



THE ROAD NAMES OF THE BATTLE DISTRICT:

An exercise in local Odonymy and Etymology

Questions are often asked of Battle and District Historical Society about the origin of local road and street names. A number of books about names and place names are available and these are helpful, but often non-specific. Many of the roads and streets in and around Battle have ancient origins, and road names are constantly being made up to christen roads in new developments.

This study looks at the roads, lanes and streets of our district and how their names have been, or may have been, derived.

The roads listed in the accompanying table are those that are in Battle and 16 surrounding parishes – as outlined on the map shown on the Battle and District Historical Society website. This list of roughly 550 names has mainly been derived from East Sussex County Council data, but has been supplemented and amended using other available information, including old Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, tithe maps, census returns, published town street lists and some published texts (see below).

Several points need to be borne in mind. The definition as to what constitutes a road/lane etc. is here rather fluid. In particular, Battle used to have numerous 'Yards', 'Plots' and 'Courts' which were inhabited and thus appeared on the census returns; however, most of their locations cannot now be readily and accurately identified, so they are listed separately. Most of the roads in the compilation are public but some private ('unadopted') roads have also been included, as have some roads identified as such on some old maps but which are now no longer navigable by car. Also, some roads have changed their name and the obsolete names are included (shaded light blue). Note too that the allocation of a road to a particular parish may be rather arbitrary, especially when it traverses the boundary with an adjacent parish, or is part of a parish boundary. And indeed, even some parish boundaries have changed over time.

Census returns

The earliest national census in 1841 is not so useful in this context as many road names are simply not recorded; thus we find terms such as 'the hamlet of Netherfield', 'Battle Town' or just 'Town' (Robertsbridge). Presumably the road names had not yet been properly formalised and adopted. However, the later census returns are more useful for listing road names which have now fallen out of use, even though the details as to exact location are often missing.

In addition, the census enumerators often recorded the names with various spellings, presumably because they were not always local and had problems with the local dialects, and the lack of available documentation. (e.g. Caldbec is sometimes listed as 'Call Back').

Modern developments

'Modern' (post 1st World War) developments and/or roads with new names are highlighted in pale green in the tabulation (in total there are c. 150 in this category and of these, the town of



Battle has the greatest proportion – 58 out of its 134 roads ss). These have been identified by reference to OS maps of the 1920s and onwards. Note that in some cases a road or track may have been present at an earlier date but it is not clear if it already had a name, especially if it originally contained no houses. These roads have been distinguished using this rather arbitrary cut-off date because there was rapid development after the 1st World War and in many cases the resulting names seem to be rather arbitrary (a ‘neologism’ – see note 1). They do provide an indication of prevailing tendencies rather than having a specific local historical significance, although of course many of the newer roads in Battle town have clearly been given names with a 1066 or Abbey connection; others appear to have no specific local connection at all. Clearly, at a time of rapid development, developers needed to create a favourable impression and generate a pleasant (possibly rural?) feeling for would-be purchasers. Thus, we see a really quite neutral and thus less interesting proliferation of names related to nature (trees, flowers, birds), aspect/views and people (including royalty). We also see the increasing replacement of the established, earlier, second descriptive element ‘Road’, ‘Street’ and ‘Lane’ for the use of terms such as ‘Close’, ‘Way’, ‘Meadow’, ‘Drive’ and ‘Gardens’.

There remain a large number of newer road names with completely unknown genesis. Many appear to be off a marketeer’s drawing board and it is a shame that those developers often seemed to choose rather mundane names. Perhaps too many councils could not be bothered to engage with their histories and imaginations. Many of these newer names seem to incorporate personal names and one is left with the feeling that the developers felt the need to leave some sort of personal legacy to their work.

Older road names

The derivation of the older road names appears to fall into several categories, but those based on personal names of individuals (especially landowners and occupiers) appear particularly prominent. Also common are those derived from place names, buildings (e.g. church, bridge), geographical and topographic features (e.g. river) and former industries (e.g. iron working, pottery, blacksmith). Of course, place names and personal names were often intricately bound as people were originally distinguished by their place of abode/origin.

For the explanation of names deemed to have Medieval and Saxon origins, it is necessary to look at Old and Middle English words and sometimes engage with the Sussex dialect, and consult relevant sources for the place names of Sussex. However, it should be borne in mind that these are sometimes ambiguous, with more than one possible explanation, and indeed there are even some differences of opinion between the different authors and there are changes with time. Thus, it is important to realise that many of the existing place-name explanations and etymologies given are suggestions and should not be considered definitive. To add confusion, place names often appear in ancient records and the older literature with very significant spelling differences or variations and corruptions. This is hardly surprising considering that most of the population would have been illiterate, and the initial documentation and transcriptions could have been made by Norman-French speakers who would have had problems with the local accents, or by monks who wrote down what they heard in varying phonetic ways. These name variations occur in parish records up



until at least the early 1800s.

Some common definitions, derivations and Old English suffixes are given below, as are some additional sources that have been consulted.

We appreciate that some of our interpretations, especially if involving ancient languages, may be incorrect or incomplete. And we are also aware that those with more local knowledge may be able to help add to and refine this work. We would therefore very much like to receive information which would help to update the table. Please send any comments and suggestions to us using the form on the website. All contributions will be acknowledged via updates.

As a final word, we can say that we are distressed at the naming of some roads in recent developments around the district. The unique, rich history of our area in the naming of roads has not been drawn on as much as it should have been. Neutral names like 'Meadow' and links to random animal and birdlife show little imagination apart from attempting linkage to an unachievable bucolic dream. Rother District Council's latest Street Naming Criteria are appended and Battle Town Council has also made a partial step towards improving developers' imaginations (see <https://battletowncouncil.gov.uk/projects/road-name-suggestions>).

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**Notes:**

Odonymy: road naming conventions.

Neologism: a newly coined word or expression.

Etymology: the history of a word or phrase shown by tracing its development and relationships.

Publications covering the place names of Sussex:

R.G. Roberts *The place-names of Sussex*. Cambridge University Press, (1914, republished 2011).

A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton *The place-names of Sussex: Volume VII, Part 2, The Rapes of Lewes, Pevensey and Hastings*. Cambridge University Press, (1969).

R. Coates *A classified bibliography on Sussex place-names, 1586-1987*. Younsmere Press, (1987).

A. Poulton-Smith *East Sussex place names*. The Derby Books Publishing Co. Ltd, (2012).

J. Glover *The Place names of Sussex*. Countryside Books, (1997).

K. Cameron *English Place Names*. B. T. Battsford Ltd, (1996).

The Oxford Names Companion Oxford University Press, (2002).

P. Brandon (ed.) *The South Saxons*, (1978).

The first three in this list must be considered the most authoritative and reliable sources. The others are useful for both ancient and some more recent names.

We have also used:

The Victoria History of the Counties of England – Sussex, Rape of Hastings Vol.9 University of London, Institute of Historical Research, (1973). (Abbreviated VCH).

B. Lucey *Twenty Centuries in Sedlescombe*. Regency Press, (1978).

E. Austen *Brede; The Story of a Sussex Parish*. Adams and Son, Rye, (1946).

L. Darbyshire *Ninfield, 1840-1940*. Ninfield Local History Group, (2015).

Domesday Book Penguin, (2002).

Report on the Manuscripts of Lord de l'Isle and Dudley preserved at Penshurst Place, Vol 1 HMSO (for Robertsbridge), (1925).

Descriptive Catalogue of the Original Charters, Royal Grants and Donations of Battle Abbey, Thomas Thorpe, (1835).

D. Martin, B.Martin, C.Whittick and J.Briscoe *Building Battle Town*. Domtom Publishing, (2016).

K. Bryant-Mole (1999) *Dallington*.

H. Harrison *Surnames of the United Kingdom – A Concise Etymological Dictionary*. Vols. I (1912) and II (1918).

W. Searle *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum*, (1897).

R. Webber *The naming of British streets*. In Coates, R. (2007). Locus focus: forum of the Sussex Place-Names Net 1996-2007, vol. 7, no. 42, 90-99, (2007). (<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/3497575>).



Useful web sites dealing with Sussex place-names:

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/3497575/locus-focus-forum-of-the-sussex-place-names-net-1996-2007>;

<http://epns.nottingham.ac.uk>; <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/>

Common descriptors:

Road: From *rad* meaning journey (on horseback), foray, ride.

Street: From Latin *strata* (traditionally thought indicative of a Roman period thoroughfare).

Lane: From *lanu*, a narrow path between hedges, fences, or houses.

Yard: From *geard*, meaning an enclosed piece of land.

Common Old English place name elements:

braedu, broad or wide

burna (now burn or bourne) brook, stream

cumb (now comb or coombe) narrow valley, hollow

den(n) clearing in a wood / woodland pasture

feld field, open land

ham homestead, settlement (parent name of home and hamlet) (*hamm* could also be an enclosure or a bend in a river)

hyrst (now hurst) wood or wooded hill

ing(as) people of /followers of /descendants of

leah (now ley, leigh, lee) open pasture, woodland clearing

sc(e)aga copse, shaw

tun (now ton or tone) farmstead hamlet, manor or enclosure

welle spring

wudu wood

The database was compiled by David Alderton and the late Keith Foord, with assistance from the Committee of the Battle and District Historical Society. Numerous others have contributed in some way and we thank them all, but special thanks are due to John Sheppard (Battle), Pauline Raymond (Sedlescombe), David Allen (Robertsbridge) and John Cheshire (Ninfield).



APPENDIX

Rother District Council Street Naming Criteria (ex RDC Website, April 2022)

2.2. Street Naming Criteria

2.2.1. The Council will use this policy when considering a new number or address. Developers and Town and Parish Councils should adhere to this policy for any suggested street names.

2.2.2. **Where possible, a street name should have a proven historical connection to the land intended for development.** Encouragement and preference is given to names that reflect local natural history or the nature of the terrain.

2.2.3. **Proposals relating to a person's name or commercial reference that could be construed as used for advertising or commercial gain will not be permitted,** unless there is a proven historical connection to the land intended for development or a proposal is put forward for commemorative purposes.

2.2.4. New street names must not duplicate any similar name already in use in a town/village or in the same postcode area (e.g. TN40). This will fall under the discretion of the SNN Officer.

2.2.5. The street name suffix (Close, Avenue, etc.) must accurately reflect the type of street to be named as described in Appendix A.

2.2.6. The street name suffix must be on the approved suffix list (Appendix A), other requests will not be considered.

2.2.7. Non-vehicular pedestrian ways must end with one of the following suffixes: Path, Way, Walk.

2.2.8. Street names should not be difficult to pronounce or awkward to spell, and must not be deemed offensive as defined in the Equality Act (EA) 2010 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>).

2.2.9. Street names with the potential to cause offence will not be approved, including the use of names and their combination with numbers that could be easily vandalised or changed into something which is deemed as potentially offensive.

2.2.10. The use of North, South, East or West (as in Collington Lane East) is not encouraged and is only acceptable where the road is continuous and passes over a major junction. It is not acceptable when the road is in two separate parts with no vehicle access between the two.

2.2.11. The use of two phonetically similar names within a postcode area (e.g. TN40) must be avoided (e.g. Chapel Road and Capel Road).

2.2.12. **Street names will not begin with 'The'.**

APPENDIX A

STREET NAME SUFFIX

Street any thoroughfare (generally used for urban roads) (TR/NTR)

Road any thoroughfare (TR/NTR)

Way any thoroughfare (generally used for main roads) (TR)

Place short road or access way (TR/NTR)

Lane any narrow rural thoroughfare (TR/NTR)

Avenue any residential street bounded by trees (TR)

Drive any residential road (TR/NTR)

Grove any residential road in a small wood or group of trees (TR/NTR)

Gardens residential roads with links to gardens (TR/NTR)

Crescent any crescent shaped street (TR/NTR)



Close any cul-de-sac only (NTR)

Hill hillside road only (TR/NTR)

Rise hillside road only (TR/NTR)

Row terrace of properties (but not a subset of named street) (TR/NTR)

Terrace terrace of buildings (but not a subset of named street) (TR/NTR)

Circus any large roundabout

Mews any short road which leads to a stable yard or horse related site, or a short row of terraced houses built to look like converted stables, or terraced houses surrounding a courtyard (NTR)

Wharf any quay side road where shipping was docked and unloaded (TR/NTR)

TR: Can be assigned to a Through Road

NTR: Can be assigned to a No-Through Road