels at Normanhurst just over 100 years ago.

It is not known how or when Methodism came to Catsfield. Mention of it was made in a lease dated 25th July, 1832, of land with a building thereon, and a chapel was shown on the present site in the Ordnance Survey of 1853.

A Methodist Trust was formed in 1857 with the result that this chapel was built in 1861 and served until 1912.

There is an oft-told tale in Catsfield, the truth of which cannot now be confirmed, that Henry Blackman, Master Builder and builder of the present chapel in 1912, fell out with Lady Idena Brassey and to remind her of the existence of the Methodists built the chapel spire not only taller than that of St. Laurence, but so that it could be easily seen from her bedroom window at Normanhurst.

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