



Markets and Bull-Baiting in Battle

Markets and Fairs

Fairs, shows and markets have been held in Battle on various dates from the town's foundation. William I gave the abbey a right to hold weekly markets free from toll and exaction. In addition Henry I (1100-1135) granted the town the right to hold a three day fair in July, later adding a second fair to be held at the feast of St Martin, 11th November. St Martin's tide would have been chosen to reflect the Abbey's dedication to St Martin, the date probably changing to 22 November following the introduction of the Gregorian calendar.

The traditional site of the market was the Abbey Green - the Duchess of Cleveland, in *A History of Battle Abbey* (1877), asserts that the Abbot's weekly market was held on the Abbey Green each Sunday. However, D and B Martin and C Whittick in *Building Battle Town* provide evidence for a different site. Manorial surveys of 1367, 1433 and 1569 show that by the mid 14th century there was a market square located at the junction of the present day High Street and Mount Street. The Abbey's court house faced the market square, meaning that by this time the commercial activities of the town, as well as the administration of the leuga were all conducted from the same area. The numbers of traders using the market place gradually diminished, evidenced by buildings changing use and ownership as shops gradually overtook the market place as a centre of trade. The market square was built over between 1569 and 1652. The court house was replaced shortly after 1569 by a new court hall in the Abbey Gatehouse. From 1566 the weekly market underwent a revival, being held on Thursdays on the Abbey Green, as opposed to Sundays at the former market place.

Markets/Fairs/Shows in the 19th and early 20th centuries

The following information on the types and frequency of markets and fairs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been pieced together from reports in newspapers and trade directories (Kellys, Pigots and Post Office – see table attached in the Appendix) of the time. Continuation can be seen from the early fairs/markets – the weekly market still took place on a Thursday in the first half of the nineteenth century as it did in the sixteenth century; the fair in November continued as a big event and later just a cattle sale right into 1950s and probably beyond. The sheep fair seems to be a new addition.

As early as the 1830s newspapers and Directories mention a sheep fair, held annually on 6th September. This certainly appears to have carried on into the 1930s and possibly beyond. A newspaper of 1838 suggests that the **sheep fair** was held at the "Galley Field, on the new London Road, nearly opposite the Wellington Inn", which would be roughly where the old cattle market was situated, in the space now occupied by the library, shops and new market square.



Also from the 1830s a **weekly market** is recorded, which was held on a Thursday. It may have combined with the cattle market on the second Tuesday of the month from the mid 1850s. This was discontinued by 1899.

From 1839 a regular **cattle market** is mentioned, taking place on the second Tuesday of each month. By 1899 this had ceased and been replaced by a “stock” market on alternate Mondays at 2pm; by 1911 the time had changed to 11am. In the mid 1920s James Woodhams auctioneers, who ran the sales of stock, advertised the market as being for “fat and store cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, poultry, butter and eggs etc. and dead stock”.

“**Fairs**” were held on Whit Monday and 22 November annually throughout the nineteenth century until at least the 1880s. By the 1890s, Directories only record one Fair - on 22 November, annually. These seem to have been for cattle initially, but by the 1850s they are recorded as being for “cattle and pedlery” i.e. with stalls selling various items. Newspapers of the early twentieth century describe the November Fair as having “cheapjacks” selling their wares all along the High Street, fairground attractions on the Abbey Green, and a livestock auction probably at the site at the top of the High Street, the former Galley Field. This certainly was the case from 1895 when first mention is recorded of the sale of cattle and livestock taking place at the November fair “at the top of the town”. Livestock by this stage included sheep as well as dairy and store cattle, although cattle were the main feature. Cattle were to be found all over the town, however, as a photo of the early nineteenth century in *Battle in Pictures*. By the 1950s newspaper advertisements suggest that the annual November fair was primarily for store cattle. The *Stan Elliott Archive*, held by the Battle Museum of Local History, mentions that horses were traded at the November Fair at the “Triangle” – the old local name for land at the junction of the High Street, North Trade Road and the London Road.

The cattle market at the top of the town fell out of use in 1967. The site was developed by Wates Homes between 1989 and 1990. Local newspapers report that the first general market was opened in the new market square on 1 June 1990, with an antiques market on 2 June. Sadly the market declined in the early 1990s. Stallholders cited the new position as the cause, stating in the local press that the new site could not be seen from the road so those passing through the town were unaware of its existence.

Disturbances at the fair

The “pleasure fair” encountered some fierce opposition from the Abbey and local council in the 1920s on account of perceived disruptions to the town.

In July 1928 the Abbey Trust sought the views of the Urban District Council (chaired by James Woodhams) on discontinuing the November pleasure fair on the Abbey Green. It was associated with the nuisance of traffic and caravans arriving two or three days prior to the event, causing congestion. In addition the parking for the town was taken up by the fair, a nuisance for the numbers of people visiting the town on fair day. Filth accumulated as there



was neither water nor any toilets available to the showmen. The article states that “passages near the Green got into such a filthy state that owners sometimes had to use a hose to cleanse them, and the condition of Park-lane after the fair people had gone was disgusting. When people were on their way to church on Sunday they could see these people washing and cooking their food, and it was not pleasant for such things to go on in the middle of town”. The council noted that the pleasure fair had declined over recent years. By the end of December the Hastings and St Leonards Observer reported that a notice had be placed outside the Abbey stating that the Trustees and tenant of the Abbey had petitioned the Home Office for the abandonment of the pleasure fair held on the Abbey Green, with the support of the Urban District Council. Objections could be made to the Home Office by 24th January 1929. Many locals objected to the suggestion that the fair be abandoned, feeling that the Pleasure Fair was representative of old local customs and that it was “a part of the atmosphere of old times, as typical as the Abbey itself”. By February the local paper reported the decision of the Home Office not to allow the fair to be abandoned. Discussion at the Urban District Council, again chaired by Mr Woodhams, suggested that a group formed locally had opposed the suggestion and influenced the decision of the Home Secretary, to the dismay of the local councillors. Only two of the seven present, A Holland (local butcher) and W H Lane voted against a decision to write to the Abbey’s solicitors asking them to write to the Home Secretary expressing their disappointment at the decision.

The fair seems to have required some policing throughout its history, the following incidents illustrate some types of misdemeanour encountered.

Middle Ages

There seems to be some evidence that “locals” were treated differently from others under the law. Cases from 1331, 1343 and 1361 support this. Two men from Sandwich, who had stolen goods at Fletching, were arrested at Battle and hanged. Two further men, also not from the locality, who attacked sellers at the market, killing one man were also hanged. In another case three out of four men tried for crimes following Battle fair were hanged – the fourth, from the more local Herstmonceux, was found innocent.

There were also crimes relating to sale of goods. In 1369 a man was found to have broken price fixing laws and fined 2s, while a tanner was fined in 1466 for selling badly finished skins.

Riot at the Fair

The Battle Museum of Local History displays a drawing taken from the Police Gazette of an eventful November fair at which a “riot” took place in 1923, when fighting broke out between the showmen on the Abbey Green. This event made national newspapers! The *Bexhill Observer* of 24 November 1923 carried the story under the heading “Battle Fair Fracas – Bexhill man charged”. It would seem that Joseph Valenti, a dealer, of 110 Station Road Bexhill, had been charged with being drunk and disorderly on the Market Green, Battle as well as wilfully and maliciously causing damage to the property of Joe Davis, owner



of the Hoop-la stall. It would seem that fighting had taken place, resulting in the Hoop-la stall being smashed. This had been possibly the result of a dispute over pitches or possibly because the defendant was protecting his wife, whom he saw being hit. Either way, the defendant was found guilty. The *Daily Mirror* of November 23rd was rather more sensational, carrying the story under the heading “Battle at Fair – Gypsies and Showmen use iron bars as weapons. Women among injured”. It details what it describes as a “free fight” among showmen over a dispute concerning pitches, resulting in a “miniature battle”, noting that “peace was not restored till a force of police arrived on the scene”.

Mad Bull

The sale of cattle and necessity to subsequently drive them to slaughter ready for their destination at the butcher’s shop was not without excitements. The following is a tale of a “mad bull” and its escapades to avoid its fate.

On 17 Dec 1898 *the Sussex Express, Surrey Standard, Weald of Kent Mail, Hants and County Advertiser* carried a story about an escaped bull under the heading “An Animal’s Extraordinary Pranks”. Events took place on the Abbey Green “just after dark” on the previous Monday. Christmas Bros., butchers, had bought a bullock at Robertsbridge and brought it to the town for slaughter. The article suggests that the bullock did not want to grace “Christmas tables in the form of beef” and on realising the commotion a large crowd gathered shouting “mad bull”. In response to the crowd’s shout the bull began to “go for” the onlookers and tried to enter a cottage in Messrs. Holt’s Yard, but it was “swept out with the aid of a broom”. The crowd were all frightened and some older men even climbed a nearby scaffold to get out its way, displaying “extraordinary agility” for their years. The bull then chased the wife of a local doctor, who only escaped by shutting the gates of the Deanery (at that time beside the church) in its face. Nellie Saxby was on her way to nursing classes at the deanery and similarly tried to escape the bull, but fell heavily while climbing a gate. Her injured arm was later tended by Mrs Currie, wife of the Dean. A woman in the crowd was knocked down and Mr Fred Anderson had a narrow escape – the bull unbuttoned his waistcoat with its horns while he was trying to get it into the yard. The bull was finally led away by a pony, acting as a decoy.

Bull Baiting

Bull-baiting was a popular sport in Sussex as throughout England, with a well-known Bull Baiting ring to be found in Horsham. Bull dogs were bred to be pitched against tethered bulls – the aim being for the dog to subdue the bull by locking its jaw and teeth into the bull’s nose. Before the sport began, pepper would be blown up the bull’s nose to make it enraged. The sport was believed by many to make the meat of the bull more flavoursome – many counties refused to sell beef unless it came from a baited bull. By the early nineteenth century bull-baiting was recognised as a cruel sport – both to dog and bull. It was banned by the 1835 Cruelty to Animals Act.



Reports indicate that Battle had a bull-baiting ring on the Abbey Green. In 1909 the *Brighton Gazette*, *Hove Post* and *Sussex and Surrey Telegraph* reported that in Battle it was proposed to unearth the ring which had sunk some distance into the ground, saying that “before very long it is probable the bull-ring - one of few similar relics of bygone ages, left in the country – will provide standing evidence of the pastime of bull baiting.” The report goes on to say that the ring had been removed during the lifetime of the Duchess of Cleveland (owner of the Abbey) and had been replaced at her request. Later it had been permanently removed. The current Lord of the Manor was in favour of its reinstatement. Whether the bull-ring was reinstated in 1909 is unclear, as in 1926 the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reports that the “ancient bull ring” at Battle had been rediscovered and could be seen in “its cemented bed” if a wooden covering was lifted by a handle. The report tells how bulls would have been tethered to the ring and baited by dogs.

Writing in her *History of Battle Abbey*, (1877), the Duchess of Cleveland notes that the bull-ring was at one time removed by a “former agent of the Duke”, in order to demonstrate the Abbey’s right to the triangle of land known as the Abbey Green. When, two years later, the Duke became aware of what had happened it was replaced as it had been before, except for the two cross beams, which had been lost. The church bells were pealed in honour of its reinstatement and local boys danced around the ring all that afternoon. She describes the bull ring as “a heavy iron ring bolted to a great block of wood, further secured by two cross beams buried in the ground”. She notes that “Bull-baiting seems to have lingered on in Sussex longer than elsewhere”. She informs readers that bull-baiting had been one of the “legitimate amusements” at Whitsun in bygone days. Today the rather more acceptable pursuit of marbles takes place on the site of the ring on each Good Friday. As the large marbles are called “bulls” perhaps the two are not as unconnected as may at first appear!

Georgina Doherty, October 2017.

(With thanks for additional information from other members of the Research Group)

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References

Hastings and St Leonards Observer and other local papers available at

www.findmypast.co.uk

Pike’s, Kelly’s Pigot’s and the Post Office Directories of Sussex available at

<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/map/collection/p16445coll4>

The History of Battle Abbey by the Duchess of Cleveland

The Chronicle of Battle Abbey

Building Battle Town by B and D Martin and C Whittick

Concorde 1066 Souvenir Handbook

Stan Elliott Archive held by Battle Museum of Local History

A Tapestry of Battle by Battle Writers Group

Battle in Pictures Battle Museum of Local History



APPENDIX

FAIRS AND MARKETS AT BATTLE

Date/Directory	Frequency	Sheep	Cattle	Other	Where
1832/4 Pigots	Weekly Market				
	Fairs Annually at Whitsun and 22 November		Cattle		
1838 Newspaper	6 September, annually	Sheep Fair			Galley Field, nearly opposite Wellington Pub
1839 Pigots			Cattle		
	Annually, 6 September	Sheep Fair			
	Second Tuesday of the Month		Chiefly for Cattle		
1851 Post Office	Every Thursday, Weekly market				
	Second Tuesday of the Month		Cattle		
	Fairs Annually, Whit Monday and 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
1855 Post Office	Fairs Annually, Whit Monday and 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	



Date/Directory	Frequency	Sheep	Cattle	Other	Where
	Every second Tuesday			Unspecified market	
1859 Kellys	Every second Tuesday			Unspecified market	
	Fairs Annually, Whit Monday and 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
1866 Post Office	Fairs Annually, Whit Monday and 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Every second Tuesday			Unspecified market	
1878 Post Office	Fairs Annually, Whit Monday and 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Every second Tuesday			Unspecified market	
1890 Kellys	Fair Annually, 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Every second Tuesday			Unspecified market	



Date/Directory	Frequency	Sheep	Cattle	Other	Where
	Alternate Mondays at 2pm	Stock	Stock		
1891 Kellys	Fair Annually, 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Every second Tuesday			Unspecified market	
	Alternate Mondays at 2pm	Stock	Stock		
1899 & 1905 Kellys	Market discontinued				
	Fair Annually, 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Alternate Mondays at 2pm	Stock	Stock		
1911 & 1915 Kellys	Fair Annually, 22 November		Cattle	Pedlery	
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Alternate Mondays at 11am	Stock	Stock		
1924/5 Advert Pikes	Alternate Mondays, Auction Market held by James Woodhams	Sheep	Fat and Store Cattle	Pigs, horses, poultry. Butter, eggs and dead stock	



Date/Directory	Frequency	Sheep	Cattle	Other	Where
1934 Kellys	Market on Abbey Green discontinued				Abbey Green
	Fair Annually, 22 November	Sheep	Cattle		Auction at Cattle market, stalls down High Street, Funfair on Abbey Green
	Fair Annually 6 September	Sheep			
	Alternate Mondays at 11am	Stock	Stock		Cattle Market
1950s Newspapers	Weekly		Store Cattle		
	Fair Annually 22 November	sheep	Cattle		

NOTES

Pigot's Directory of Sussex for 1832/4 gives Thursday as the weekly market day and fairs as being held on "Whit Monday and 22 November, for cattle".

In 1839, however, Pigot's states that there is a market on the second Tuesday of the month, chiefly for cattle, with fairs for cattle on Whit Monday and 22 November. The sheep fair was on 6th September.

The Post Office directory of 1851 has markets held every Thursday and fairs "for cattle and pedlery" on Whit Monday and 22 November. Cattle markets are noted as being on "second Tuesday of every month".

By 1855 the Post Office Directory notes that markets are held every second Tuesday, fairs for cattle and pedlery every Whit Monday and 22 November.

In 1859 Kelly's Directory notes that the market is held on the second Tuesday of each month, with fairs on Whit Monday and 22 November "much frequented for cattle and pedlery", with a sheep fair on 6th September.



The 1866 Post Office Directory records fairs on Whit Monday and 22 November for cattle and pedlery, with a sheep fair on 6th September. Markets were held on the second Tuesday of the month.

In 1878 the Post Office Directory records markets as second Tuesday of each month, fairs on Whit Monday and 22 November (cattle and pedlery), and sheep fair on 6th September.

Kelly's 1890 records market day as the second Tuesday of each month, with a fair on 22 November "for cattle and pedlery". A sheep fair was held on 6th September and stock sales were held on alternate Mondays at 2pm.

Kelly's directory of 1891 notes that a market was held on the second Tuesday of each month. A 'fair' was held on 22nd November for 'cattle and pedlery'. A 'sheep fair' was held on 6th September. Stock sales were every alternate Monday.

In 1899 Kelly's notes that the market has been discontinued, but there is a fair on 22 November for cattle and pedlery and a sheep fair on 6th September. Stock sales are alternate Mondays at 2pm.

Kelly's 1905 records a fair on 22nd November, sheep fair on 6th September, stock sale on alternate Mondays at 2pm and notes that the market has been discontinued.

Kelly's of 1911 records the same as in 1905, but stock sales are alternate Mondays at 11am.

By 1915 Kelly's notes that a fair was held on 22 November, a sheep fair on 6th September, with stock sales on alternate Mondays at 11am.

Pike's directory of 1924/5 notes that James Woodhams (Auctioneers) held an auction market every alternate Monday for "fat and store cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, poultry, butter and eggs etc. and dead stock".

Newspaper reports show that Battle Fair (22 November) went on until the 1950s as a cattle auction. The "pedlery" element seems to have started to decline from the early 1930s (ref. Hastings Observer 1934)