INNS AND OTHER DRINKING HOUSES

The following text is based largely on the archived material written by the late John Springford, a past Chairman of the Battle and District Historical Society. Internal evidence suggests that he wrote the text in the very early years of the 21st century. It has been revised and brought up to date, where further information is available, in the winter of 2016-17. A list of known licensees for each property is given in an appendix, up to the 1930s. Clubs (such as the Battle Club or the former Priory Club) are omitted.

The earliest directory, the Universal of 1791, listed eight licensed premises in Battle. Of these, the *Gun* and the *Black Horse* were both outside the town itself, the former in Netherfield and the latter at Telham. There was also the *Squirrel* along the North Trade Road which is, apparently, 16th century and was purportedly a 'popular watering hole for drovers taking sheep to market'. The story of the Netherfield and Telham pubs will be found at the end of the text below.

The term 'inn', like that of 'public house', which we now use, is a generic rather than a particular one. Not all inns were the same sort of establishment and many places were little more than drinking rooms where one was 'licensed to be drunk on the premises'. These was the lowest and crudest of places, where the labourer could drink cheap ale, probably brewed on the premises: over the years there must have been several of these pubs in Battle, very few of which are now remembered. The term ale-house was partly defined by the Beerhouse Act of 1830, where on payment of a licence fee any adult could open a beerhouse for the sale of beer only, without wines or spirits. One such was possibly the *Conquering Hero*, which existed in the 1840s, and another, the *Cow* which apparently was to be found in the High Street next door to the *Bull*. The *Bell* may have been another.

The pre-1830 ale-house provided ale but little else; some entertainment possibly, but only as much as the customers could provide for themselves, The tavern was one step further up the social scale and provided food and wine and some very basic accommodation. These were not firm definitions; a drinking house could call itself what it wanted. In the early days at least, all the beer sold would have been locally produced, much of it by the inns themselves; it seems that not until the nineteenth century was a brewery established in the town like those of later years (see the *Industry* essay).

Horace Walpole (1717-1797) encountered one such drinking establishment in Robertsbridge – unfortunately unidentified – which he described in horror as a "den, where only one bed was available, the remainder were occupied by smugglers, with whom Walpole's companion was expected to lie". The travellers did not hesitate and hurried on to Battle "despite the late hour", where they were presumably housed in a fit style.

The top of the scale was occupied by the inn proper, where the customer could expect superior food and lodging and where there would be provision for stabling. These grand establishments would commonly boast rooms of style and elegance, capable of housing functions and becoming the unofficial meeting place of local dignitaries. In the days of the mail and stage coach it was frequently inns of this calibre that were the ports of call for the

coaches and from where the independent traveller could hire a post-horse. In Battle the obvious example was the *George*, which still presents a little of its air of superiority and style despite no longer being a drinking house.

Early records give insufficient information about where the inn was though, patchy as they are, we can identify some; their owners or tenants are named in the appendix. Leonard Reygate is listed as being at the *Bull* in 1569, for example, but we have no way of knowing whether that was on the site now occupied by a pub of the same name.

The records improve in the eighteenth century. In 1791 but in no later directory the *New Inn* is listed under the tenancy of John Alderton, and with the *George* it was described as one of the two principal inns of the town. It faced the Abbey Green and stretched back into Kenwards Yard. In 1657 Edward Welch was admitted to the 'copyhold messuage in Middleborough once called Fishers but now called The Eagle', and the Martins,[1] citing legal documentation, confirm that 6-7 High Street was indeed the *Eagle*, run by Edward Welsh in 1662, and still there in 1839. So the *New Inn* and the *Eagle* were the same. It shut shortly before 1850, presumably as a result of falling coach traffic.

Next in progression along the High Street was what Springford termed '*the abominably named 1066*', which until May 1980 was called the *Star*. While the sign of the star has been for centuries as the symbol of welcome and associated as such with monasteries, the connection should not be made in this case as before the mid-19th century the establishment was known as the *Eight Bells*. It was clearly indicated in the guide-books and was described in 1850 as a 'commercial inn' by which date the coaching trade had largely ceased.

The name 'eight bells' is commonly used and relates to the standard peal of church bells. It is said that where an inn denotes the number of bells in its title, then the parish church will bear the same peal. Certainly Battle has eight bells. For example Northiam does have six; so does Chailey, now at any rate, rather than the indicated five.

The tenant of the *Eight Bells* – for a twenty-year period until about 1845 – was Henry Alderton. He, no doubt, was a relation of the *New Inn*'s John Alderton. He would have presided over the coaching trade in its glory days, something which was shared with others, and no doubt stayed on until the trade died in its tracks with the arrival of the railway.

The Eight Bells, later the Star and then the 1066: a nineteenth-century view from the Abbey.

In 1856 it belonged to the Castle Brewery of Lewes, then being sold.[2] In 1914 it joined the *George* as a preferred meeting place for local bodies. The *1066* closed early in the present century and is now one of a chain of coffee houses.

The *George* was the grandest of Battle's inns. It was apparently rebuilt in the 17th century (the Martins say 18th, though this was almost certainly in addition to an earlier rebuild) and again, enlarged and on a new plan, in 1811. It had large rooms, many now subdivided, where formal balls and dinners were held. An establishment of such importance would have been an obvious staging post for the coaches and must equally have felt the chill when this lucrative trade passed away. The *George* survived and remained a meeting place for Battle's worthies (and for William Cobbett in 1830; it refused him permission for a public meeting, perhaps because he had addressed one there in 1822.). The local sanitary board (1851-1894) and its successor the Urban District Council, 1894-1934, held their meetings at the *George* up to 1914 : meetings there are hardly conceivable in 2017.

The George, late nineteenth century

The earliest recorded tenant was Thomas Smith, in 1700. As this precedes the arrival of George I the name must come from somewhere else. In 1792 the tenant was the Widow Bellingham, whose grave is to be found in the churchyard (she died on 27 July 1796). In the 1840s and 50s the tenant was Mrs Sarah Couchman (who died late in 1854); in 1851 it appears to be run by two other women and in the 1870s by Mrs Sarah Riley. These were no doubt formidable women. Women commonly ran inns and taverns, often in succession to their late husbands but also because this was one of the few businesses in which women were accepted on equal terms and which provided good living.

In 1881 the tenant was a Dutchman, Henry Druquer, who had married an English woman. He was still there ten years later (the 1891 census has him managing a hotel at Sevenoaks). Until 2000 the George was one of 14 hotels owned by Fownes, who were said to be actively encouraging the return of "more local custom and expanding as a function venue for local organisations". Nothing came of this and the premises have become a hotel with an Italian restaurant occupying the ground floor.

Perhaps the grandest moment for the George was in 1816 when some special visitors were passing through Battle on their way to London. They were the King of Prussia, the Tsar Alexander and Marshal Blücher. The George provided lunch.[3]

The *Abbey*, facing the real Abbey across the Green, is another inn that has had a change of name. Until the 1870s it was called the *Half-Moon*, which is apparently a semi-religious symbol having its origins in the Templars and the Crusades. Until late in the 20th century the *Abbey* was where the local people went, slightly scruffy but homely; it is now smart. The 'old' *Abbey* fitted the definition of a tavern and there is no evidence that it was ever involved in the coaching trade. John Byng lodged here in 1788 and described it as "a miserable alehouse, where horses are never received".[4] For much of the middle part of the 19th century the licensee was Thomas Eldridge, a good old Battle name, who was still behind the bar well into his 80s.

Now this family inn is part of the Shepherd Neame company based at Faversham in Kent.

Changing inn names is not new, and one often wonders why such and such a name was substituted for another. Why, suddenly, the *Half-Moon* should become the *Abbey* will probably remain a mystery.

The Abbey Hotel, late nineteenth century

The name seems to have changed after the (future) Duke of Cleveland bought the Abbey but it might simply reflect a growing interest among visitors. After all, the 19th century found mediaeval times very fashionable.

The *King's Head* in Mount Street advertises itself as being Battle's oldest inn. It certainly occupies an old *building* (restored in 1935) but oldest pub on its original site it is not. It probably moved here in the 1830s when its former site along Caldbec Hill was rendered unremunerative by the building of the new turnpike from the Watch Oak to John's Cross; this not only severed the Lewes road at the Watch Oak but more significantly diverted the London road away from Caldbec Hill. Moreover, its Indian summer from the barracks further along the Levels (i e the stretch of road from Virgins Lane to Gate Farm) would have ceased some years before 1830 so that a removal down to Mount Street was both prudent and inevitable.[5] The inn itself was alongside the windmill extant on Caldbec Hill and, according to Mrs Behrens[6], its remains were "still to be seen in the house Friar's Hall". The site of its bowling green was reputedly within the property, Mount View, opposite.

While referring to the barracks along the Levels, this is probably the place to mention the *Barrack Inn*, which *may* have existed. The most likely candidate is now called Barrack Cottage but Springford was inclined to accept the Society's distinguished historian, Colonel Lemmon's, opinion that the cottage was probably the commanding officer's house as it exactly resembled a similar building in the barracks at Bexhill.
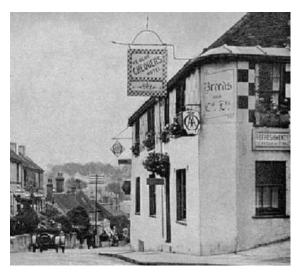

The barracks, in its short career, had a significant impact on Battle. It almost certainly gave birth to the *Wellington Inn* which started life in the building now called Old Wellington House, near the junction of the Whatlington Road with Virgins Lane. For the same reasons as the migration of the *Kings Head*, the *Wellington* re-established itself at the top of

In this nineteenth-century view the Wellington is the building with five first-storey windows.

the High Street, opposite the old cattle market. The inn was rebuilt in 1858. It remained there until the 1980s when the site was redeveloped and became Wellington Court, a complex of modern warden-assisted flats for the elderly. The tenant in 1881 was Ben Chrismas, another good old Battle-name, who described himself as both a licensed victualler and farmer.

The *Chequers* is venerable and almost certainly the oldest of Battle's existing inns. It was built about 1478, and in some quarters is believed to derive its name from the ancient coat of arms of the de Warenne family.

There is archaeological evidence that a chequers sign was unearthed at Pompeii, and the suggestion is that the true derivation is that of a money-changer's abacus. This is a credible interpretation, bearing in mind that the inn is built virtually within the confines of the Abbey, which may have given it a semi-official position vis à vis the Abbey's relations with mediaeval traders. This is a thought rather than a fact, if an appealing one. However, it is also a fact that its original name was the *George*, thus dispelling the belief – as with the George – that 'George inns' are invariably named after a monarch of that name.

The Chequers, early twentieth century

This George was in honour of our national saint. There is a touching entry in the Sussex coroner's Inquest for 5 March 1522: 'On 3 March Lucy aged 12, servant of John Love of Batle, a daughter of a vagrant stranger, fell into a pit of water in a yard within the inn called 'le Chequer' formerly called 'le George' in Batle, and was drowned by misadventure.'

In the 1930s the upper part of the building was decorated in an attractive chequerboard motif but this has long since been painted over.

Directly opposite, 1 and 2 Lower Lake, a building with rare and distinctive mathematical tiles,[7] is the purported premises of the *Telegraph Inn*, which according to local legend was still active in 1853, although neither the 1841 or 1851 censuses confirm the legend. Moreover, this name appears in no directories. Springford suggests that its name could only be concurrent with the invention in the 1790s of the telegraph system. This is a curious comment, and cannot refer to the electric telegraph (pioneered in about 1816 by Sir Francis Ronalds, who came to live in Battle and is buried there) which was not adopted by naval or military forces; it was not until the 1840s that the electric telegraph came into use.

If the inn did exist it must have had only a very short life, probably corresponding to the Revolutionary/ Napoleonic Wars when the town was full of militia and army men. It may have been little better than an ale-house; it may have been only billets for the militia, who were certainly housed in the *Chequers* opposite. Interestingly, when in June 2000 the property, now named 'Housecarl House', was put up for sale it was described thus: 'believed

to date back to 1751. Originally built as an inn, using timbers that came from HMS Sovereign from Chatham docks'.

At the bottom of Lower Lake is the *Senlac Inn*, another name-change to reflect post-war conceit. It was formerly – honestly and unpretentiously – the *Railway Hotel*. It was built on the site of the old workhouse which had removed in 1840 to the North Trade Road, and it was opened in about 1852 to serve the railway.

Two families, the Attrees and the Gaymers, were licensees here in succession for nearly seventy years until the late 1920s. Until recent years the inn offered nothing more than drink and simple meals – it now serves 'pub grub' and a different clientèle. Its eclectic toilets betray its railway heritage.

The Railway Hotel before 1914. Now the Senlac Inn, the front façade has been brought forward to incorporate the two bays seen here. The tannery can be seen on Battle Hill and the old Wesleyan chapel opposite.

The *Bull*, at 27 High Street, is one of the few inns mentioned by name in the Victoria County History of Sussex. It is 'a tall building dated 1688, and mostly of stone said to come from an Abbey building, probably the kitchen which was demolished in 1685'. Stone from the Abbey was then sold at 4/- a load and lead from the roof at 12/6d per cwt, so this suggestion is very probable. The preceding building, a 15th century inn, was burned down in 1685. This was 'the messuage and garden, called the Bull', which in 1569 was in the occupation of Leonard Roygate and in 1652 of Richard Farncombe.

In 1845 the building was occupied by William Parks, plumber and glazier, and from the 1870s by Joseph Tyrrell, corn factor. (The yard behind is called Parks Yard.) From 1916 it was the offices of James Woodhams, auctioneers and estate agents and proprietors of the Battle cattle auction market, before it reopened in 1983. Individual ownership has never been long; perhaps it was too close to the *George* to shake off its competition. Now it is a pub serving good food and offering regular entertainment. (For the reasons apparent from this and the preceding paragraph, the landlords are not listed in the appendix.)

Now to Upper Lake. The Martins say that by the late 1470s three of the houses in the mediaeval terrace on the south-western side, including the central dwelling, were ale-houses. This dwelling was divided by an open passageway and it was once the *White Horse*, gone by 1792. Springford says that it was mistakenly identified as the *White Hart* by our earlier members (i e the Historical Society) but *White Horse* it was because this is the name of the cottage at the end of the passage, which is said to have been the ostler's cottage; the passage was apparently used for the passage of the horse! Despite the appeal of this argument, if the 1792 directory is to be taken seriously – as it is elsewhere in Springford's text – it should be noted that it lists the White *Hart*, not *Horse*. There were few pub signs in those days, so it may have been known by both names. There is also a reference to a *White Horse* as the location of an inquest in 1861, but this cannot be true, at least of this site.[8]

Neither the 1861 census nor any directory give any indication that the pub had revived, and there are no other mentions.

Other Battle inns that have come and gone, probably mere ale-houses, include a *Rose and Crown* in Mount Street, closed before 1791, part of whose land was sold to the Baptists in 1810,[9] a *Lion* in the High Street, reputedly where Boots now is, and, at Telham, a *Hop*. The Cresy report of 1850 refers to a *Lion*, run by W. Leney (the later brewer); this was almost certainly the former *Conquering Hero*. The 1861 census also includes a *Bell*, somewhere by the Beech Farm estate. It is not listed in other censuses and was presumably a short-lived beer-house. Even more obscurely is a reference[10] to John Pickford, made bankrupt in 1852, who was a beer retailer. It is possible that he kept an off-licence, but he appears in no record of Battle's censuses, births or deaths.

In Telham, a *Black Horse* is listed in the 1791 directory as being in the tenancy of the Widow Pepper. It continued to be listed until c.1870, but this may not be the Black Horse we see today. Springford suggests that it occupied what is now Hemingfold farmhouse; he also suggests that even though the London-Hastings coach would have passed the door there is no evidence that it stopped, obviously being too near to both Battle and Hastings (and down-hill in both directions).

The present *Black Horse* was formerly the *Horse and Groom*, and its earliest listing is about 1867. The change of name occurred in about 1905, when the Hastings Road was actually called Black Horse Road. Springford was intrigued at the possibility of a brief period of overlap, with two inns vying for custom at this isolated spot, the highest lie of land between Battle and Hastings. Where did the drinkers come from?

The Black Horse, late nineteenth century

The nearby estates of Beauport and Crowhurst Parks both had substantial staffs and even by mid-Victorian times there was a tourist trade from Hastings and St Leonards to Battle and the *Black Horse*, about half-way, would have been an ideal watering-hole on a thirsty carriage drive. [So why not for coaches and their horses?]

The evidence for there being two pubs here is supported by the 1861 census, in which both appear. The order of appearance is perhaps confused, but it seems that the present *Black Horse* was indeed south of the old one but also that the two were very close to each other. Hemingfold Farm was occupied by a gentleman, so it is most unlikely that the old pub was there. It seems to have been between there and the present one but one possibility is that the original *Black Horse* was in the building immediately to the south of the present one, and the two were combined under one name. This seems unlikely in the light of newspaper reports of 1899 and 1907 referring to 'the original Black Horse' or 'old Black Horse', which imply a separate building.

And now, at last, to Netherfield. We are used to two pubs at Netherfield: the *White Hart* and the *Netherfield Arms*. Of these, the *White Hart* is much the older, having appeared in

every census between 1841 and 1911. The *Netherfield Arms*, however, appears only from 1871, when it was described as a beerhouse. (It is not listed in Kelly's directory for 1867.) One would not think that Netherfield had had room for two such establishments; it seems likely that what is now the *Netherfield Arms* was adapted from previous use – the building is reported to date from 1725 – in response to an increase in demand after, or in anticipation of, the opening of the gypsum mine at Mountfield in 1876. The gypsum industry very soon became the major employer in the village, and attracted immigrants from elsewhere, notably from Cornwall where mining skills were well developed. But 1871 is early, and opening a beerhouse – especially when the 1871 licensee was not from the area – does seem to represent a risk. But it has survived, though still merely a beerhouse as late as 1928.[11]

There remains the question of the *Gun*, mentioned in the 1791 directory, where Isaac Venis is listed as victualler. There is a Gun House in Netherfield; whatever its previous status, by 1831 it was a private residence.[12] The 1803, 1808, 1811 and 1824 editions of the 1831 work do not mention its status. It still exists, off the main road, and it is not the *White Hart*. On the other hand, in the Post Office Directory for 1859 the *Gun* is listed, with the licensee one Stephen Thomas. But the same name was borne by the licensee of the *White Hart* in both 1851 and 1861. Thomas Sinden, who took over as licensee after 1871, is listed simply as a farmer. It appears, therefore that either Thomas was running two pubs at once, which seems unlikely given that no census mentions the *Gun* or a second pub before 1871; or that *Gun* was an alternative name for the *White Hart*.

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Sources
The sources for this study are John Springford's essay, referred to at its beginning; directories published in and since 1791; the census returns from 1841 to 1911; and personal knowledge of mathematical tiles. Note has also been taken of a document produced in the 1960s by the Battle Women's Institute (in the BDHS archive). See end-notes.

APPENDIX: THE LICENSEES

The sources for the table below are the various directories available and the censuses for and after 1841, with occasional additions from tax returns and newspapers. Where a name appears it is of course possible in most cases that the person named was the licensee at an earlier date. In the case of a census, if the person named was already the licensee no information is given. Where a licensee died during his or her tenancy the year of death is given if certain. Information after 1939 has not been included.

HALF MOON then ABBEY HOTEL		CHEQUERS	
1791	John Gutsell	1569	William Bannister
1823	Thomas Eldridge	1791	John Newington
1870	John Jarvis	1802	… Savory
1871	Edward Jarvis	1811	Allen Eldridge
1878	William Twyman	1823	John Standen
1881	William Freeman	1839	Emma Standen
1882	David Bradshaw d1897	1845	John Davis
1901	Thomas Turner	1851	James Hayter
1903	Mrs Annie Turner d1903	1855	William Challenor
1911	Richard Stace/William Tarrant	1858	James Harmer
c1918	George Ling	1878	Mrs Maria Wagstaff
1922	Charles Francis	1881	George Wagstaff
1926	George Lang	1901	Thomas Clarke
1931	Walter Tout	1907	James Hewitt
		1922	George Lee
BLACK HORSE (Old)		1926	Charles Gowing
1791	Widow Pepper	1931	Mrs Frances Barnes
1828	Henry Baker		
1841	John Calcall (?)	**KING'S HEAD**	
1845	John Callaway	1791	Joseph Gurr
1851	Mrs Martha Woodhams d1855	1823	Thomas Longley
1858	Peter Hards	1839	William Austin[Longley still recorded]
1861	Edward Bull	1851	James Goldsmith
1862	William Tompsett	1855	Wisely Wood
		1858	James Turner
HORSE AND GROOM then BLACK HORSE		1870	George Dunford
1867	Peter Hards	1878	Matthew Hooker
1878	Walter French	1907	Henry Clarkson
1887	George Avis	1922	Mrs Ada Sargent
1891	George Morris		
1901	George Lavington	**EIGHT BELLS then STAR then 1066**	
1922	Thomas Agate	1791	William Beney
1926	William Cottrell	1823	Henry Alderton
1931	Frederick Mower	1851	John Davis
		1855	Charles Hammond
		1858	John Davis
RAILWAY HOTEL then SENLAC INN		1890	Charles Holt
1855	James Phipps	1901	Samuel Judge
1858	Thomas Attree d1878	1901	Francis Canuto d 1902
1878	Mrs Jane Attree	1902	William Sharp d1911
1887	James Gaymer d1896	1911	George Ling
1901	Eliza Gaymer d1902	1922	Walter Mead

1902	Charles Gaymer
1931	Thomas Agate

1938	Victor Sprules

CONQUERING HERO then LION

1839	Charles Goodwin
1850	W Leney

WELLINGTON

1828	John Elliott
1839	Samuel Day
1855	Walter Leney
1858	Thomas Dunn
1867	William Carr
1870	Benjamin Chrismas d1882
1890	Henry Elliott
1911	Henry Robbins
1931	Frederick Page

SQUIRREL

1841	[not found]
1851	George Dunford
1870	Frederic Newington
1881	Rhoda Ralph
1882	Stephen Ralph d1890
1891	Mrs Ruth Ralph m Tom Marsh 1894
1901	Tom Marsh d 1926
1931	Frank Stone

GEORGE

1700	Thomas Smith[13]
1792	Widow Bellingham
1811	John Hutchings
1823	Thomas Barnes
1829	Charles Emery[14]
1834	Joseph Couchman[15]
1839	Christopher Richardson
1845	Mrs Sarah Couchman d1854
1851	Sophia Smith/Sally Stevens
1858	Joseph Couchman d1875 [and farmer]
1878	Mrs Sarah Riley
1881	Henry Druquer
1891	George William Wagstaff d1907
1911	Frank Emery d1925
1928	Capt. Scott
1931	Maj. Leonard Allen
1938	Victor O'Connell

EAGLE then NEW INN

1662	Edward Welsh
1791	John Alderton
1839	Robert Heathorn

BELL

1851	John Duke

NETHERFIELD ARMS

1871	John Nightingale
1881	Henry Laurence
1891	John Durrant
1901	Thomas Hoad
1911	James Henry Bailey
1918	Percy Hayward
1928	Alan Rich

WHITE HART, NETHERFIELD (or GUN)

1791	Isaac Venis
1841	James Sutton
1851	Stephen Thomas
1866	Thomas Sinden
1890	Thomas J Eldridge
1899	Henry Hunnisett
1905	Charles Ball
1911	James Gibb
1920	Albert Sitch

ENDNOTES

[1] David and Barbara Martin with Christopher Whittick: *Building Battle town* (Domtom Publishing Ltd, Burgess Hill, 2016)

[2] London Gazette, 5 February 1856

[3] Hastings and St Leonards Observer, 14 June 1902: reminiscence of Francis William Ticehurst.

[4] John Byng: *Byng's tours* (ed David Souden, Century, 1991)

[5] Geoff Hume: *Take time for a tipple* in (Alan Judd, ed) *A tapestry of Battle* (Battle Writers Group, 2002), states that the move to Mount Street was made in 1935. This is clearly wrong and may be a misprint for 1835.

[6] Lilian Boys Behrens: *Battle Abbey under 39 kings* (1937)

[7] This term refers to special tiles hung vertically to resemble bricks. Doing this allowed a frontage fashionable for the day at a lower cost than a brick frontage and with considerably less disturbance. They are noticeable in eastern Kent and eastern Sussex, for example at Faversham and Lewes. This seems to be their only surviving appearance in the town of Battle.

[8] Sussex Agricultural Express, 17 December 1861

[9] See the article on the *Baptists of Battle*

[10] Sussex Agricultural Express, 25 May 1852

[11] Hastings and St Leonards Observer, 21 January 1928

[12] Edward Mogg: *Paterson's Roads*, 1831

[13] From Battle parish records

[14] From Roger Wells: *Mr William Cobbett, Captain Swing and King William IV* http://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/45n1a3.pdf Emary appears in the article on the local board of health.

[15] Geoff Hume: *Take time for a tipple*