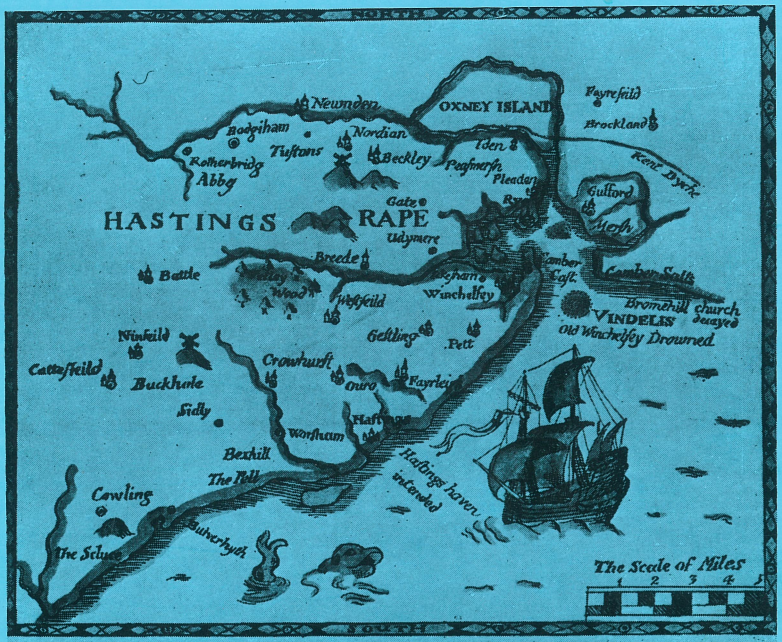
BATTLE AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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

Newsletter

MARCH, 1988 No. 6

BATTLE AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM TRUST

Affiliated to the Historical Association, the Sussex Archaeological Society, the Sussex Archaeological Trust, the South Eastern Federation of Sussex Museum and Art Galleries and the Federation of Sussex Local History Societies.

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* Sadly, Mrs. Langley died in July 1987

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FOREWORD

"Great abilities are not requisite for an Historian, for in historical composition the greatest powers of the human mind are all quiescent. He has facts ready to hand; so there is no exercise of invention. Imagination is not required in any high degree; only about as much as is used in the lower kinds of poetry".

So said Dr. Johnson. Certainly this could not be said of historians today, as any member who reads works in the Museum Library by our President, Professor Allen Brown, and Vice-Presidents Professors Loyn and Searle will confirm. Whether it was true in Johnson's own day I am not qualified to judge, save that I doubt if I would apply this dictum to Johnson's contemporary, the author of 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'. (I have only now discovered that Edward Gibbon was buried in the Sheffield Mausoleum in Fletching Church outside the gates of Sheffield Park!)

Neither would Johnson's disparaging remark apply, surely, to those who lecture to the Society. But on what kind of topics do members wish their Committee to find lecturers? The Society's Constitution clearly states that "The objects of the Society shall be to educate the public in the study of local history in Battle, East Sussex and the surrounding areas". Yet over the years we have ventured well outside the field of purely local history, though for a very long time such topics were not summarised in our 'Transactions' which preceded the 'Newsletter'. A programme of lectures solely on local topics might, perhaps, be difficult to sustain on a basis of nine such a year, year after year; and we know that talks on broader subjects like 'Heraldry', 'London Buildings' and 'Richard III' have been popular. And if any quibbling sea-lawyer maintains that such topics are "unconstitutional" one might argue that local history needs to be understood in a broader context. Thus in Elizabeth's reign Battle was "a hotbed of Popery" and the report of Archbishop Parker's Visitation of the Chichester diocese states that "in the town of Battell ... they be yet very blind and superstitious", but might we not gain a better understanding of Roman Catholicism and Recusancy in Sussex with a background of knowledge about the Reformation, and Catholicism in Elizabethan and Stuart England? However the main point about this digression is to stress once again how important it is for members to make known their views on the content of the lecture programme to those they elect to the Committee.

Once again I am grateful to those who give me contributions to the Newsletter. You will note that I have had an amateur's impertinence in adding a postscript to the talk on "The Real Richard III" given by Miss Melhuish. Why, you may well ask, did I not make and enlarge upon those points at the end of her lecture? I will tell you! It was only afterwards that I heard a talk at the Tunbridge Wells branch of the Historical Association given by John Gillingham (who has since enlightened us on 'Love and Marriage at the Plantagenet Court') on

'Richard III - The Case for the Prosecution'. Such a different version set me reading much of the recent literature on that controversial monarch. But I would not wish to seem to be denigrating the work of the Richard III Society which has done much to make it possible for a more just appraisal to be made. Their editing and publication of the Register of the Signet Office (British Library Harleian MSS 433) is invaluable and so is 'The Road to Bosworth Field' by two of the Society's officers, P.W. Hammond and Anne Sutton - an account of Richard of Gloucester's career from purely contemporary sources, favourable and unfavourable.

On local history I have already, in my report to last November's A.G.M., paid tribute to the splendid and enthusiastic work of Mr. and Mrs. Bishop on the oral history project. But what about research on written material? When I look at the publications of other Sussex History Societies I am struck by the fact that some of their members do research on local topics and write articles. (Note for your diaries please. Our Society is hosting the Conference of Sussex Local History Societies on April 9th. I hope this will be well supported by members). I would very much like to see in the future a return to what obtained in the early days of the Society when members contributed articles to 'Transactions' and more than at present gave talks at our autumn and winter meetings. (More economical too, for members who lecture seldom, if at all, ask for a fee)

Even if one has not leisure to research in the East Sussex Record Office, is there not material in the Museum that could form the basis for an article? And that prompts me to say that whatever else you do not read in this Newsletter, do please read the Museum Trust note, especially the last two paragraphs. This last year has been a difficult one for the Museum, with the sad death of Mrs. Langley, to whose service to the Museum we paid tribute at the A.G.M., and the resignation because of the pressure of other commitments, of the Chairman, Mr. Scott. That the Museum carried on during the season with "business as usual" was due to the dedicated efforts of Dr. Clark and his helpers. I hope that in 1988 there will be sufficient members willing to help in the Museum so that Dr. Clark will not feel called upon to staff so many of the Museum morning and afternoon sessions himself. Happily the Museum Trust Management Committee now has a Chairman, Mr. John Hill, Mrs. Knight has agreed to take on the Secretaryship, and Mr. S. Bennett takes on the role of Assistant Curator. The Museum now has a very strong management team, but help will still be needed both in preparing for the Spring opening, and during the season. Sitting at the receipt of custom in the Museum when the tourists are around one meets people from all over the globe. And as you will see from the Museum Trust report, there are interesting developments in the offing.

There have, of course, been changes in the Society's Committee. Mr. Sanders, Mr. and Mrs. Kinnear and Mr. Caleb Smith were unable to continue, and I paid tribute to their help in my report

to the A.G.M. last November. In their place we welcome Mr. Gillman Davis, Mr. J. Springford, Mr. E. Goldsworthy and Mr. Augele, and Mrs. Carson who take over the Secretaryship from Mrs. Denny who remains as Membership Secretary. And Alan Denny takes over from me as Chairman and I know he will find the office as enjoyable and rewarding as I have done.

Those of you who were at the Commemoration Service last October will have heard an antiphon sung at the coronation of William the Conqueror in December 1066 - the result of much diligent and persevering research by Mr. Springford. But not enough members heard it. In my first year as Chairman we had discussions with the Dean about the future of this Service. There is little point in continuing it unless more members attend. Since Harold and William are to Battle what Romulus and Remus were to Ancient Rome, our Commemoration Service ought to become again, what once it was, something in the nature of a Battle and East Sussex Civic Service.

Finally, I recently came across a translation of an 8th century Latin poem which seemed very appropriate to the Year of the Great Storm. "Storm and destruction shattering
Strike fear upon the world,
.....
The rush and ruin of the wind".
The verses were dedicated to Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury and later Bishop of Sherborne, and a man much revered by King Alfred. It seems that Aldhelm used to stand on a bridge as a gleeman singing Gospel songs interspersed with scraps of clowning. (This suggests that guitars etc. in church services can claim an honourable ancestry.) Those who have been so tolerant of my Chairmanship for three years will not be surprised when I say that Aldhelm is clearly a man after my own heart!

K.M. Reader

"1066 AND ALL THAT"

(The Background to Domesday)

The Commemoration Lecture: The President of the Society, Professor R. Allen Brown, M.A., D.Litt., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.

10th October, 1986

The Norman Conquest has always been a controversial subject, bedevilled by national and insular prejudice and a "them and us" mentality. Freeman whose six volume work on the Conquest appeared in the 1860's and 70's saw the conflict as one between Liberal Englishmen with Protestant leanings defeated by foreigners guilty of using dirty tricks (cavalry), and aided by the Scarlet Woman of Rome: though in the end we captured the conquerors who became more English than the English. In short, Hastings, was a glorious defeat, like Dunkirk.

But there was nothing insular about the Normans themselves. In 911 Rollo the Norseman was granted a settlement in Northern France by Charles the Simple. (Here indeed they did become more Frankish than the Franks). They expanded. Maine was absorbed in 1064 and meantime Normans were taking over southern Italy and Sicily. They were to head the First Crusade and found a Norman state at Antioch. But except for their achievement in Syria they succeeded by infiltration; military prowess as mercenaries they gained the lordship of fiefs, and they built churches as well as castles. Colonization and takeover was the intended pattern for England. Hastings was not meant to happen.

It was the increasing resistance of the Godwin faction, the parvenu and Anglo-Danish* element of the English aristocracy, that made peaceful takeover impossible. Ethelred II had married Emma, daughter of Duke Richard I of Normandy. Edward their son was thus a kinsman of the Conqueror. Some 50 years before the Conquest, Swein Forkbeard, King of Denmark, and his son Cnut conquered England, and Ethelred, his wife and family were exiled to Normandy.
Edward the Confessor was eight years old when he left England and spent the prime of his manhood at the Norman Court. Then in 1036, in the time of the Conqueror's father Duke Robert the Magnificent, Alfred, Edward's younger brother intervened in England from Normandy, and Edward never forgave Godwin for the subsequent blinding and murder of his brother. But Godwin may well subsequently have assumed the role of kingmaker, for in 1042 Edward was crowned king, but was obliged to marry Godwin's daughter Edith. (The marriage was childless). But Edward brought Norman friends and favourites with him. Robert of Jumieges became Bishop of London and then Archbishop of Canterbury. There was a Norman colony in Essex and on the Welsh border, with a Norman castle in Hereford in Earl Swein's own territory. In 1051 Edward nominated his kinsman William as his heir. This, no doubt, was the cause of Godwin's

* All four of Godwin's sons, Harold himself, Swein, Gyrth and Tostig bore Scandinavian names.

rebellion as a result of which Godwin and his sons were banished and Edith sent to a nunnery. In 1052 the Godwins were back in arms and reinstated, Edith was recalled, and most Normans dismissed from court including Archbishop Robert; the latter replaced by Stigand, a pluralist and uncanonically appointed. The aetheling Edgar* was invited back from long exile in Hungary, but died soon after his arrival. Godwin died in 1053. In 1064 Edward sent Harold Godwinson to Normandy to confirm his promise of the throne to William. So when, on the death of the Confessor, Harold took the crown himself, he did so as a usurper and perjurer. No doubt he recognised that if William became king his own former role of sub regulus would be ended, for William would be unlikely to tolerate a power behind the throne. Halley's comet was the omen, and Senlac the Judgment of God. The Conquest was not premeditated, but since peaceful expansion by infiltration was not to be, William crossed the Channel supported by the blessing of the Pope and the public opinion of Europe.

Especially obscured by insular prejudice has been any assessment of the consequences of the Norman Conquest, i.e. who contributed what to Anglo-Norman England. The changes were certainly profound: an increase in the power of the monarchy and a more personal kingship, a change of personnel at the top, the imposition of an alien ruling class in church and state, and feudalism.
Sooner or later every aspect of English life was to be affected. Architecture: pre-conquest Westminster was already Romanesque, but after the Conquest every major church was rebuilt on the Norman model - only larger e.g. Norwich, and Winchester which became the largest church in Latin Christendom. There were some Norman castles in England before 1066, but after that date they proliferated as an expression of feudal lordship (e.g. the Tower of London). Alongside the building of castles must be set the revival and modernisation of the Church in England. For the Conquest brought a change in our foreign relations; in effect our entry into Europe, where northern France was not only the political but also the intellectual powerhouse of the West. The spiritual side of the Normans should not be ignored. If they were great builders of castles they were also great founders and builders of monasteries. By their victories they saw themselves as God's Chosen People.

Pre-Conquest England had seen four Danish kings on the throne (Swein, Cnut, Harold Harefoot and Harthacnut), Godwin was a creation of Cnut and Harold was not of the royal blood of Wessex.

Northern Europe in the 11th century was old fashioned and in 1066 it was the old Teutonic/Scandinavian world that went down before the new. The fact that the Conquest gave England a foothold in northern France where Normandy was nominally a fief of the French King involved this country in continental warfare, and war is a catalyst of change. War brings problems of supply, and in some sense Domesday leads on to Magna Carta

* son of Edmund Ironside, son of Ethelred II.

and beyond. There was an expansion of the Old English administration, and the introduction of Norman techniques: ducal charters based on Carolingian models were in some respects superior to those of pre-Conquest England. England became the best governed country in Europe. Domesday testifies to a literate society, and also, perhaps less happily, is evidence of the growth of a highly efficient bureaucracy!

K.M. Reader

THE REAL RICHARD III

Miss J.M. Melhuish — November 7th 1986

The posthumous reputation of Richard III as a humpbacked murdering villain can be attributed to the distortions of Shakespeare. As for physical deformity, portraits of the king provide no basis for this, and an x-ray of the portrait of Richard in the Queen's collection at Windsor shows clearly that the high line of the right shoulder was overpainted by a later hand to accord with the malevolent tradition. Some very old men remembered him as "comely enough-short of stature but comely" while the Countess of Desmond maintained that she had once danced with Richard "the handsomest man in the room".

Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard III is Tudor propaganda based on Sir Thomas More (only eight years old at Bosworth) Holinshed and Polydore Vergil. What are the crimes alleged against Richard? He murdered Edward, the Lancastrian Prince of Wales, likewise Henry VI, was responsible for the deaths, among others, of his brother the Duke of Clarence, of Hastings, Rivers, Grey and Vaughan, and of course, Edward V and his brother the Duke of York (the Princes in the Tower of the sentimental Victorian painting). And finally, that he poisoned his wife with the intention of marrying his niece, Elizabeth of York. There can as yet be no complete proof of innocence on all of these charges, but some can be proved groundless. Further light on events may yet emerge from archives, particularly from those of Burgundy where Duchess Margaret was Richard's sister, and from those of the Holy Roman Empire in Vienna.

Richard, son of Richard, Duke of York, was born at Fotheringay on October 2nd, 1452, when the pious but feeble-minded Henry VI was on the throne, with his amazon spouse Margaret of Anjou the power behind it. Duke Richard was killed at the battle of Wakefield in December 1460, but in the spring of 1461 his eldest son, Edward, Earl of March, decisively defeated the Lancastrians at Towton, and Edward became king as Edward IV, making his elder brother George, Duke of Clarence, and his younger brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester. In 1470 Edward IV quarelled with Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick (the Kingmaker) who, supported by Clarence, now made common cause with his old Lancastrian enemies and restored Henry VI. Edward fled to Burgundy with only a handful of followers, including his brother, Richard of Gloucester. Six months later they returned. Warwick was defeated and killed at Barnet, with

Richard playing a prominent part in the Battle, and the Lancastrian forces were then completely crushed at Tewkesbury where Anne of Warwick's husband, the Lancastrian Prince Edward of Wales, was killed. (All contemporary sources state that he was killed on the field). Henry VI, the pathetic catspaw, died immediately afterwards, no doubt liquidated as a matter of political necessity, but not by Gloucester but on Edward IV's instructions. Clarence had Anne spirited away, but Gloucester found her "a damsel in the guise of a kitchen maid" took her to her uncle the Archbishop of York, and their marriage was to produce one delicate child who predeceased his father. But whereas Richard of Gloucester was to show consistent loyalty to his brother Edward IV, George of Clarence was a devious troublemaker, and in 1478 Edward summoned a Parliament at which he laid an indictment against his brother, and Clarence was executed at the petition of Parliament, and Gloucester had no hand in the affair. Even Thomas More says that Gloucester pleaded against his execution, and Dominic Mancini, an Italian and a member of a French mission to the English court says that Richard deplored his brother's execution and was rarely seen at court afterwards. He remained in the north, in effect Viceroy of England North of Trent, where he achieved a lasting reputation for bringing law and order to that turbulent region.

Why was Clarence disposed of? Edward IV had, in some secrecy, married Elizabeth Woodville, widowed daughter of Lord Rivers, and considered of somewhat too humble an origin for a queen consort. Her social climbing Woodville relatives achieved rapid advancement and became the all powerful faction at court. But Edward IV had previously been betrothed, also in secret, to Lady Eleanor Butler, a contract as binding as the marriage ceremony itself. The King's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville was therefore invalid and Edward's children illegitimate. Had Clarence unearthed a secret known to few, and was he a victim of the machinations of the Woodvilles?

In 1483 Edward IV, a man "given to unbridled lechery and gormandising" died unexpectedly, but having designated Richard of Gloucester, uncle of the young Edward V, as Protector. The Queen, Elizabeth Woodville, saw a threat to her parvenu relatives and planned to dispose of Richard. Richard, forewarned by Lord Hastings, a member of the Council, cannot seriously be blamed for subsequent events. He did homage to Edward V, and Stillingfleet, Bishop of Bath and Wells, imprisoned since the death of Clarence, was released. Richard seems to have been reluctant to accept the crown and finally yielded at the petition of Parliament. He was then anointed and crowned, and after his coronation he made a triumphant tour of the north. During this triumphant progress, according to Thomas More, Tyrell murdered the young princes. Yet Richard had no need to take action against them since they had been judged illegitimate, and therefore ineligible to succeed to the throne. The bones found in a casket at the bottom of stone steps in the Tower are not conclusively of the right age group or even sex.

Richard proved a good and conscientious administrator. The Harlian MSS 433 transcribed by the Richard III Society shows him unwilling to delegate, and devoted to the minutiae of government. His one Parliament on his initiative passed enlightened acts to secure the fair administration of justice. He showed much kindness to the humble, giving money to the poor of London, and supported the widow of an adversary he had eliminated. He was a generous benefactor of the Church - King's College Chapel and Queens' Cambridge, York Minster and Carlisle Cathedral bear witness. During his reign of just over three years he faced plots and rebellions. His wife died in March 1485, almost certainly of consumption. Their only child had died in April 1484. Richard was left downcast and certainly politically vulnerable.

Henry Tudor not Richard was the usurper. Henry VII sprang from the illegitimate line of John of Gaunt. Richard during most of his reign had relied very much on the northern nobility, but at Bosworth Northumberland withheld his forces and Lord Stanley changed sides, with the result that Richard was overwhelmed. But even his opponents vouched for Richard's great personal courage. His naked body was strapped on the back of a horse, and he was buried in the Church of the Greyfriars in Leicester, and his remains were scattered at the Reformation.

A villain? Note the official City Records of York. "This day was our good King Richard piteously slain and murdered, to the great heaviness of the city". And a recent television programme "The Trial of Richard III" returned a verdict of 'Not Guilty'.

K.M. Reader

(Certainly a rather different assessment of Richard III has emerged in recent years, but the view that the traditional verdict on Richard III is based solely on Tudor propaganda cannot be substantiated. Dominic Mancini and the author of the Croyland Chronicle (who, scholars think, may well have been John Russell, Bishop of Lincoln and Richard III's own Chancellor) provide evidence that the hostile view of the King was held by contemporaries also. If Richard III can almost certainly be acquitted of some of the crimes alleged against him he surely cannot be absolved from the murder of Hastings; and the summary execution of Rivers and Co. without due process of law must also be held against him even if the ultimate fate of Rivers, Vaughan and Grey would have been no different. It is possible to provide a different and less favourable account of the events following the death of Edward IV and the accession to the throne of Richard of Gloucester, but here, as with the death of the Princes in the Tower, the verdict perhaps should be neither 'Guilty' nor 'Not Guilty', but the third verdict available under the Scottish legal system, i.e. 'Not Proven'. As for the verdict on the Television Programme referred to by Miss Melhuish I quote from an article in 'History' (the journal of the Historical Association) of June 1987 which reviewed recent work on that controversial monarch. "The result was a futile debate, which may have made compelling viewing but hardly merited publication.

Several of the contributors, under cross-examination, produced assertions which they would probably disown in calmer conditions, while promising topics were brusquely cut off where they did not fit the lawyers' arguments. The transcript is a brutally explicit demonstration that the adversarial approach, so beloved of television, is inimical to real historical debate".

The late E.F. Jacob, sometime Chichele Professor of History at Oxford was surely right when he wrote that "He (Richard) was very far from being the distorted villain of history". Professor J.R. Lander in 'Conflict and Stability in 15th Century England' (1969), "Richard was an able soldier and administrator, a cultivated man, fond of music and architecture and deeply pious. He introduced into Parliament a useful programme of reforming legislation".

Was he a villain by the standards of his own time or even or ours? Might he not have been very conscious of what had happened to former 'Protectors' during a royal minority? Did he have cause to fear the machinations of the Woodvilles once Edward V achieved his majority, and there is some suggestion that Elizabeth Woodville and the Council may have had an early majority in mind? Were many of his actions the result of what may well have been justifiable concern for his own safety in a violent age? Of course we are never likely to know the truth, and for this, idle speculation can be no satisfactory substitute to the historian. It is said that Oliver Cromwell lifted up the lid of Charles I's coffin and muttered "Cruel Necessity". Might this not be the most charitable comment on the actions of Duke Richard of Gloucester?

Had the Battle of Bosworth gone the other way there is evidence to suggest that Richard III might well have gone down to posterity as an able ruler.

And, when all is said and done, it would certainly be possible to make out as good a case for Henry VIII to be regarded as the Wicked Ogre of English History as there is for the traditional view of Richard III as the Wicked Uncle.

K.M.R.

HATCHERS, SKIVERS AND DOE SKIN GLOVES

(The Sussex Leather Industry in the 19th Century)

Mr. Geoffrey Mead, B.A. — December 5th 1986

A very interesting lecture on the Sussex leather industry of the 19th century was given by Mr. Mead, who, with the aid of slides, guided us through the Tanning industry of that time.

Before the advent of plastics, leather was in great demand and used for many purposes: footwear, harness, protective clothing for industrial Brighton, and so on. All kinds of skin were used: apart from the obvious cow hide and sheep skin, others were used which would not normally spring to mind - hedgehog, eel and dog (doe skin!) Nothing was wasted. Even the hair and bristles were used for clothing and brushes.

Hatchers were the men who chopped the tree bark to obtain the tannin used in preparing leather. Much running water was needed to clean the skins, lime removed the hair, and the skins were then transferred to progressively stronger solutions of e.g. urine and alum, and in some cases the process could take up to two years. Little wonder the Tannery could be smelt at some considerable distance! The tanned leather was then rolled, beaten and stretched, and dressers (skivers) split it for its various uses. Many thousands of skins were sent from Brighton slaughterhouses each year to small family owned Tanneries in Lewes and nearby towns.

The coming of the railways hastened the decline of small local tanneries which were unable to survive the fierce competition from the large factory tanneries of South London.

Jean Kinnear

BATTLE, THEN AND NOW

Mr. Kenneth Clarke — January 2nd 1987

Mr. Clarke presented a pictorial record of the changes in Battle High Street between 1870, the date of the earliest available photograph, and the present day. This was based upon his unique collection of some 700 old photographs and postcards supplemented by his recent photographs taken, in some instances, within a few weeks of the date of the lecture.

The earlier pictures illustrated the extent of trades such as shoemaking and saddlery associated with the former Battle tannery, as well as the former importance of clock and watch making as a local activity. The advent of motor traffic exposed the hazard of the very steep camber of the High Street, and the consequent levelling resulted in the double kerb which is now a feature of the south side. A photograph taken in the early years of this century showed another hazard of motoring in the High Street, a petrol pump being situated immediately below a gas street lamp. This does not seem to have caused any concern at the time!

Prominent features in some of the earlier pictures now missing from the local scene were the Towers Hotel, the jam factory, and of course the tannery. With a few honoured exceptions the shops of the High Street have changed many times both in ownership and in the nature of the business carried on, with consequent changes in the appearance of the shop fronts. These changes are by no means all for the worse, and some owners have achieved very satisfactory restorations of fronts which had been unfortunately "modernised" in Victorian times.

In addition to a most interesting series of pictures of buildings Mr. Clarke also showed photographs of some noted Battle "characters" of former days, among them some early members of the Society.

D.L. Nicol

UNUSUAL ASPECTS OF RYE

Miss Alma Fabes — February 6th 1987

Rye, situated on a rock and bounded by the rivers Tillingham, Brede and Rother, has had a turbulent history, but reached its peak of prosperity in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The French made several raids during the 14th century and in 1377 they succeeded in taking Rye. They burnt the town so that only stone buildings survived, and among the booty they took were the church bells. The following year the men of Rye raided Normandy and recovered them. Rye then set about the slow business of rebuilding the town much as we know it today. To give warning of any other approach by the French, a bell was hung in Watchbell Street at the end of which a look-out tower was built.

In 1449 Rye, still suffering from the effects of the French raids, annexed Tenterden to help provide the quota of ships required by the Cinque Ports Confederation; yet in 1588 when the Spanish Armada came, Rye could provide only one ship.

In 1573 Elizabeth I visited Rye, causing confusion among the local dignitaries. Expected to arrive at the main gate, she entered by the Postern Gate. To this visit Rye is indebted for its mulberry trees. The Queen, concerned for the welfare of the many Huguenot refugees in the town, ordered 12 mulberry trees to be planted to supply silk to enable them to follow their trade. Evidently happy with her visit she was pleased to call the town "Rye Royal".

In 1562 L. Hilliard built a clock for the church for which he was paid £30 in quarterly instalments. This is the oldest church turret clock in the country still in working order and with its own works. It has an 18' pendulum which hangs down into the church. The scroll around the clock is carved in wood. The Bell Boys that strike the quarter hours first appear in a drawing of the church dated 1760, but the ones now seen are made of fibre glass; the original oak models having been honourably retired after 200 years service to the warmth and safety of the Chapel of St. Clare in Rye Church.

John Fletcher, the dramatist, was born in 1579, the son of the Minister of Rye Church. Fletcher House, situated in Lion Street close to the Church is now a restaurant. To the left of Fletcher House is a narrow passage down which is an old Tudor door which once led into the house. A few years ago the then owner of the restaurant heard footsteps down this passage, and thinking that someone had lost their way, went out to see if she could help. She found herself facing a young man in Edwardian dress, and as soon as she spoke the "gentleman" vanished.

In 1638 Thomas Peacock bequeathed his fine house in the High Street and £36 income to provide a free school for the boys of Rye. In 1831 a sun dial was presented to the town by Colonel De Lacy Evans which was placed above the oval window on the second floor of the school, but during Queen Victoria's

Jubilee it was removed and placed on the wall of a building opposite the Town Hall.

James Lamb, when Mayor of Rye, played host to King George I. The King was returning from Hanover when his ship was in difficulties during a storm, and for safety he was put ashore at Jury's Gut. Lamb, hearing of the King's plight, hastened to meet him and gave him hospitality in his house where he stayed for several days on account of a heavy snow storm. During this time Mrs. Lamb gave birth to a son to whom the King became godfather. All conversation between Lamb and the King had to take place in their one common language, Latin.

As a magistrate, Lamb imposed a fine on John Breads, a butcher, for giving short weight, and thereafter Breads bore him a grudge. One evening Lamb was to attend a dinner but felt unwell and asked his brother-in-law to go in his place. To save him going home to fetch his own cloak, Lamb lent him the one he usually wore himself, and it was the unfortunate Grebell who was stabbed by mistake in the church yard on his way home. Breads was arrested when he was heard drunkenly shouting that "Butchers should kill Lambs". Tried and found guilty he was condemned to death.

It was the practice in those days for the corpse to be removed from the scaffold the following day and hung up in a gibbet for all to see. It was said that as the corpse deteriorated into a skeleton women would collect the bones for soup.

In the Old Tuck Shop opposite the Town Hall is an oven in use since 1750. Immediately above is a hoist used by smugglers to remove goods in a hurry and pass them down the street over the roof-tops.

In 1632 Thomas Brown and family emigrated to America and bought land from the Indians about 25 miles from New York. On this Brown founded two villages called Rye and Hastings. To preserve his links with his home town he asked for a brick from Rye and in return sent one from the new Rye. This brick is now set in the facade of the Town Hall.

The old Court Hall and Market Place, once two separate buildings, were replaced in 1742 by the present Town Hall, inside which is a list of all Mayors since 1286. Rye can also boast two maces still carried before the Mayor on ceremonial occasions. One is the Mayor's mace, and the other was the King's Bailiff's mace, but in 1705 the Mayor became Bailiff also, and therefore entitled to both maces.

The old fire engine was kept at the Town Hall, but the horses to pull it were kept in a field, owned by Wright and Pankhurst, outside the town. When a fire occurred someone had to run to collect the horses - if they were not already out on a job.

The row of tiny cottages in Huckstep Row (Fishgut Alley), a narrow passage off Church Square, was once inhabited by fishermen who left their mark by carving ships on the wooden beams along the side of the passage.

In 1935 the public conveniences in Cinque Port Street were demolished, to be replaced by more modern ones. During demolition an 8' well was discovered, and also the remains of the circle around which horses were driven to pump water up Conduit Street to the water tower in the church yard. This tower is said to be the finest example of Georgian brickwork in the country. Recently some architectural students in wet suits examined the bottom and reported that the brickwork below ground was in perfect condition and that there was as much brickwork below as above ground. When this tower was built to contain 20,000 gallons of water the Vicar was paid 7/- compensation for disturbance to the church yard.

In the Rope Walk is a door between the fish shop and the back of the public conveniences. Miss Fabes was lent the key to this door and allowed inside where she found the old soup kitchen containing two large coppers which each held 70 gallons of soup. The Town Crier went round the town telling the needy to go to the Town Hall for 2d tickets which they took to the soup kitchen where they were fed.

Miss Fabes was also lent the key to the Landgate. When she turned it in the old lock it sprang back immediately, opening more easily than many a modern lock. Inside the tower she found old stone steps circling upwards around the wall. At the top she found herself in what had been the room for the machinery that worked the drawbridge and portcullis, although neither is there now. Instead there is a Wendy-house type structure to protect the workings of the clock placed there in memory of the Prince Consort. At the top of one tower she found an old bell still hanging, but it had been silent a long time.

Sheila Bishop

THE ABBEYS OF NORMANDY AND SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Mr. Roger Porter, Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Academique

An Audio-Visual Presentation 20th February 1987

Although there were several important religious houses in the south of England, particularly in Sussex, such as Battle Abbey, Lewes Priory, Bayham Abbey, Michelham Priory, etc., all built subsequent to the Norman Conquest and mainly in the Norman style, these were mostly destroyed by the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII. Similar buildings were being erected at the same time in Normandy, particularly in the Seine valley at Jumieges, St. Martin-de-Boscherville, Bec-Hellouin, Rouen, etc., and some of these have fared much better, so giving us the opportunity of seeing today what our buildings would have been like had they survived.

This audio-visual presentation outlined the development of monasteries from the original desert hermits through the Benedictines and Cistercians, and showed the layout of a typical monastery of the period. Mr. Porter in presenting his own slides covering both historical and archaeological aspects of the Abbeys gave a wide ranging commentary that one might expect from someone who has been honoured by the French

Government for services to French culture.

Alan Denny

LORDS, DEANS AND TITHES

(New Information From Battle)

The Robertson Memorial Lecture Mr. Christopher Whittick, M.A.

6th March 1987

Mr. Whittick began by outlining the work of the East Sussex Record Office, and then distributed photocopies of some of the documents, including medieval charters, recently transferred there from the Deanery, and also from a firm of solicitors to whom Battle, and indeed the whole of East Sussex, owes much on account of their good record keeping. That firm was probably in Battle in the 1660's (J.N. Tilden, then Tilden and Barton, Barton and Bellingham, Ellman and Whitmarsh, Raper and Ellman, and subsequently Raper and Fovargue).

The speaker then dealt with the Urban Tithing Practice known as Battle Custom, which was bound up with Battle's status as a Peculiar, which had been a bone of contention between the Abbots of Battle and the Bishop of Chichester. This status was preserved at the dissolution of the Abbey and hence the Dean was exempt from episcopal visitations, held his own court, licensed midwives and schoolmasters, dealt with probate and had his own seal. The exemption of the Dean from episcopal jurisdiction lasted until it was abolished by Act of Parliament in 1845 (this Act did not apply to Royal Peculiars).

The list of Deans from 1662 to 1882 circulated to members showed the majority to have been Cambridge men (and mostly from St. John's) and many were pluralists. All were chaplains to the Hospital for which they were paid £25 p.a. charged to the rates. The Websters, as lineal descendants of the Abbots retained the right of institution, and were indeed known as Abbots, and there was occasional friction between Deans and these post-Reformation 'Abbots'.

Between the Deans and the Townsfolk tithes, however, were the main and special source of friction. Most towns had secured exemption from tithes long ago. (Only vicarial or small tithe was at issue; the great or rectorial tithe continued to be paid to the owner of the rectory, i.e. the Abbot or the post-Reformation Montagues and Websters). It was the tithe on houses that was contentious, for although some householders were farmers, most were urban traders and shopkeepers. We know so much about Battle Custom because of litigation, and Mr. Whittick gave details of a number of court cases. With the increase of Nonconformity still more people became unwilling to pay and had to be sued by the Deans. This was often embarrassing to the incumbent, but tithe constituted between ⅓ and ½ of a Dean's total income. The Unitarian Minister who ran a school at 91 High Street had his books distrained for non-payment and was forced to close down. The Tithe Commissioners in 1858 succeeded in redeeming all but

"Battle Custom" and it was some years later before this came to an end.

K.M. Reader

AGRICULTURE IN THE WEALD - PAST AND PRESENT

Mr. Laurence Woodham — 20th March 1987

Mr. Woodham spoke from a deep personal knowledge of local farming and its history. He described the region as one of difficult land, mostly poorly drained clay apart from some areas of sand. Wide stretches are covered by woodland and the rest supports wheat, dairying, beef and sheep, and around Heathfield in the 19th Century, poultry.

Mr. Woodham went on to take a closer look at this occupation of poultry rearing. Chickens and cows were complementary and as a crop were rotated about the fields. There were no exclusively poultry farms as one of the major risks was that of disease. Poultry lived out in the open, sheltering in night hutches and were crammed in the later stages of fattening. Higglers walked from farm to farm buying the fat stock, which was then transported by horse wagon to London where it was known as Surrey Fowls.

Poultry rearing was one of the ways in which a farm worker could set up on his own. For a start profit sharing schemes between employer and employee were common. Land could be rented for £1 per acre, and the Vicar of Heathfield reported in 1895 that 6 acres, 2 cows and poultry gave a decent living for a family. The present Broiler industry started in Buxted and is still carried on in the district.

So much interest was shown by the members that question time afterwards lasted almost as long as the lecture.

Alan Kinnear

SUMMER OUTINGS 1987

It was the Dean of Rochester who, when he visited the Society's exhibition of the Leek facsimile of the Bayeux Tapestry in 1986, suggested that members might like a guided tour of Rochester Cathedral. And Rochester, apart from the Norman Cathedral and its association with the Conqueror, and the Norman Castle Keep, has other attractions, the restored Victorian High Street and the Dickens Centre among them. It was appropriate in the year marking the 900th anniversary of William's death that on 17th June, 1987 members visited the Cathedral; an occasion marred only by the tuning of the organ in preparation for an evening concert. This at times made the commentary by our two very knowledgeable and fluent guides inaudible to those whose hearing aids magnified the organ sound as well as the voice of the speaker! The visit to the Cathedral left little time to enjoy the city's other places of interest, but no doubt, in the words of the old song "there'll come another day".

If there were some empty seats on the coach to the Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton on 16th July, the same could not

be said for the Romney Marsh Churches tour on 12th August, which, as on a previous occasion, was oversubscribed. Brigadier Harper, assisted this time by the Rev. J.H. Green, now Vicar of Sandhurst but who began his Ministry as a curate in the Marsh, led us to churches not seen in 1985.

Ivychurch - mainly 14th century, with its three parallel aisles without structural division for the full length of the church. The very large tower, seven bay arcades and the 15th century stalls in the Chancel are some of the less usual features, along with the more typical black board Commandments, the Lord's Prayer etc., and the Royal Arms of George III over the south door. Along the south wall is stone seating, before the days of pews, for the old and infirm, i.e. "the weakest went to the wall".

St. Mary in the Marsh which stands on a mound surrounded by the marsh dykes has a Norman tower which is all that remains of the original church after enlargement in the 13th century. E. Nesbit, ("The Railway Children" etc.) is buried in the churchyard.

New Romney - one of the original Cinque Ports, has many historic buildings, but pride of place must go to the splendid church of St. Nicholas. Dating mainly from the 12th century with a great 100' West Tower and a fine Norman West Doorway, the church is entered by steps below street level, a consequence of the storm and floods of 1287. In the South Chancel a large altar tomb from the early 17th century was once the meeting place for the election of the Mayor and Jurats of the port.

St. Clements, Old Romney was first built in the 13th century, but enlarged a little later when a South aisle was added with an Early English arcade. An unusual font of around 1300 has shafts with elaborate carvings of foliage and beasts. Some scenes from the 'Dr. Syn' film were shot here, and in return the Rank Organisation gave a generous donation which was used to good purpose on repair and restoration work. Tea in the Church Hall at Brookland gave a bonus opportunity to see again the Church of St. Augustine with its detached wooden bell tower, its wall painting of St. Thomas Becket and its remarkable lead font. (See Newsletter No. 4 of April 1986. A talk on the Rural Churches of Romney Marsh was given by Mr. Barry Funnell on 28th October, 1983, and a note on this will be found in Newsletter No. 3 of April 1985).

There was some support from those who were on this outing, and also on that to the Downland Museum that the caterers at the latter could well take lessons from the ladies of Brookland.

The September outing to Michelham Priory had to be abandoned for lack of support, and the Society has been warned by the Coach Company that future cancellations of advance bookings are likely to result in a demand for financial compensation. We have been warned. And that warning prompts again the question, "What kind of outings do members want?". Some may

not wish to visit places they have seen before, perhaps with their own transport. Others may no longer drive and are glad to visit old familiar places as well as new ones. But your Committee cannot attempt to satisfy members unless they make their wishes and views known. To quote "The Importance of Being Earnest" "...it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure". For the sake of future pleasure, speak your minds!

K.M. Reader

THE MUSEUM TRUST

The Museum is now closed for the winter, though of course, we can usually arrange to open it for special occasions - School visits, Society members and their friends, and other groups. Contact Mr. J. Hill (Battle 2439) or R. Clark (Battle 3825). We plan to open for the Easter weekend (April 2nd to 4th), possibly for the May holiday weekend, and then, finally - for the season at Whitsun.

It is intended to display several new exhibits throughout the season, in particular, items relating to industrial enterprises from Battle's recent past; also many of the existing exhibits are being refurbished and rearranged. This means that there is much to be done before visitors start coming.

As the Museum is so closely associated with the Society, if any member has any ideas, and above all, can help, would they please call in to the Museum soon after 10 a.m. on Wednesdays or Fridays each week.

We are still looking for an assistant secretary; the position is not onerous and requires no historical knowledge - just an interest in the history of the area - could someone out there please help?

J. Hill, Chairman, Museum Trust Committee
Dr. R.H.P. Clark, Curator

THE LIBRARY

Books added to the Library include the following:-
Given by the family of the late Mrs. M. Langley.
Arthur Bryant: The Fire and the Rose
Robert Gottfried: The Black Death
Catherine Hills: Blood of the British
Richard Humble: The Saxon Kings
A.L. Rivet and Colin Smith: Place Names of Roman Britain
A.F. Scott: The Saxon Age
Michael Wood: In Search of the Dark Ages

Donated by the Historical Society
R. Allen Brown: The Normans
Elizabeth Hallam: Domesday Book Through Nine Centuries
H.R. Loyn: The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England

Other acquisitions: R.H.S. Robertson: Fuller Earth - a history (Given by Mr. Robertson in memory of the late Miss J. Robertson), James Campbell: The Anglo-Saxons. Battle Petty Sessions, 24th March 1778 to 10th March 1789.

Mrs. G. Young

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