



BATTLE 1945-1960

Commemorating 75 Years of Battle and District Historical Society

Introduction

Britain in the years following World War II underwent huge changes. Nationally, the post war period reflected the desire of British people to re-group and to build a new, better, more equal society. The Labour Party under Clement Atlee had been elected to a landslide victory in 1945, ousting war-time leader Winston Churchill and, with important reforms, setting the foundations of society for many years to come. Apart from nationalisation of many industries, the most well-known of these is the setting up of the “Welfare State”, which guaranteed that people were provided for “from cradle to grave” in return for a universal system of National Insurance. The State Pension could be claimed from age 65 rather than 70 as previously, parents would receive weekly payments on the birth of their second child which would increase with subsequent children. In 1948 the National Health Service was created, providing free access at the point of need to all and the 1944 Education Act provided free education, abolishing fees at any state schools, thus ensuring that all Grammar School places were now free. The school leaving age was raised from fourteen to fifteen, and two tiers of education were introduced – Primary for ages 5-11 and Secondary for ages 11-15. Secondary Education was to be provided at Grammar Schools, Secondary Schools or Technical Schools, following a universal Eleven Plus test. Difficult economic conditions, however, resulted in Labour losing power in 1951 to the Conservatives under Winston Churchill: it was against this background that the 1950s began.

This paper looks at life in Battle, Sussex, in the period following World War Two, up to 1960. It does not cover every aspect of daily life, but hopes to answer the following questions. What were the impacts of Atlee’s reforms and national initiatives of the 1950s on the people of Battle? Can we see any parallels with life in Battle today?

Post War Battle

Superficially, Battle in 1945 was very similar to Battle in 1939. Bomb damage had been relatively limited, with the town having only one major loss in the High Street, that of Tickner’s newsagents, which succumbed to a bomb on 2 February 1943, killing the proprietors, Mr and Mrs Giles. It was May 1958 before a Roll of Honour to the Civilian War Dead was created in Westminster Abbey, with Mr & Mrs Giles appearing on page 2035. The Drill Hall (on the site of the current telephone exchange) remained the centre for social events such as dances and whist drives; The Towers Hotel (now the site of the



Fire Station) [2026], was still standing, if out of use; the Senlac Cinema, now the premises of Burstow and Hewett in Lower Lake [2026], showed popular films; the Guide Hut (situated near the land now occupied by Sheppard Place) was regularly used by both Guides and other local organisations; the Council offices continued to be based at The Watch Oak and the Battle Abbey Estate was still in the hands of the Webster family. In many ways all was as it had been before the war.

Certain aspects, however, had changed. A new Dean was appointed, with Dean Naylor replacing Dean Youard who had been in post since 1924. A T Arthur Naylor had been made Honorary Chaplain to King George VI in 1945 and had a distinguished service record in the recent war. No doubt he, like many others, had to adapt to civilian life and was well suited to lead his parishioners through this time of renewal and change. Of course, there was no major building during the war, no new homes, no new schools, but defensive changes had been made. Immediately post war, tank traps were still present throughout Wellington Gardens, running between 52 and 53 as well as occupying the spaces between houses to the rear. These had been put in place during the war to protect the Council Offices at the Watch Oak, as Battle had been identified as a Nodal Point in defence plans. Should invasion have come, it would have been defended to the death. There were further tank traps by the cattle market (now Market Square); as well as in Saxonwood Road, one of which remains; a line behind Battle Abbey and a long line by the church, some of which still remain in situ. A public air raid shelter, which can still be seen today, stood at the corner of Senlac Gardens and Station Approach, while a pill box could be found close to the rear of the Newbery Jam Factory. The Abbey itself bore the marks of graffiti made by the Canadian soldiers stationed there, the last of the prisoners of war remained at Normanhurst, Catsfield. All these served to remind the population of the war that had recently ended. Their joy at victory was tempered by the fact that everyday life had not yet returned to “normal”. It was still not possible to shop freely: rationing remained in place, with certain foods becoming rationed even more strictly than during the war, including bacon, cooking fat, potatoes and, for a time, even bread. Clothes rationing remained until 1949, sweets until 1953, food in general until 1954, petrol until 1950 and coal rationing until 1958. Under these conditions the people of Battle, as in the rest of the country, began to try to start afresh and build a new, and better, life.

Battle Starts to Re-Awaken

Despite limits on trade Battle’s shopkeepers were eager to re-build their businesses: this determination evident in the *Battle Christmas Shopping Gazette 1948*, produced to encourage shoppers by the Battle Chamber of Commerce. In his opening letter, G Colley, the President of the Chamber, thanks the residents of Battle “for their very kind co-operation and sense of understanding during these difficult times of shortages.” He goes on to



welcome “newcomers” to the chamber: “Mr J. C. Foot of the Battle Bookshop [24 High Street], Messrs. E. Hall Ltd. (The Kandies) [64 High Street], and Mr Guy W. Wood A.C.A., Chartered Accountant [later at 39 High Street].” Many Battle tradesmen and shopkeepers advertised in the *Gazette* and some examples are shown below.



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Wholesale and Retail Bakers
SEDLSCOMBE and BATTLE
Phone 210 Phone 154

Invite inspection of their New Garden Bakery, where the *Bread with the Golden Crust* is made with the most up-to-date equipment under strictly hygienic conditions.

You can see our famous Pies being made by Local Labour with FRESH LOCALLY BOUGHT MEAT

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We offer - A COMPLETE DISPENSING SERVICE
URGENT MEDICINES AT NIGHT

For Christmas - GIFT SETS
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MEN'S GIFTS
HOT WATER BOTTLES
BRUSHES

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now rapidly becoming so popular,
demand expert cutting and shaping.

The secret lies in tapering out the
unwanted thickness and so enabling
you to adopt a style suitable to your
individual personality.

WE SHALL BE PLEASED TO ADVISE
AND HELP YOU IN CHOOSING
YOUR NEW STYLE.

ERREY'S 80, HIGH STREET, BATTLE.
BATTLE 56

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**BOOK EARLY FOR YOUR
CHRISTMAS APPOINTMENT**

Images from “Battle Christmas Shopping Gazette 1948” Battle Museum of Local History (BMOH)

Clubs and Societies began to re-form as Battle began to get back on its feet. A remarkable record of the major events of the previous year survives in the *Christmas Shopping Gazette 1948*, a rare first-hand testimony to the eagerness of people to return to a varied and full life of social activity. Highlights, paraphrased below, illustrate this and provide an opportunity to look back into the past and glimpse a post war life in Battle which included parties, church services, singing and musical events, reviving local traditions, as well as youth and sporting activities. Most interesting amongst these is the mention of the Anglo-German Christmas service, apparently a regular event, providing rare evidence of social relations between Battle residents and the prisoners of war held at Normanhurst. The death of Mr William Goldsmith, who died at the age of eighty-six, but nevertheless was described as “Whatlington’s oldest resident”, reminds us of the shorter life expectancy in 1948.



Highlights of 1947/8 taken from the "Christmas Shopping Gazette":

December 1947

- *Christmas and New Year Parties, including one at the Drill Hall organised by the Battle British Legion Branch Women's Section which included a "Twenty Questions" style quiz.*
- *The last Anglo-German Christmas service took place at the Church with an address by the Dean, the Very Rev. Naylor and the Rev. Werner Reinhold, the padre at the Normanhurst Prisoner of War Camp. Anthems were sung by the Church Choir and the German Prisoner of War Choir.*

January 1948

- *Battle Club took the decision to purchase its premises.*
- *Battle Choral Society re-formed and several concerts were held.*

February 1948

- *The Fellowship of St George (see p.22) held a Pancake Social.*
- *350 Gypsum Miners went on strike over the employment of Poles, but a settlement achieved a return to work the following day.*
- *A service of dedication for the British Legion's Women's Section standard was held.*
- *Mr W Goldsmith, Whatlington's oldest resident and former JP, County Councillor and Rural District Councillor died.*
- *Heavy snow at the end of the month caused withdrawal of buses and delighted children who were able to use their toboggans.*

March 1948

- *On Good Friday the Marbles Tournament was revived by Frank Anderson.*

April 1948

- *A crowd of 3,000 watched the East Sussex Hunt's Point to Point races.*
- *The Music Club held a concert at the Abbot's Hall.*
- *The Forge at the end of Mount Street [now occupied by "Cook"] closed down with the retirement of Mr Tom Beney, aged 73.*
- *The future of the Youth Club was uncertain, but stalwart support meant it would continue for the time being.*
- *A new bus service was sought.*

May 1948

- *BBC presenter Richard Dimbleby visited the town for an edition of "Twenty Questions".*
- *Mr E Kupfer licensee of The Chequers, died.*

June 1948

- *Rev Francis Vere Hodge was ordained Deacon at Chichester and began work as curate at Battle.*
- *The Guides held a Pageant on the Rec.*
- *Battle Rangers FC entered the East Sussex League.*
- *British Legion held their summer conference at the Drill Hall. An address was given by Sir Ian Fraser, President of the British Legion.*
- *The Chamber of Commerce was re-vitalised after a meeting at The George. New officers were elected.*



August 1948

- *The second Abbey Flower Show since they had been re-started after the war was held. Nearly 5,000 attended.*

September 1948

- *The Parish Council continued their scheme to add amenities to the Recreation Ground and make it more attractive.*
- *A Sussex cricket XI visited the town to play Battle for the Harry Parks – John Langridge benefit.*

October 1948

- *The Bonfire Boyes make plans for bonfire celebrations to rival those held pre-war.*

It is evident that many clubs and societies were eager to start afresh and that old customs such as the Good Friday marbles matches on The Green and Bonfire celebrations were eagerly revived.

The *Christmas Shopping Gazette* provides further, more detailed, insights into the various social clubs, with reports from Battle Rangers Football Club, the Cricket Club and the Women's Institute. Since the war, supporters of the football club were increasing, with "gates" getting bigger. The Club won the Hastings League Division I Cup in 1946/7 and 1947/8, the first against Westfield and the second against the Civil Service. It was on account of these victories that it had applied to join the East Sussex League. The club's president at the time was Mr J Hookham, the Secretary Mr W H G Peters, the Chairman Mr D Gander and the Treasurer Mr H Taylor. The Cricket Club began a Second XI for younger players, with matches and a regular weekly practice coached by Mr R G Stainton. John Windle made his first century against Ringmer and the Harry Parks and John Langridge benefit raised £52 10s for the pair. The Women's Institute met every third Wednesday in the Church Hall with members learning crafts, hearing talks, holding sales of produce and much more to fulfil the main purpose of the WI which was "To improve and develop the conditions of rural life".

Battle, then, was starting to re-group and escape the privations of the wartime period. But in the midst of re-generation the threat of war remained. Townspeople were reminded of this in an item in the *Christmas Shopping Gazette* by Capt. W A Raper, who emphasised the role the Territorial Army must play in training the National Service recruits from 1950 onwards. He reminded townspeople that the Territorial Army nationally needed 150,000 volunteers by the end of the forthcoming March. Men with war experience were sought so that, Capt. Raper said, the new Territorial Army would be "trained and ready" for any future war, giving the country a head start. Officers and NCOs were needed from Battle and the area around, to spare a night per week, a weekend per month and eight days a year for camp and would have, by way of a bonus, access to social events. A stark reminder that this new life should not be taken for granted, and, perhaps, particularly in the social side of involvement at the Drill Hall, a



way for some veterans to recapture the comradeship of the forces lost to them in peacetime. Settling to civilian life was difficult – children had to make relationships with fathers who were strangers, wives who had made a life without their husbands, whom they may have assumed dead, had to re-build a married life with men who perhaps seemed unfamiliar, service men had to put aside the horrors they may have witnessed, accommodations had to be made on all sides. The fresh start after the war would not be easy.

A Nation Moves On: Battle in the 1950s

The year 1950 saw the first episode of “Listen with Mother”, a radio show for children; India, once the “Jewel in the Crown” of the British Empire, finally became a republic; June saw a pilot episode of “The Archers”, now [2026] celebrating its 75th year; while August saw a return of war when troops were sent to Korea and National Service was extended to two years. Indeed, along with many ex-servicemen, in 1951 Battle’s own Cllr Ross requested a leave of absence from the Town Council as he had been recalled to the Royal Navy. Government sought to boost trade, industry and the arts with plans for a “Festival of Britain” to celebrate British culture and innovation. While there were many national events and exhibitions in the Festival, including the building of the Royal Festival Hall and the first bikini-clad Miss World Competition, local communities were encouraged to create their own mini-Festivals of Britain, and Battle was no exception.

Festival of Britain 1951 in Battle

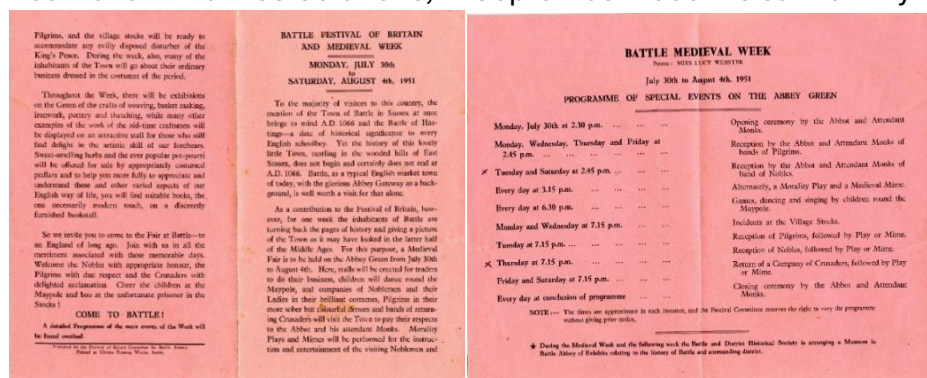
Town Council minutes reveal that, in accordance with National agreement for funds to be made available for Festival of Britain celebrations, in September 1950 the sum of fifty pounds was

allocated from the precept to a

Festival of Britain Committee, set up to organise Battle’s response to the initiative. The chair

of the committee,

formed that year, was Lord Burghley, with the Vice Chairmen being the Very Rev. Dean Naylor and J P Woodhams. An appeal was prepared for local support for the initiative, which highlighted the combined roles of the Chamber of Commerce, the Festival Committee and other Societies in organising the events. The plans were finalised for a



Festival Programme held in BDHS Archive



Medieval Week from July 30th to August 4th as shown in the original programme pictured above. Designs for Medieval costumes adapted from existing garments were to be displayed in shop windows to help those participating make their outfits for the occasion. The Abbey gave permission to hold the celebrations on The Green and the Council decreed that the town was to be tidied up in preparation for the event – the frontage of Langton House was to be cleared; litter bins were to be provided; seats were to be renewed where necessary and some new ones provided, including on Battle Hill. Battle Youth Centre (based at Pyke House in Upper Lake, now [2026] a boarding facility for Claremont School) would provide an elm bench to be situated opposite the centre; Mrs Grace Simmons would provide a seat on Caldbec Hill, near the top of Virgin's Lane; Mr Schnorr would provide a seat on the Green if two others did the same. The site of demolished cottages by the old Wesleyan and Unitarian Chapels in Mount Street was to be tidied and the demolition of The Towers Hotel was to be complete by the end of March, to allow for the possibility of the site being used as a temporary car park. We are lucky to have pictorial records of some of the events, a selection of which are shown below.

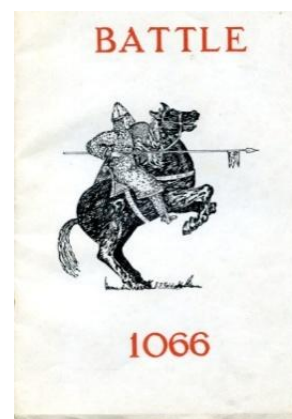


Starting at top left - The arrival of the Crusaders; Pilgrims arriving on The Green; centre – Dean Naylor as Abbot; bottom left – The Foot Family; bottom right Miss Rice and Miss Hayes. Pictures from the Stan Elliott Archive, Battle Museum of Local History (BMOLH)



The *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* of 4 August 1951 reported on the events in Battle, giving a flavour of the celebrations. On the Monday afternoon “there were several hundred spectators to see the opening ceremony. The pilgrims, noble ladies and their retinues approached slowly from Lower Lake. The noble- women, colourfully dressed and led by Lady Burghley, walked under canopies held by attendants.” They were welcomed at the Abbey by the Very Rev. Dean Naylor as the Abbot of Battle, who was wearing “a mitre, a cope embroidered in red and gold, with the Pascal Lamb, and carrying a staff”. He invited them to refreshments in the Pilgrim’s Rest, where the ladies sat at trestle tables eating bread and drinking water from “horn mugs and tankards”. The refreshments were followed by a performance of “The Apple Tree”, a morality play, after which wares were sold from stalls in the market place. Following a sudden cry of “Stop, Thief” an offender was brought before the Abbot to be tried according to medieval custom and sentenced to be put in the stocks. The evening saw Battle school children dancing round the maypole to the accompaniment of a choir from the school. The children, conducted by Miss P Thornton, sang to rounds played on recorder by John Edmonds, Sylvia Farmer, Jean Harmer, Patrick Laws and Norma Marchant. Mrs Mouatt and Miss Sutton taught the dancing. The final day of the fayre was due to take place the following day, when, the newspaper reported “in the afternoon nobles and squires will arrive with their pages on horseback, will be received by the Abbot and attendant monks and blessed. In the evening mounted crusaders will arrive and be met and blessed by the Abbot. The Abbot and monks will then lead a procession to the Parish Church, chanting Plainsong in Latin as they go, for a service of thanksgiving to conclude the week.” We are fortunate that the memories of two former Battle residents were recorded as oral histories by the Historical Society in 1987 and 1988: Mrs L Ross, wife of Cllr Ross, describes her family’s involvement with the Festival in an oral history recording which can be heard at bdhsarchives.com/Archives/Audio/AUD00031.m4a and Miss Ruth Chiverton describes her recollections of the Festival here bdhsarchives.com/Archives/Audio/AUD00027.m4a

We owe the foundation of the Battle and District Historical Society (BDHS) to the Festival of Britain Celebrations. In July 1950 the Festival Committee set up a sub-committee to prepare a Guide to Battle, published by the Festival Committee, (see right) and to arrange an exhibition of objects relating to Battle as part of the celebrations. A trial exhibition was held in October 1950 during the Autumn Flower Show at the Drill Hall with the co-operation of the Horticultural Society. Battle residents lent items to be displayed and the event was very successful. A public meeting was held in November to gauge interest in forming an Historical Society which resulted in a group being formed to write a constitution for such a society. The inaugural meeting of the BDHS, at



Guide to Battle
Copy Held in BDHS Archive



which the constitution was adopted, was held on 13 December 1950. Its President was Professor G M Trevelyan O.M. C.B.E.; Vice Presidents Mrs E Harbord, Miss Hope Muntz, The Very Rev. A T A Naylor D.S.O. O.B.E. M.A.; Chair Mr A E Marson M.B.E.; Treasurer Mr J H Bailey; Secretary Miss F M G Gausden.

An exhibition of artefacts relating to Battle and the surrounding district was put on by the newly formed Society in the Abbot's Hall and Parlour at the Abbey during the Festival week and the week following in August 1951, attracting two thousand paying visitors. It included both donated and loaned artefacts relating to Sussex, but especially Battle, a highlight being, according the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* of 4 August 1951, a photostat copy of the deed of Henry VIII (with translation) granting the Abbey and lands to Sir Anthony Browne. Another outstanding item was silver coins from the hoard found at Sedlescombe in 1876, believed to be perhaps King Harold's War Chest. These were lent by the Sussex Archaeological Society and Dean Youard. Among other exhibits were an axe head found in Marley Lane, since identified as of a type used at the Battle of Hastings and displayed in Battle Museum of Local History; 12th to 16C Abbey grants and accounts; 17C Courts Baron records; a deed of 1758 of Sir Whistler Webster appointing a coroner, witnessed by Isaac Ingall; Roman finds; a Saxon Quern from Sedlescombe; a crossbow used for killing deer on the Abbey Estate and many more, as well as items relating to the family history of the Saxbys, Avanns, Ticehursts, Watts and others. Despite this success, it was not until 1956 that a permanent Museum was opened by the Society, in former stables at the rear of Old Church House, High Street. Run for many years by members of the BDHS, the Museum was the fore-runner of the current Battle Museum of Local History, now a separate entity in its own right. The Society quickly became popular. Council Minutes note that a lecture on 14 October 1958 by R Gibb-Smith of the Victoria and Albert Museum on the Bayeux Tapestry attracted between two hundred and fifty and three hundred people – and more still had to be turned away from the Church Hall due to lack of space.

The Early 1950s and Coronation of Elizabeth II

The 1950s, locally and nationally, appear to have got off to a hectic start. In addition to the Festival of Britain, 1951 had seen spies Burgess and Maclean defect to Moscow; the first X rated film category for those aged 16+ introduced; the formation of the first National Park, The Peak District; the first Zebra crossing; and, a reminder of the fragile state of the peace, troops being sent to Suez. George VI had died and was succeeded by Elizabeth II at the start of 1952 which also saw four thousand die as a result of The Great Smog caused by air pollution in London; an atomic bomb test by Britain in the Monte Bello islands; and the start of a foot and mouth outbreak in cattle, with outbreaks in Canada and throughout Europe. In 1953 Watson and Crick discovered DNA; Casino Royale, the first James Bond book by Ian Fleming, was published; Hillary and Tenzing



reaching the summit of Mount Everest and the first commercial jet airliner was launched. Televisions were still a luxury in homes, with only a few owning a television set.

In Battle, in 1951 the Imperial War Graves Commission began to mark World War II graves in Battle Cemetery. In response to the Foot and Mouth outbreak restrictions were introduced at Battle Market, with the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* 25 November 1951 reporting that the following Monday the market would be open “only for the grading of fat cattle calves, sheep and pigs intended for immediate slaughter” and in May 1952 the same newspaper reported that a local Hastings MP, Sir Neil Cooper-Key, had lost his own herd to foot and mouth. Such was local concern that he arranged for local farmers to be able to ask a minister questions about the outbreak at a special meeting held in Battle’s George Hotel in July 1952. As part of a national screening programme for TB, now a rarely heard of disease, a Radiography Unit was set up at the Drill Hall in September to conduct mass x-rays, with the aim of detecting TB early so that case numbers could be reduced owing to the newly developed anti-biotic treatments available. A house-to-house collection was arranged for the King George VI Memorial Fund following the death of George VI. Councillor Woodhams, a very active member of the Town Council and owner of Battle Market, died in May 1953.



Coronation Programme
Held in BDHS Archive

With the celebrations for the Festival of Britain barely committed to memory, more celebrations were to follow both nationally and locally, with the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, a figurehead for renewal and growth. A Coronation Committee was set up to organise Battle’s celebrations, which took place between 30th May and the 7th June. Four new seats were to be provided by the Chamber of Commerce; permission was given for bunting to be hung from the lamp-posts and a new “village sign” for the town was commissioned. A Souvenir Programme (left) was produced detailing a week of activities such as children’s sports and children’s fancy dress tea; church services; tennis matches; pancake races; carnival; old peoples’ tea; window box and floral display competitions and the broadcast of the coronation itself on television sets in St Mary’s Church to be viewed by the majority who did not have television sets of their own. Much more information about these celebrations and those held for coronations from Queen Victoria onwards can be found in *Coronations 1838-1953* in an article in the Collectanea section of the BDHS see [1.1 Coronations 1838-1953](#) .



State Education and Schools

The 1950s saw huge changes made to education nationwide. Not only were GCE “O” and “A” Levels introduced in 1951 for pupils aged sixteen and eighteen to replace the former School Certificate (introduced 1917), but the entire structure of state education was reformed. As mentioned previously, state-educated children had remained at one local school gaining a basic education from age five until they left at fourteen (originally twelve – raised to fourteen in 1918) unless they either passed a scholarship or paid fees to attend a local Grammar School from age eleven years. It was only these children who would have the opportunity of sitting the School Certificate and learning new subjects such as French and Latin and others at a greater depth. Post war, schooling would be divided into “primary” and “secondary” education, with all pupils expected to remain at school until they were at least fifteen. At eleven all pupils would take the “eleven plus” exam and those who achieved a high score would gain free access to a local Grammar School with others attending either a Secondary Modern School or Technical School. Where new schools were required to accommodate this structure, they would need to be built.

Claverham County Secondary School

But what happened in Battle? Here pupils had attended Battle and Langton School in Marley Lane from age five until they finished their education, at either twelve or from 1918, fourteen. Some pupils were put forward to take scholarships for local Grammar Schools. In 1925, for example, the *Sussex Express* reports in its July 10 edition that Elsie Hobday and Doreen B Nash gained scholarships from Battle to attend Rye Grammar School. Doreen stayed at Rye Grammar, travelling every day by train and bus from Battle, until she was sixteen, having passed the Oxford School Certificate. Others paid fees for their children to attend Grammar Schools. Under the new laws all pupils would take the eleven plus and all would change schools at eleven. Battle needed a secondary school in order to accommodate pupils (the majority) who did not gain places at local Grammar schools in Bexhill or Hastings.

In 1951 the *Sussex Express* reported on 23 November that the Education Committee had confirmed to the County Council that a Secondary School at Battle was to be included in its 1951-2 building programme. It would provide education in Battle and from seven surrounding villages for pupils who did not pass the Eleven Plus exam. On Saturday 30 April 1955 the *Bexhill on Sea Observer* reported that Battle’s Secondary Modern School had opened the previous Monday, the 25th. It described the scene thus: “with the yellow dust typical of a building site swirling in the spring breezes and workmen hastily putting the finishing touches to the building, 250 boys and girls from villages miles around moved into the new Secondary Modern School on North Trade-road.” Pupils from the upper years (age eleven to fourteen) at Battle and Langton were moved to the new school. The school was described by the newspaper as being shaped like a boomerang with



spacious classrooms leading from an “impressive” entrance hall. There was an assembly hall with a “magnificent” stage and “excellent acoustics” which the new Headmaster, Mr H M Davis, hoped would be used by many local societies for concerts and similar events. In addition, there was a well fitted almost completed domestic science section and a woodwork section to be finished. The school also benefitted from a large library. The walls were blue/grey with doors a variety of colours with ceiling girders in the science and woodwork rooms painted violet. Teachers had come in the week before to make preparations for the first pupils – numbers would rise from

September to 330, and to 450 once the gymnasium and science blocks were finished. From the following list of teachers and their subjects an idea of the curriculum can be gleaned: Mr H M Davis – Headteacher and former English master at Lewes Modern School for eleven years; Mr Foster – art master from Battle school; Mrs Covey – needlework, well known in Battle; Mr Stone – woodwork, formerly at the woodwork centre; Mrs Epstein – cookery,



Former Claverham School 1955-2025

formerly at the cookery centre; Mrs Stidon – Senior Mistress, from Bexhill Down; Mr Burgess – maths and science, from Worcester; Miss Martin – English, from Yorkshire; Mr Baxter – rural science, from Hastings; Miss McInnes – temporary Physical Training teacher; Mrs Garrett – temporary Religious Education teacher. It is notable that there were no language, history or geography teachers listed, with the curriculum seeming to be more practical than academic. Mr Davis remained Headteacher at the school until 1959, when he took up a post in the Bahamas as Head of the Government High School in Nassau.

The name of the new school had been the subject of some controversy, according to *Sussex Express* of 2 March 1956, with some believing that it should be called “Battle Secondary Modern School”, after the town in which it was situated. Battle Parish council, however, recommended the name Claverham, after the historic borough in which the new school was situated, a name approved by the Rural District Council and School Governors. The school was officially opened on March 15 1956, by the Chairman of East Sussex County Council, Viscount Gage. A Battle resident, Elaine Harmer, recalls moving up to the new school, where her form master was Mr Burgess and her favourite lesson P.E. For the first time pupils like Elaine had to wear a school uniform, similar to that worn today, with girls wearing a navy-blue skirt, light blue blouse, school tie and a beret, while boys wore navy trousers, a light blue shirt school tie and a cap. Both wore navy blue school blazers. Detentions were in order if the cap or beret were not worn to school. Elaine remembers that one of the first things the new pupils had to do was to sit



tests to determine which class they would be in. The classes were “streamed” according to ability, with the most able pupils in the top or “A” stream, a common practice at the time. The fresh new building must have been a stark contrast to the Victorian school in Marley Lane, with its outdoor lavatories!

Battle and Langton School

Battle and Langton School has its foundations in the early nineteenth century, and was certainly in existence as part of the National Schools movement by 1842, when a building took shape in Marley Lane. Immediately post-World War II it provided the only source of free state education in Battle for pupils aged five to fourteen: with the advent of post war education reforms and before Claverham Secondary School was built, the school had to start taking pupils to age fifteen.



*Early Drawing of National School in Marley Lane
Image held in BDHS Archive*

This must have placed a great stress on already stretched resources. Unlike at Claverham, pupils did not have to wear a uniform, but they were expected to dress smartly. Ann Beale, born in 1939, recalls her teacher drawing attention, as a model for the other children, to the appropriate cardigans her mother had knitted for her to wear to school. She recalls that her teacher was a Miss Marshall, who taught her class everything. School lunches were served at Pyke House in Upper Lake: pupils had to walk there and back two by two. Ann walked to school daily, from her home in Vale Road, at one time walking home for lunch as well. A memory recorded in *Within Living Memory* by the East Sussex Federation of Women’s Institutes suggests that mental arithmetic and spelling tests were undertaken every morning.

We are fortunate in that Mr Edmund Passam, (see photo) a teacher at Battle and Langton between 1954 and 1973, left an account of school life at Battle and Langton during the 1950s. When he first came to the school in 1954 as a supply teacher, before Claverham was completed, Mr A G Clark was Headteacher. Mr Passam recalled that the senior pupils were accommodated separately, the girls in a unit near what later became the dining hall. The unit had “its own cloakrooms (which have proved useful in more recent times when the outside lavatories have been frozen up) it also had its own central heating boiler in front of the classroom to supply radiators and hot water taps”. Mrs Rogers was the



*Edmund Passam
By permission of Catherine
Murray*



teacher in charge of the senior girls. The senior boys, under Mr Foster, who later worked at Claverham (seen right with boys' football team), were led daily to the Church Hall, apparently a rather cold building heated by roof hung gas fires, which were not always up to the task! If it became too cold, Mr Passam writes that "Sir was constrained to apply the crucial test – if the ink froze in the inkwells the boys, unless directed by the timetable to partake of some activity in



*Mr Foster with Boys' Football Team
Fred Doyle Collection, courtesy of Margaret Emeleus*

the school building, were instructed to return to the comparative comfort of their own homes. Meanwhile Sir was free to relieve other staff members if required and to do his marking, preparation etc. in front of a roaring fire in the Headmaster's rooms." Two centres, a Handicraft Centre, which later became the dining hall, and a Domestic Science Centre a "green painted corrugated iron erection situated next to what was the senior girl's unit" provided additional activities for the older pupils, not only from Battle and Langton, but also from other schools. The Domestic Science centre was headed by Mrs Jacobs and was equipped with solid fuel, gas and electric cookers as well as a boiler, wash tub rubbing board irons and ironing boards for washing, ensuring that female pupils learnt the basics of keeping a home before they left school. The Handicraft centre catered for boys, giving basic woodworking skills. It also doubled as being where male staff members had their coffee break "the coffee pan having displaced the glue pot on the gas ring pro tem by Mr Stone, the Handicraft teacher."

Mr Passam goes on to describe the rest of the school at that time. In the centre was the caretaker's living accommodation, the kitchen of which later became the school office. Infants and lower juniors occupied one wing and upper juniors the other, with the large room opposite the Head's room (later the staff room) holding two classes which were "divided from each other by a not very high curtain of hessian punctuated by a number of holes of diverse shapes and dimensions (whether for light or ventilation I cannot say). Suffice it to record that it was known for a piece of chalk (aimed by a gentleman on one side at a less than attentive pupil) to penetrate one of these holes or to ricochet over the top of the curtain to the great discomfiture of the recipient on the other side." For morning assembly, the curtain was drawn back. Two further junior classes occupied two rooms at the top of the steps in the infants' playground, strangely divided by a wall which ended at the side walls, and was not continued to the full height of the sloping roof, thus leaving a triangular void between the top and the roof. This meant that "the dulcet tones of voices from one room were deflected to the ears of the occupants of its neighbour."

One of these rooms was Mr Passam's, and his description of the scene is so detailed and amusing it warrants a full transcription. "The furnishings of this room, apart from a



cupboard and the pupils' desks comprised a teacher's desk and chair and a blackboard and easel. The desk was high, the chair was low, so to equalise matters was placed on a platform behind the desk. Unfortunately the height of the platform was such that though the occupant of the chair was raised to such a height that he was relieved of the discomfort of sitting with his chin on the desk and endeavouring to write at or above eye level (which would have been his lot had his chair been on the floor) with the aid of the platform the discrepancy now meant that any endeavour to sit with his knees under the desk led to imminent danger of his legs being wedged between chair and desk or being snapped off above the knee. Owing to shortage of floor space the blackboard and easel could not be operated from floor level so the easel was set up on the floor and one had to remain on the platform, leaning over and endeavouring to maintain one's balance by holding on to the board with one's left hand. In such cases it was necessary to ensure that the pegs were firmly inserted in the appropriate holes in the easel lest disaster befall and the blackboard and teacher plunge headlong on to the desk of the nearest pupil."

He tells us that once Claverham opened the school was less crowded. School dinners were no longer taken at the Youth Centre at Pyke House in Upper Lake, but in the school's own dining room and kitchen, the former Handicraft centre. The gap between the wall and roof of Mr Passam's and the adjoining class was sealed up, the hessian divider in the large room removed and one large class accommodated there. The caretaker's premises were taken over for school use and central heating installed. Two prefabricated classrooms were placed on the playground. Mr Passam himself secured a permanent position when staffing was increased to teach the children of the post war baby boom. In September 1958 Mr D H Ellis took over from Mr Clark who had served as Headteacher of the school from 1934.

Recreation

By the mid-fifties society was starting to look very different. Rationing finally ended in 1954 - save for coal which continued until 1958, marking a start to a more consumer-led economy. Television ownership had increased enough to make commercial television viable and the first channel opened in 1955. The same year, Mary Quant, fashion icon of the 1960s, opened her shop, Bazaar, on the Kings Road, offering designer clothing to young people, overturning the utilitarian styles of the 1940s and early 1950s. Meanwhile Roger Bannister became the first to run a mile in under four minutes in 1954. Men returning from war wanted to continue camaraderie of the forces in clubs and societies, while war had highlighted the need for a fit healthy population.

Recreation Ground and Sports Clubs

In Battle, improvements to recreational facilities were a priority for the council, particularly at the North Trade Road Recreation Ground as the proposed layout plans show. In the end, many of the proposed changes did not happen, or were replaced by



other schemes, but the plan illustrates the commitment of the Council to improving local facilities.

Cycle Speedway was one of the first sports to benefit. It was a sport which grew up in the aftermath of the war, appealing to teenage boys who raced stripped down customised old cycles without brakes or gears. It was, according to a BBC news article of 2015 “the birth of youth culture... which enabled kids to have a completely separate identity to their parents for the first time”. It aped motor cycle speedway, hugely popular between the wars. Starting in London, its popularity spread rapidly, including to Battle. In April 1950 the local cycle Speedway club, Battle Bulldogs, was granted permission to lay a track at the Recreation Ground. Cllr Hughes declared the track open on 28 April and the first match took place that day. Matches took place within a local league, with the use of the track limited on Sundays to between 2pm and 6pm. As part of Coronation celebrations, the Sedlescombe and District Speedway League held an individuals’ championship for a Coronation Trophy at the Recreation Ground, however, 1954 appears to be the last mention of the team hiring the recreation ground. Mention of the cycle speedway league in the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* ceases after that year, indicating that the post war craze may have come to an end, possibly when most of its participants were called up to National Service.



*Proposed Layout of Recreation Ground
Battle Town Council Records*



*Battle Bulldogs Cycle Speedway Team at the Recreation Ground
Fred Doyle Collection, courtesy of Margaret Emeleus
L to R John French, ?, John Oliver, Jim Pearce, John Mackenzie, Malcolm Akehurst, Alf Mephram, Roland Beaney*

Tennis was the second sport to benefit. In 1950 a grant was sought by the Council to fund the provision of two tennis courts (still in existence) at the Recreation Ground. On 26 July 1951 it was learnt by the town council that the County Council had approved the expenditure and loan for the two hard tennis courts, instructing Rutherford Construction Co. Ltd to carry out the work. The courts were in demand even before they



were in place – at the same meeting of the council it was noted that the Youth Centre had applied to hire the courts on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8pm. The Recreation Ground Committee was given the power to set fees for hire and Mr Ellis, of 21 High Street, had volunteered to collect the monies on behalf of the council. The Cemetery Keeper would be allowed to use the unwanted turf from the site of the tennis courts to repair patches at the cemetery. On 8 December 1952 the final cost of the new tennis courts was revealed to be £1,046 6s 4d. A Ministry of Education Grant of £336 and a Public Works Loan of £824 offset the total cost. The courts, once in place, became very popular, with a tennis tournament forming part of the Coronation celebrations and hirings being made by not only the Youth Centre, but also the Guides, Young Farmers, Fellowship of St George and Battle Tennis Club throughout the 1950s and included Claverham School from 1956.

Battle Rangers FC had been hiring the football pitch on the Recreation Ground since its creation in the mid 1920s and continued to do so during the 1950s. The following photo shows the end of 1952/3 season club dinner for both team and supporters held at the Drill Hall. The team had been particularly successful that season, winning the League Cup, the East Sussex Challenge Cup and the Hastings Senior Challenge Cup. The *Sussex Daily News* of 11 May 1953 reported that the President of the Supporters' Club, Mr D Hookham, noted, when toasting the club's success, that all three cups had only been won before in one season by Hastings Rangers and Hollington. The East Sussex League Championship Cup was presented at the dinner to the team by Mr P F Chambers, life member of the County FA and Chairman of the East Sussex League. He congratulated the team, and its administration, led by their "able" Secretary, Mr W F Peters.



Attendees included: Near table R to L: Mrs D Gander, Mr & Mrs S Hills, Mr & Mrs Shadwell, Mr S White, Mr R Buckman, Mr J Purvis, Dr R McNeilly, Mr C Unicombe. Back Table: Mr S Day, Mr D Gander, Mr L Foster. Standing L to R include: Mr McLeod, Mr D Patterson, Mr W Peters, Mr F Fletcher, Mr A Gander, Mr & Mrs R Young, Mr S Blackman, Mr D Young, Mr F Bridges, Mr S Turner, Mr W Mephram, Mr B Gander, Mr H Taylor, Mr G Duke, Mr H White, Mr G Woodcock, Mr W Bailey, Mr Brown, Mr D Batt, Mr C Smith.

*1952/3 Season Club Dinner
Photo Gifford Boyd, Stan Elliott
Archive, BMOLH*



Battle Rangers FC 1952/3 at The Drill Hall with the Hastings Senior Challenge Cup, the East Sussex Challenge Cup and the League Cup.



Back Row: Wally Peters; ??; Eric Bluff; Charlie Crouch; Albert Morris; ?Bill Funnell?; ??; “Crujer” Crouch; Harry Taylor. Front Row: Derek Brown; Gordon Woodstock; Harry White; “Farmer” George Morris; ???; Bob Hollands; Kim Crouch; ?? Gurr.

Photo: Stan Elliott Archive, BMLOH

The Town Council decided, in 1954, to further improve facilities at the Recreation Ground by installing a putting green. Battle Rangers proved central to this plan when an agreement was reached with the council that the club would loan the use of their tea hut to supervise the use of the putting green and provide staff to man it, in return for half of the income from the putting green. It must have proved popular, as the Council Minutes for 23 May 1955 note that additional putters were to be purchased. The putting green, sited at the north side of the ground, remained in place until at least the early 1990s.

In May 1955 Battle Bowls Club suggested that a four-rink green should be created at the Recreation Ground, further improving facilities. Quotes were obtained by the Council it would have cost £2,400 to create a four-rink green and £1,850 for a three-rink green. Added to this would be the cost of drainage at £200. Sadly, the Council felt that the costs were prohibitive and the plans were filed and the land suggested for the rink became part of the putting green. The scheme was not alone in being found unviable. A plan to provide a children’s sailing pool suffered the same fate, however, a slide was provided in its stead. The Bowls Club continued to meet, as it does to this day, at its own green by The Railway Hotel. In 1956 Mr A Copley and his wife joined the club and swiftly became joint Secretary. Mrs Copley was the first woman player at the club whose members at that time totalled thirty, but by 1957 the *Sussex Express* of 4th May reported that women members had increased to three. The joint secretaries were hopeful that, if numbers continued to improve, they would be able to field a Ladies Team the following year. They would seem to be successful, as in 1958 the same newspaper reported



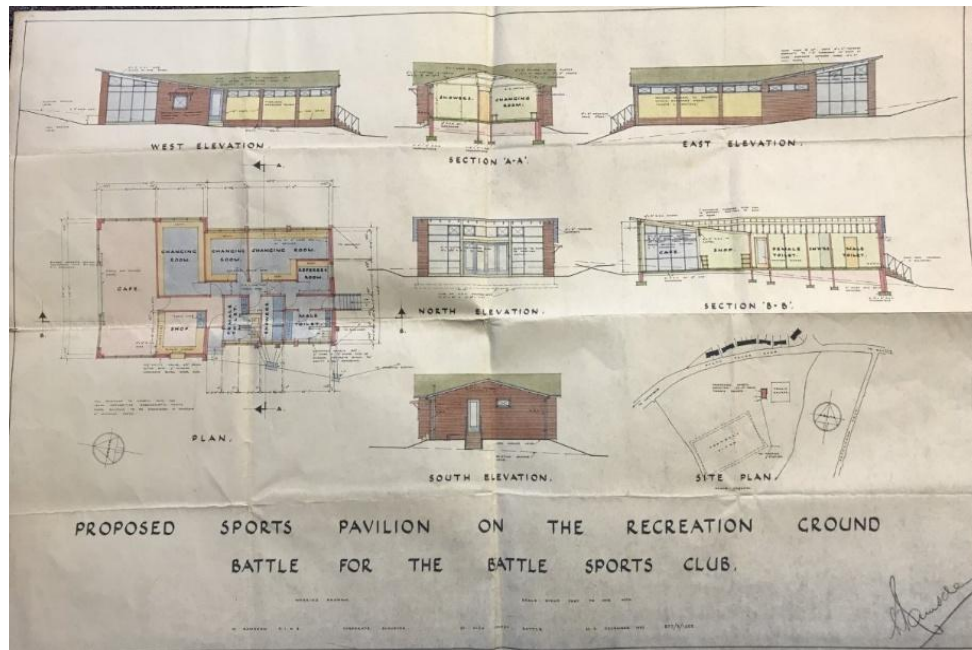
that they were hoping to strengthen the women's team. Pictured below is a men's team from the 1950s.



Picture: Stan Elliott Archive, Battle Museum of Local History (BMLOH)
L to R: Frank Rusby; Edwin Barnes; George Reid; "Nap" Douch; Dave Gander;
Albert Webb; ??; ??; ??; Bob Young

The Recreation Ground had become a home for many sporting groups and others: from children at the swings, youths at the cycle track, Scouts and Guides to families playing putting. Even the local Police Force Tug of War Team practised there. The tennis courts were hugely popular, especially with youth groups and the ground provided additional sports facilities for the local school. It was hired for fetes and large outdoor gatherings, such as those organised by the Scouts and Bonfire Boyes. In 1956, in what now seems, in the light of modern Health and Safety concerns, to be wholly inappropriate, the Council was pleased to propose to place a six-inch rolled gravel surface under children's play equipment, as was the latest trend.

Local groups were not satisfied with the success of all the new developments, however. Since the end of the war there had been plans to build a Memorial Hall on the Recreation Ground (see George Kiloh's Collectanea paper found at <https://battlehistorysociety.com/Documents/O23.pdf>). It would appear that, despite efforts to raise funds, the Memorial Hall Committee were unable to go ahead with the project at that time and in 1955 suggested that a Sports Pavilion be built instead on the land at the Recreation Ground, with changing rooms, toilets, facilities for washing and refreshments. In 1956, to further the project, a Sports Development Club was formed with sixteen hundred members, a measure of the popularity of the scheme.



*A Plan of Proposed Sports Pavillion
Battle Town Council Records*

The Town Council, while sympathetic to the idea of the improved facilities, rightly insisted that full details of proposals for the Pavilion plus plans for management, maintenance and control of the building would have to be laid before it before any lease for it would be considered. There were several difficulties to be overcome – monies raised for the project by the Sports Development Club were refused by the Council as they had been accrued via a lottery. Further, a resolution of April 1947 approving a Memorial Hall to be built at the eastern end of the Recreation Ground (see earlier ground plan) would not cover the new pavilion, a new resolution would be needed. In February 1956 all previous plans to set aside land at the Recreation Ground for a Memorial Hall were rescinded and by December 1956 the Council agreed that, if a proposal to lease part of the Recreation Ground to build a Sports Pavilion was received from a “properly Constituted Committee” it would be favourably looked upon. In 1957 the Sports Development Committee was granted permission to hold a fete on the Recreation Ground to raise funds for the new pavilion. In October 1957 the Town Council approved Battle Sports Club as being a suitable body to manage the new Sports Pavilion. A sixty-year lease at a ground rent of 1s per annum would be considered once all the funding necessary had been received or was assured. The Management Committee would have fourteen members, including two Councillors and three elected annually by townspeople. The Sports Club would be responsible for collecting fees from the Putting Green and the Tennis Courts. In 1958 a revised plan for a Sports Pavilion built of cedar wood was approved and the lease between the Council and the Sports Club was executed in May 1959. The resulting building was well used until its demolition and replacement in 2025.



Social and sporting activity was not confined to the boundaries of the Recreation Ground. Battle Cricket Club continued to thrive throughout the 1950s, playing, as now, on the George Meadow. In March 1954, at the annual general meeting presided over by



John Windle
Stan Elliott Archive BMOLH

President C W R Pantlin, the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reported “a sound financial position, despite decreased subscriptions”. President’s prizes for highest averages were presented to J Windle (first eleven batting) and G Woodcock (first eleven bowling). In the second eleven prizes went to A R Porter (batting) and P Bridges (bowling). Despite decreased numbers, there were enough members to field three teams: S Day and A Brown were elected Captain and Vice-Captain of the Saturday eleven; G Woodcock and G Hollands Captain and Vice-Captain of the Sunday eleven and E Turley Captain of the Saturday second eleven. The photograph left, taken in July 1959, shows player John Windle walking along the path next to the cricket Ground at the George Meadow, with a glimpse of the game being played in background. A social

element was present, then as now, in all the sporting societies, with cricket no exception, as illustrated by the advertisement to the right¹ for a New Year Ball from December 1957. Council minutes record that in 1958 the path by the cricket ground became flooded, endangering the ground. The issue had been caused by the newly tarmacked George Yard and Trust Houses, who owned the Hotel, looked into the matter.



Youth Activities

Although many of Battle’s young people were involved in some of the sporting activities mentioned above, there were activities aimed more specifically at them. Ann Beale, formerly Ann Bridges, recalled in her oral history interview that she had been a member of the local Brownies and Guides which she went to once or twice a week. Guides, at that time was run by Jennifer Stiles. From 30 May to 6 June 1953 a Divisional Rally and

¹ From *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* 28 December 1957



Pageant were held on the Recreation Ground as part of the Coronation celebrations. The “Fellowship of St George”, a national church-based organisation for 14-25 year olds who either had been confirmed or desired to be, had been set up in 1939 and continued to meet throughout the 1950s. Cubs and Scouts were also popular, and the Stan Elliott Archive holds a photo of a Battle Scout Troop of about 1946, at the time run by Mr Hooker.



*Scout Troop 1946 from Stan Elliott Archive held at BMLOH
Back row 4th from left Maudwin Wrenn; middle row from the left 4th Reggie Whitehead, 5th John Oliver, 6th Terry Wilson, 7th Michael Brewers, 8th Peter Goodsell; front row from left 1st Jimmy Pearce, 3rd Harold Tompsett, 4th Mr Hooker, 5th Cecil Blackman, 6th Jack Tompsett, 7th Gordon Wenham.*

Ann Beale, in her oral history recording, recalls leisure time also being spent bike riding and learning Old Tyme Dancing taught by Miss Child in a building at the rear of the Chequers once a week. As she grew older she joined the local branch of the St John’s Ambulance, run by Miss Hibberdine. Ann trained as a volunteer nurse for the St John’s Ambulance and her husband to be was a stretcher bearer. As a member of the St John’s Ambulance she wore a uniform consisting of a black cap, grey dress with a full white apron belted at the waist. Members joined local parades, such as for Armistice Day and provided a well-used ambulance service run entirely by volunteers. As a young woman she went to local dances, the cinema and on bike rides and walks with her husband to be.

Battle Youth Club

Youth work, providing activities for young people nationally, had developed in the early 20C with the advent of movements run by volunteers such as Guides, Scouts, the National Association of Girls Clubs and the National Association of Boys Clubs among others. In 1939 Government Circular 1486, titled *In the Service of Youth* suggested a role



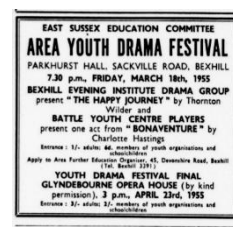
for the state in providing activities for youth to prevent widespread delinquency in the face of war. This was followed in 1940 by Circular 1516 *The Challenge of Youth* which promoted the idea that recreational and instructive activities should be provided for young people. Later, the 1944 Education Act imposed a legal requirement on Local Authorities to provide Youth Services.

In Battle the response to *In the Service of Youth* and *The Challenge of Youth* culminated in the opening of a Youth Centre. In September 1941 the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reported on a meeting held between representatives of youth leaders from the Church and others to organise a local response to the “Service of Youth” movement. The aim, it was explained, was to provide a service for those aged between 14 and 21 who did not belong to any other group, with central and local government grants being made available to qualifying projects. Speaking at the meeting, Rev J J Catterick said that “a good building, in which all existing and fresh activities could meet, which youth could regard as ‘something of their own’” was required. A committee, comprising R W Fovargue (Town Council), R Seymour (Chamber of Commerce), Mrs A Clarke (Battle and Langton School), Miss Fuller (Toc H) and the Hon. Ruth Buckley (East Sussex Education Committee) was duly set up to assess the needs of Battle’s young people and to agree a way forward. By October 1941 the *Sussex Express* reported that the first meeting of the “Battle Youth Centre” had been held in the Church Hall and had been a great success. The following month *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reported that Youth Centre activities included keep fit, ballroom dancing, mathematics and shorthand and typing, held at various locations. The priority, however, was to find a permanent home for the centre. By November the following year the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reported that “The Battle Youth Centre has acquired a new and permanent home”: it was to be situated in the former Senlac Hotel in Upper Lake, later known as Pyke House and now [2026] accommodation for Clarement School.

In 1948 The *Christmas Shopping Gazette* reported that the Youth Centre had at that time a membership of 53, with a further 20 in the forces. A newly formed senior group had 18 members. The girls planned to decorate the Games room with pictures of various sports. Other groups, such as the Air Training Corps and the Scouts, also used the centre, and the Army Cadet Corps joined PE activities. All these were joined, from 1952, by the W I, which had to move from the Church Hall which was being used, as we have seen, by Battle and Langton School to accommodate senior boys. The Centre was largely funded via subscription by local people and fundraising events such as a Christmas Bazaar. Various activities continued but, in a move very much reflecting the perceived roles of men and women at the time, only the girls received cookery lessons, however both had “handicraft” lessons, although there is no indication as to what “handicraft” activities were taught. Judo was offered by 1953, and in 1955 the very



successful Battle Youth Centre Players performed one act from “Bonaventure” by Charlotte Hastings as part of the Area Youth Drama Festival².



By 1957, the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, reporting on that year’s annual meeting of subscribers, noted that Mr H Fovargue was still Chair, Mr K Why had taken over as Secretary and Mr R White was Treasurer. Mr Davies, Headteacher at Claverham, had become an ex officio member of the committee, as Claverham was the main source of young people attending the Centre and with whom a close link was desirable. The Centre opened four nights a week and had sixty-nine members. Mr Fovargue suggested plans to offer weekend courses at the centre by summer of that year, in camping and similar activities had the backing of the local Education Authority.

One such weekend activity occurred in 1958, when Youth Centre members joined members of other local Youth Clubs for “Operation Earthlift” at Oaklands Park, Sedlescombe. The property had recently been acquired by the Pestalozzi Children’s Village Trust and the volunteers had been enlisted to help dig the foundations for the new village. About twenty young people joined in, locals being joined by others from Crawley, Brighton and Littlehampton, as well as those nearer from Hastings and Netherfield. Volunteers brought their own tools, paid their own fares and those requiring overnight accommodation stayed at Battle Youth Centre. Members of Battle Centre had already spent some time clearing the site to make it ready for foundations to be laid. The Village, the idea of Dr Henry Alexander and Mrs Mary Buchanan, eventually opened in 1959 and housed children of refugee families displaced by the Second World War, together with some deprived British children. Children were expected to be of above average ability but without adequate family care to qualify for a place and while at the village attended local schools. It was a tremendous success, but with the last European children leaving in 1967/8 the Trust’s focus turned to helping children from Third World Countries.

The Youth Centre seems to have carried on successfully throughout the 1950s, keeping up with latest trends in youth culture with the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reporting in November 1957 that a “disc dance” (a forerunner of later discotheques?) had been held and that the group had also received a talk from London skiffle expert Dr John Hasted. Skiffle was a music genre very popular with young people at the time, the Quarrymen, antecedents of The Beatles, was a rock and skiffle band. May 1958 saw the arrival of the “espresso coffee craze” in Battle reported, with the installation of a “one pump” coffee machine imported from Italy being installed at the centre. The machine was believed to be the only one of its kind in the country at that time. Its arrival seems to

²Advert from Bexhill-on-Sea Observer 12 March 1955



have spurred the young members into a programme of redecoration, as in August that year the newspaper reports that following the redecoration of the coffee bar and lounge, the billiards room was next in line to be re-vamped. The Youth Centre was a remarkable and worthwhile facility for young people, made possible by the work of tireless volunteers and donations of well-wishers, the like of which we miss today. By 1960 plans were being drawn up for a new Youth Centre and Library, next to the Fire Station.

Marbles

Marble matches on the Abbey Green on Good Friday continued its post-war revival throughout the 1950s, with local characters Frank Anderson and Pelham Wait dressing in traditional white smocks for the occasion. On one notable occasion locals were treated to the sight of Frank Chacksfield (centre, right) joining the fun. Frank was a Battle native who became a famous dance band leader of the 1950s, starting his professional music career by setting up a small dance band of local young men in the 1930s. By the mid-fifties he was well-known on both sides of the Atlantic for his easy-listening music. Children enjoyed the “marble” scramble at the end of the event – hoping to be able to collect a unique marble for their collections.



*Frank Chacksfield and Frank Anderson
(in traditional smock)
Photo held by BMOLH*

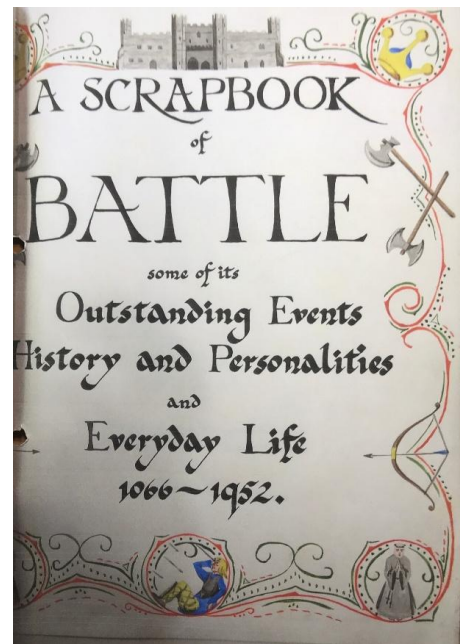


*Marbles in the 1950s
Photos from Stan Elliott archive held by BMOLH*



Women's Institute

The Battle branch of the Women's Institute (WI) had its inaugural meeting on 6 February 1918 and continues to the present day. Meetings during the 1950s were held monthly in the Church Hall, starting by singing the hymn "Jerusalem", followed by the business of the meeting, including minutes of the previous meeting. This was followed by a talk on a subject of interest to members or a demonstration of a skill such as glove making, upholstery, or rug making, with a tea break afterwards. During the tea break sales of members' garden produce, craft ware and used clothing were held. A competition and a musical half hour rounded off the afternoon. The WI had subsidiary groups which members could belong to, the Drama section competed in the Hastings Musical Festival as did the Choir. Parties were held in January each year and in the summer there was an outing. In 1952 this took the form of an outing to London, where members were taken on a tour of the Houses of Parliament led by Sir Neil Cooper-Key MP for Hastings. "A Scrapbook of Battle", now in Battle Museum of Local History, was compiled that year, detailing outstanding events in Battle's history, characters well-known in Battle and everyday life between the years 1066 and 1952. In May 1952 the WI organised a house-to-house collection for the British Empire Cancer Campaign.



*Frontispiece of "A Scrapbook of Battle"
Held by BMOLH*

Battle Bonfire Boys

Battel Bonfire Boyes continued to be an active social group fundraising for local charities and organising the annual bonfire celebrations. Traditions had been kept alive during the war by lighting a candle on the Abbey Green, shielding the light with a flower pot. Once the war was over celebrations began again in earnest, with traditional "Battle Rouser" fireworks being made by local people. Gunpowder at that time was readily available from Tills ironmongers in the High Street, and Rousers had been made locally for at least two hundred years. Cases were made from old ledgers and powder rammed home with the finished product being sealed with pitch.³ Making these fireworks resulted in Tills facing trial and conviction in January 1952 for supplying gunpowder to unlicensed people and three local men for making the fireworks and storing gunpowder in unlicensed premises. Despite the clampdown on home-made fireworks, bonfire celebrations continued to be enjoyed by many (no doubt much more safely than

³ Source "Battel Bonfire Boyes: Bangers Bloomers and Bonfire" by R A Longley



before), with firework displays from the Abbey battlements and bonfire on the Green each November.

Other Social Activities

Whist Drives, dances, fetes and cinema were among other popular social activities of the time. The Abbey Cinema, situated at the bottom of Lower Lake, was popular throughout the 1950s, showing, by the late 1950s, three films a week. In 1952 Town Council minutes record that a monthly Church Service was held for old comrades and sportsmen. In 1957, the Rotary Club of Battle was welcomed into full membership of the Rotary Movement, its charter being presented at a dinner held at the Queens Hotel in Hastings, attended by two hundred guests from all over Kent and Sussex. Mr H Alexander, of the Hastings and St Leonards Rotary Club, presented the charter. The new president was Mr A H Neave, the secretary Mr J P Armitage and Treasurer Mr P T Wilkins.⁴ The new Rotarians were asked to set “a high moral standard in their business and home life”. Sadly, the club has recently closed due to lack of members.



Photo Stan Elliott Archive, BMOLH

In 1954 the Town Council minutes record that a “Darby and Joan” club was to start, for older residents. It met, ironically, at the Youth Centre, and in December 1955 was reported as holding a Christmas Party there⁵, the highlight of which was a huge Christmas pudding revealed to be filled with gifts for the attendees. Entertainment came in the form of a magician, George Mockford, and carols sung by the Battle Choral

⁴ Bexhill on Sea Observer 11 05 1957. Members of the new Club were: H B Chatfield, T A Cheveralls, K Collins, H M Davies, S Day, Rev E F Donne, J G Du Shearing, G A A Emeleus, I B Fernie, W R Humphreys, A T Huxford, D G Jenner, F T Jennery, S J Kingston, W Ramsden, R D Shephard, A J Walke, J H Watson, F G Winnaborrow

⁵ Sussex Express and County Herald 22 Dec 1955 and Stan Elliott Archive



and Orchestral Society followed by community songs led by Mr G Powell. The whole event was organised jointly by members of the WVS, British Red Cross, St John's Ambulance and Battle British Legion.

Housing and Building Developments

Two major changes to large buildings took place in Battle in the 1950s. Firstly, the Fire Station was replaced by a brand-new station in 1956 on the site of the former Towers Hotel, which had been demolished. The second change saw the town no doubt much relieved when the Tannery, sited on Battle Hill where the Tesco garage stands now, closed in 1956⁶. Residents would no longer be subjected to what has been described as a very unpleasant smell, which hung over the area surrounding the works. It was finally demolished in 1960⁷.



The new Fire Station

Photos Battle Museum of Local History



The Tannery, Battle Hill

After the Second World War there was a shortage of housing nationally. Families had lost their homes through bombing (over 200,000 homes had been destroyed in England)⁸, the high birth rate increased pressure on housing stock and widows often found they could no longer afford to maintain their homes alone. One solution to the housing crisis was the deployment of prefabricated bungalows, or "pre-fabs". Initially they were intended as a stop gap measure to last about ten years, but many lasted much longer. The Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act 1944 was passed with the aim of providing 300,000 homes in two years. Early pre-fabs were built of timber frames with asbestos or cement cladding, later they were constructed of pre-cast reinforced concrete or steel frames with asbestos panels. The homes, often furnished with "Utility" furniture marketed to provide good standard furniture items in the wake of bombing

⁶ See *London Evening News* 9 April 1956

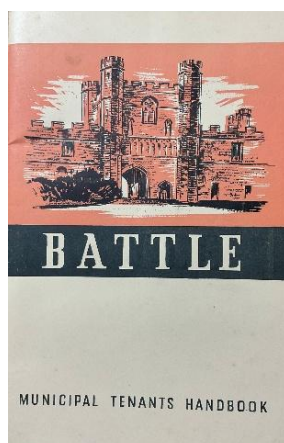
⁷ See Planning Application A/60/26 by Messrs D A Lawrence and J S Short

⁸ [A Brief History of Prefabs – The Historic England Blog](#)



losses, were in many ways superior to general housing at the time, with well-fitted kitchens and appliances. In Battle thirty-five single storey prefabricated bungalows were erected in 1947 in Marley Gardens. Fifty more homes, another type of pre-fab, known as “Orlit” homes or two storey terraced homes built from pre-cast reinforced concrete, were built at Darvel Down, Netherfield, between 1950 and 1954 for Gypsum Miners.⁹

In addition to the pre-fabricated and Orlit homes, traditional homes were also built – between 1950 and 1954 a further twenty-six homes were built at the newly named Darvel Down Netherfield, again for Gypsum miners; twenty-two more were built at Mountjoy and eighteen at the newly named Marley Rise. Perhaps the most controversial development in the 1950s was that of the Asten Fields Estate, to be built on what the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* of 20 9 1952 described as “one of the town’s outstanding beauty spots” at Lower Almonry Farm, south of North Trade Road. The proposal attracted much local opposition, with a public meeting held at The George Hotel on 24th September 1952 at which local grievances were aired. However, in December 1952 the Rural District Council posted notices to announce its intention to compulsorily purchase the land at Lower Almonry Farm for housing. It was not all plain sailing after this. In April 1953, there was a public inquiry into the scheme held at The Watch Oak before Inspectors of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Ministry of Health, at which eight objectors were present. Householders in North Trade Road bordering the site feared a reduction in the value of their homes if the building went ahead, but these concerns and a suggestion that the homes could be built on Pound Field (near the top of Powdermill Lane) were rejected. On 24 July 1954 the *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* printed an advertisement for tenders to be submitted for the erection of fourteen houses and sixteen flats, to be the first of seventy homes planned for the estate, which would include two homes for District Nurses.



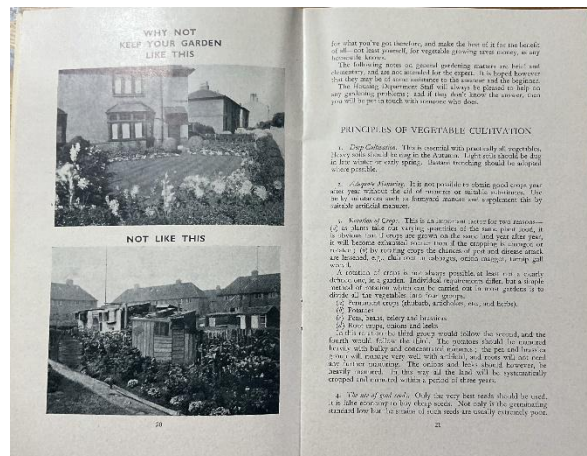
Handbook held by BMOLH

During the 1950s tenants of council properties were provided with *The Municipal Tenants Handbook*, a copy of which is held by Battle Museum of Local History, a rare survivor! Tenants were instructed not only in rules which they must observe, but also all manner of useful advice and information in the forty-eight-page booklet, remarkable in its detail. Following a lengthy introduction from C R Stavert, Chair of the Housing Committee of the Rural District Council, tenants were provided with names of the housing committee members and local councillors, followed by a “Message to the Housewife from your Medical Officer of Health”. Other advice covered topics such as security, from the local Police; fire prevention “chimneys should be swept every six months” and advice on

⁹ Battle RDC Jubilee Review 1894-1954



use of oil stoves, irons, petrol, furniture polish and fat; a whole page on looking after “Your Front Door”; restrictions and advice on how to avoid disputes with neighbours; keeping poultry; rent; first aid; nine pages on growing vegetables, flowers and advice on matters such as pruning; repairs and responsibilities of the tenant including how to hang wallpaper and paint, cleaning and general maintenance; a lengthy list of useful local contacts such as the Registrar, local Food Office, Rent office etc.; use and care of both gas and electric appliances (five pages); and finally details of the numbers of homes, rates and population of the Rural District. It is a truly remarkable product of its time, its contents revealing the distinct roles of men as wage earner and handyman and women as housewife and mother, social concerns such as personal and public health (definitely the concern of the housewife), rationing and the need to continue the wartime habit of growing your own food. Perhaps most surprisingly, in its instructions on using gas and electric forms of heating, washing and cooking, it suggests an unfamiliarity with appliances and power which must have been new to many of the poorer rural population at that time. The whole forms a very complete basic manual for coping with everyday life in the 1950s, which we might balk at today as being interfering, but which was perhaps made necessary by the return to civilian life of servicemen and women, many of whom had been in the forces from age eighteen and therefore unfamiliar with independence and the demands of family life and domesticity, but instead used to detailed orders from above.



Pages from *Municipal Tenants Handbook*
Held by BMOLH

Planned housing growth in the local area meant that infrastructure needed to be improved. In 1952 the Town Council minutes book records that sixty-nine residents of the council estate in Marley Lane had written requesting a children’s play area on land nearby. Many of the signatories had offered practical help in building the playground. A lease on the land was obtained from the Rural District Council and by 1953 a seesaw and swings were purchased for the new playground. In October 1950 the Duke of Norfolk opened the Darwell Reservoir at Mountfield, which would, via a six-mile aqueduct to the Brede pumping stations provide water mainly to the Hastings area. The new lake covered 170 acres and had taken twelve years to complete. It had been constructed in response to pressing water supply issues in Hastings and marked a change from relying on water supplied from underground to collection of surface water, being the brainchild of Mr Sydney Little, the well-known Borough Engineer of Hastings.



The Mid to Late Fifties

The mid to late fifties saw many changes nationally and worldwide. Globally, in 1955 Russia formed the Warsaw Pact of eastern European countries in response to the NATO alliance; the Suez crisis of 1956 resulted in Egypt blocking the use of the Suez Canal and impacting on trade. In the same year The Gold Coast (Ghana) became the first African state to gain independence from Britain and the European Economic Community was formed following the signing of the Treaty of Rome. Nearer to home, Harold Macmillan replaced Anthony Eden as Prime Minister in 1957, while in 1958 Manchester United lost its “Busby Babes” football team in a plane crash and Britain’s first motorway, the Preston Bypass opened. The iconic Mini car was introduced in 1959 and the country’s first new town, Stevenage, was built. In what might today be seen as “green” initiatives, the Clean Air Act of 1956 aimed to end air pollution responsible for London smog and the first nuclear power station was built at Windscale. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was founded in 1958 in response to the real ever-present fear of nuclear war. Council minutes show that readiness for war, including preparation for nuclear war, remained a focus locally throughout the 1950s, with an entry in 1957 noting that several local people had gained certificates as trained Civil Defence Volunteers. The Civil Defence Corps had been constituted under the 1948 Civil Defence Act and members prepared to deal with potential emergencies including those caused by nuclear, biological and chemical warfare as well as peacetime emergencies. For the Battle district Mr Bramley was the Civil Defence Officer, with Col. Winward as deputy from 1952. By 1954, over 380 volunteers had enrolled.

Battle Town Council

Throughout the 1950s Council’s minutes give an invaluable insight into life at the time and reveal members of the Town Council carrying out their civic duties with zeal and attention to detail. This has already been seen in their development of the Recreation Ground, oversight of Coronation and Festival of Britain celebrations, as well as monitoring provision of council houses by the Rural District Council and changes in education by East Sussex Education Committee. The Town Council was Chaired from 1934 to 1954 by Mr R W Fovargue; from 1954 to 1956 by Mr J Newbery; 1956 to 1964 by Mr J D Ross. By May 1953 the council formed three Committees to deal with the main areas of its works: recreation grounds; streetlighting; footpaths and stiles; and burials.

One of its main responsibilities was, as it remains today, the management of the cemetery, its regular upkeep, determining fees required and ensuring that there was adequate room available for new burials. As part of this responsibility in 1950 the Council granted the Commonwealth War Graves Commission grants of burial rights in perpetuity with no fees for headstone erection for war graves in the cemetery. This



included the grave of Violet Akehurst, a Battle woman who was the youngest woman to die in the British and Commonwealth military service in World War Two. By 1953 space for general burials was becoming short, and the Council resolved to request that the County Council make a compulsory purchase of land adjoining the cemetery from Mrs Mary Dannreuther, whose family had cultivated fruit in the area adjacent to the cemetery, to alleviate the situation. Sheppard and Son were contracted to act for the council and permission was given for a £4,500 loan to be sought, in addition a £600 loan was to be sought from Barclays Bank. In September 1953 minutes note that Rutherford Construction Company of Battle had been selected to carry out all the necessary work for the extension. By December 1953 an overdraft of £1500 was sought from Barclays Bank to fund the project, but even this was not enough and in March 1954 further borrowing was needed in order to complete the extension. The final contract cost for the work by Rutherfords, however, was £57 17s 3d. The additional land was consecrated on 4th November 1958. Comfort was not forgotten and a paraffin heater was purchased to heat the cemetery chapel, no doubt making it bearable rather than warm!

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was passed in 1949 and by 1959 there were ten designated National Parks in England and Wales. The Act placed a responsibility on Local Authorities to manage and to produce definitive maps of public paths, and in time, after lobbying by groups such as the Ramblers, footpaths were recorded on Ordnance Survey maps. The Town Council became responsible for reviewing footpaths in the Battle area and commenting on the Local Authority's records of rights of way in order that definitive maps could be produced. The minutes show that this activity took up some considerable time and brought to the fore various issues for resolution. Work began in April 1950, with the parish being divided into six areas with a councillor assigned to each area to assess what needed to be done. An early candidate for refurbishment was the well-known tumbledown stile on the footpath near the tannery. The stile is mentioned by Sid Holland, son of Alf and brother of Fred, former butcher of 20 High Street, in his correspondence with Charlie Thompsett in 1989. Sid had emigrated to New Zealand with his wife Kate after the war, but had fond memories of his pre-war life in Battle. He said "It was the greatest thrill of all to see your photos of Tumbledown Stile and to know that it is still there". According to Sid, the path beyond it led to Crowhurst via Isaacs Pond. Signs to mark footpaths were requested to the County Council and various disputes as to the exact course of footpaths were recorded, including one at Kingswell Farm, where the owner of the land initially disputed the existence of a footpath. Others were found to be obstructed and the route unclear, as for one at the Beauport Park Estate. By 1953 a draft map of rights of way had been received from the County Council, but unfortunately it was based on the 1934 map and had not included the council's suggestions for updates. Work on mapping footpaths appears to have continued throughout the decade, including in 1958 the decision not to prohibit cycling on any footpath.



Street-lighting and traffic produced further work for the council. The area in the centre of the town, including Wellington Gardens, was lit by gas lamps, which were illuminated each night individually by a lamplighter. In 1954 additional gas lighting was provided in the High Street to put in place high power lighting from the Chequers to the cattle market, further, it was decided that the hours of street lighting would be extended from 11pm to 11.30pm. The new Asten Fields estate and development at Tollgates, however, were lit by electric lamp standards, meaning that the council had to have contracts with two different suppliers. Electric street lighting was extended during the period, to go as far as the Netherfield road junction on North Trade Road. This was paid for by a loan from the public works loan board, with work commencing in 1957. Later that year, in response to complaints, an additional lamp was provided at the entrance to Chain Lane, as the area between the end of the gas lamps and the start of electric lighting was agreed to be too dark. In September 1950 an application was made to extend the thirty mile per hour speed limit on North Trade Road to the hospital, but this was rejected, much to the dismay of the council. In 1951 the council formally objected to the decision that there should be no thirty mile per hour speed limit in North Trade Road, Hastings Road and Caldbec Hill, all areas where electric street lighting had been installed. In March 1952, following a successful bid to introduce the speed limit as far as Tollgates, it was noted that a speed restriction up to Starrs Green corner would be sought.

Speed and numbers of cars, areas for parking and street crossings formed the topic of many discussions. A sign "Slow – Major Road Ahead" was requested to the County Surveyor to be placed at the junction of North Trade Road and London Road. As early as 1950 concerns were raised for the safety of pupils crossing the road by The Chequers in order to reach school in Marley Lane. There seemed to be little agreement as to whose responsibility this was. The police had formerly assisted children, and Battle Labour Party felt they should continue to do this. The County Council placed the responsibility in the hands of the school and it is unclear from the minutes how this was resolved. The County Council did, however, agree in September 1955 to extend the footpath on the South side of Marley Lane to the road junction and improve the footway in Lower Lake. The site of a Zebra crossing for the High Street was discussed, the favoured position in November 1954 was by The Star "passage", the only difficulty being the high pavement on that side of the High Street. Parking for the increasing numbers of cars was an issue, as it remains. In 1954 it was agreed that land should be purchased near the cattle market in order to provide a free car park. By April 1956 "No Waiting" signs were erected on both sides of the High Street fronting the Abbey Green. In a cry familiar still today, the Chamber of Commerce protested that customers were threatening to shop elsewhere where parking was easier.



The Town Sign

The Council also had various other areas of responsibility. In addition to discussions on siting of telephone kiosks and types of bus shelters, provision of seating and litter bins and management of allotments a surprising amount of time throughout the entire decade was spent discussing the provision of a new Town Sign. The original town sign had been removed when there was threat of invasion during the War, along with other road signs nationally. The earliest mention of a perceived need for the sign to be replaced comes in 1951, when the idea was passed to the Festival of Britain Committee. Nothing seems to have been done about it as the next mention is in December 1952 when it was suggested that a new sign should be erected in the Coronation year and paid for by the District Council, who, it was said, had removed the original. In February 1953 the Rural District Council disclaimed all knowledge of a sign, stating that they would therefore certainly not pay for a new one. The matter was referred to the BDHS. By May 1955 the Chamber of Commerce had taken an interest, complaining to the council about the lack of a sign. This time the matter was referred to the Sussex Archaeological Society and the College of Heralds to find out if there were any record of Battle having a coat of arms. It was not until March 1958 that a committee was set up to consider suggestions for a design for a sign, following design ideas from the Women's Institute and the Chamber of Commerce. The Head at Claverham was to be asked for assistance with preparation of the sign. In May that year a design was accepted which would cost £27 17s 10d plus another £6 for repairs to the post. The council would pay up to £20 of the cost should donors not be found to cover the whole amount. The ceremonial unveiling of the sign (right)¹⁰ was reported in the Sussex Express on 1 April 1959, it seems it was paid for by Mr C W R Pantlin, who unveiled it. It included a griffin on a shield, superimposed on a crossed swords symbolising the Battle, and a crown showing that the battle was for the crown. The whole was on a blue background with gold lettering. The sign was not without controversy, it was described as depicting the coat of arms of Battle, a claim which was disputed. In December 1959 the same newspaper reported that the Heraldry Society had doubted the claim, suggesting that the sign had its origin in "someone with more enthusiasm than knowledge" finding the coat of arms of the name Battle in "Burke" (Burke's Peerage) and had based the design on it. The true arms, the Society stated, could be found in the Military Roll of Henry VI.



Battle Town Sign

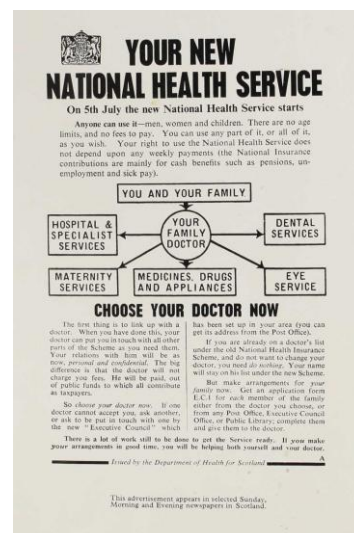
¹⁰ Image taken from Sussex Express 1 April 1959



Health

A look at the post war and 1950s period would not be complete without a mention of the immense changes to healthcare after the advent of the National Health Service in 1948¹¹. Prior to 1948, under the reforms of Lloyd George in 1911, a National Insurance scheme was imposed, with mandatory contributions from workers and employers. Workers had to choose an approved insurance company to collect their contribution and administer their claims. From 1948 all this changed. In Battle, as elsewhere in the country, residents had to ensure that they were registered with a doctor of their choice in order to benefit from access to the new free healthcare system.

The doctors in Battle at the start of the health service were, at 5 High Street, Drs. T Nevill Wood and Robert McNeilly; at 36 High Street (Martins Oak [2026]) Drs Walter F Davidson, Edward C W Maxwell; Kenneth L Brown. During the decade these were joined by Dr James C McNeilly at 5 High Street and Dr James R Mc Michael at 36 High Street. This service was supplemented by District Nurses, various clinics and Infant Welfare Centres. The Medical Officer of Health for the District, M I Silverton, instructed council tenants in their handbook that they should contact their doctors early in the morning if they required assistance; should have children immunised against diphtheria at age one and again at five when they began school. Vaccination against smallpox was also encouraged, particularly necessary, it was suggested, as the area attracted holiday makers, despite compulsory smallpox vaccination ceasing in 1948. General advice included keeping flies away from food, washing hands before preparing food and keeping rooms well ventilated. Should hospital treatment be required, patients were taken to Hastings. As the decade passed, the various hospitals in Hastings developed specialisms, accidents could be treated at the Royal East Sussex Hospital in Cambridge Road, Hastings; births, if not taking place at home, could take place at the Buchanan Hospital in London Road, St Leonards and further treatments, including for children, could be obtained at the re-named St Helens Hospital, former workhouse and Municipal Hospital. Battle Hospital, formerly Battle Workhouse, was re-designated for geriatric care for the area. As seen earlier, Battle residents took part in national screening for tuberculosis.



National Health Service Leaflet
1948

¹¹ Leaflet depicted taken from [The founding of the NHS: 75 years on – History of government](#)



In Conclusion

It is clear that post war national changes impacted on daily life in Battle. It is also clear that there are some parallels between events of the 1950s in Battle and those of today. In 2022 King Charles III became King, his coronation taking place seventy years (2023) after his mother's, both occasions marked in Battle. Concerns for global stability, both in the Middle East (Suez) and Far East (Korean War) were present in the 1950s and remain very much in our news today. These concerns were reflected in 1950s Battle in the calls for recruitment to the Territorial Army and the Civil Defence Force to prepare for conflict, including nuclear war. In education, post war reforms led to the building of a secondary school in Battle, only recently re-built, the present reflecting the past. National initiatives to engage youth led to the development of a thriving local Youth Centre. It is a great shame that provision for youth activities has not been continued, except for volunteer groups such as those run by churches and, of course, the scouting movement. The formal recognition of footpaths in the area, making the countryside accessible, was thanks to the success of national movements such as the Ramblers Association. Cycling was recognised for its contribution to general health in the Council's decision in the 1950s not to ban bikes on footpaths. Today, our council is still working to ensure that there is provision for walking and cycling, illustrated by the development of the Health Pathway on the Recreation Ground and the aim to create more cycle routes in the town. The extensive development of the Recreation Ground at North Trade Road in the 1950s mirrors the developments at the Recreation Ground put in place by our council today, including a newly opened sports pavilion. The importance of the development of our National Health service, created post war and vital to delivering vaccinations, screening and general health care for all, was drawn sharply into focus during the Covid pandemic, as illustrated by the image of a notice from the window at Martin's Oak Surgery .



Poster in Martin's Oak Surgery window April 2020

Life in Battle today bears many similarities to that of the 1950s, it still has thriving societies, many of which were revived post war, including the Choral Society; Horticultural Society; WI; Bonfire Boys; Scouts; Guides; football bowls and cricket clubs providing a full social life for many residents. The cemetery, extended in the 1950s has been extended again in recent years. A number of concerns for Battle residents in the 1950s remain the same today – traffic, both volume and parking; new housing developments are still objected to just as Asten Fields, now integrated into the town, was objected to in the 1950s. A new zebra crossing was installed in the High Street in the 1950s, but calls for safe crossings for pedestrians remain unchanged, with concern now being for a crossing on Battle Hill. The Battle which gave birth to the Battle and



District Historical Society in 1951, was one of re-birth, development and change in response to national developments. A place which, in many ways, we can still recognise as our town today.

Georgina Doherty

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Abbreviations throughout:

BDHS – Battle and District Historical Society

BMOLH – Battle Museum of Local History

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