

Battle Museum of Local History



BACKGROUND NOTES ON BOOKS OF BATTLE 2020

Tannery	2
Ironmonger	3
Allworks	4
Poveys	5
Battel Mechanics Institute	6
Battle Book Club	7
Normanhurst	7
Holy Bible	8
Battel Mechanics minute book	8
Selected recipes of Betty Barber	11

Suggestions for amendments: please email Adrian and Sarah enquiries@battlemuseum.com specifying page number and the revised text you propose.

BACKGROUND NOTES ON BOOKS OF BATTLE 2020

Tannery

George Kiloh of the BDHS writes that leather – its creation through tanning and then its use for personal and equine purposes - had a major influence on Battle in the nineteenth century, with origins going back to the monks of Battle Abbey. Apart from agriculture, leather was once the largest industry in Battle. According to the censuses of 1841 to 1911, some 10-20 people were employed in the tannery where Tesco service station is now sited, opposite the Railway Hotel. Between 30 and 80 people were involved in shoemaking at Battle in the years 1841-1881, declining thereafter.



View of tannery 1905

But there was a price to pay for the tannery: odour, effluent of contaminated water, and reeking smoke from the chimney. There were large sheds with hanging strips of oak bark for the tannin- local fishermen used the worms for fish bait. ¹ Huge vats of lime solution were used to prepare the hides and had to be removed before the petrol station could be built. From 1860 onwards there were frequent disputes with the local board of health and its successor the urban district council; even the “old” workhouse nearby complained!

Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century the tannery was owned by the Noakes² family who, demonstrating that where there’s muck there’s brass, used the proceeds to

¹ Talk by Tony Emeleus 1992.

² According to George Kiloh and Aylwin Guilmant. Probably the Bacons owned it at a different , later, time – their name appears on the leather soles displayed in the Museum.

build the three storeyed house at the corner of Upper and Lower Lake, still there today. The Bacon family owned the tannery later, we think.

The tannery closed in the 1950's and had been demolished by 1960,; some say earlier, in 1955. Thorpes – the main shoemaker and seller- was at 14 High Street and closed in 2002 after almost 200 years' trading, having been founded in 1819.

Ironmonger

The 1855 ironmonger's account book on display shows a range of clients including Battle Jail, which in that year had its locks checked. The building occupied by the ironmonger W H Wheaton for about a century, was 59/60 High Street (now Rother Books). The building appears today, thanks to a 1952 restoration which removed the eighteenth- century stucco, in something like its original form as a fifteenth century Wealden hall house.

H S Newbery recalled in 1986 that this ironmonger's shop – to be carefully distinguished from Tills (NB Guilmant photo 69 is incorrectly labelled) , used to be “a very dilapidated ironmongers run by William H Wheaton who called himself an oil colourman.”



William Wheaton's van date uncertain, maybe late 19C

This was presumably because he sold linseed oil as the shop sign indicates, as well as paint. Tony Emeleus (1992) has a similar recollection: he recalls the shop as “dark with lots of drawers full of nails. The darkest shop I've ever been in to”. Since Wheaton died the premises have been a lingerie shop (“Whispers”), a clock shop, an art/framing shop and now a bookshop: Rother Books. Below is the shop as it looked in 1938:



Allworks

Starting in the Battle area as farmers, Allworks set up shop in Battle in the late 1870's/early 1880's . R B Allwork became a pillar of the community as a Councillor and Church Warden. The shop specialised in country deliveries and wines- they bottled their own wine. They also sold their own blend of coffee, roasted at 11 am every day: many residents of Battle remember the smell. Their sales slogan was: "Comparison is the test of cheapness. Try a sample parcel and compare with any other in the country."



Allworks and staff 1924

A relatively common photo of Allworks is below, but notably driving past are Mr and Mrs Jenner(identification Guilmant) : he made his own Battle car at the turn of the century although this model looks a little later.



Allworks

Poveys

The recipe book dates we think from 1928 and comprises cheap and cheerful mass-production recipes. A H Povey's Battle branch of bakers and confectioners was based at 49 High Street (where Beau K now is) but later on the family had other branches in Hastings, St Leonards and Silverhill.



Date of photo uncertain: 1920's?

We have another photo showing the staff/owners but titled "Long and Povey"



Battel Mechanics Institute

The Institute was founded in 1825 as a subscription- based society which ran a lending library in Battle and arranged educational talks on literary and scientific matters: "mechanics" in the sense we understand it today, was not part of the offering!

The minute book of 1844 shows the efforts to keep the Institute going. A summary of the minutes is below. Similar Mechanics Institutes sprang up all over the country and were part of the campaign for public libraries which culminated in the Public Libraries Act of 1850. The social and political context was the raft of social reform measures from the 1830's onwards, with revised voting and elections, improved sanitation (a badly needed improvement in Battle) , a start on improving conditions in workhouses and factories, and introduction of the railway to this town in 1852. A notable campaigner for establishment of public libraries was the Chartist Edward Edwards, a former bricklayer who educated himself in the library of his local Mechanics Institute. The Liberal MP's William Ewart and Joseph Brotherton also played a leading role in the development of public libraries, whose introduction was controversial in Parliament because of the costs and the social transformation which it was argued they might bring. The first free public library in England was the Royal Museum and Public Library in Salford which opened in November 1850. Our public library in Battle is the successor to all these efforts.

Battle Book Club

The rules of Battle Book Club 1844 suggest that its founding preceded the Institute by many years, being in 1792 with some kind of relaunch in 1844 , apparently as an organisation separate from the Mechanics Institute and quite possibly competing with it.

Normanhurst

Normanhurst was completed by Thomas Brassey senior in 1868³, two years before his death, with part of the fortune he made from major railway construction projects around the world. Thomas Brassey junior, the circumnavigator, died accidentally in 1919 and it seems the family , with no male heir and most of the family accommodated elsewhere, had little use for Normanhurst. It was used as a military hospital in the Great War, as a girls' school in the interwar years, and as a camp for German prisoners in the Second World War. Surplus to family requirements and possibly driven by the need to economise after death duties, Normanhurst was demolished in 1951.

³ George Kiloh says this. Guilman says 1871 and is specific he died a year before it was finished



Normanhurst: Guilmant says there was a fire in 1902

Holy Bible

It's presumably made of limestone or marble, not local gypsum unless maybe in the form of alabaster?? Might it for example be made of limestone from the nineteenth century Netherfield workings? Suggestions welcome!

Summary of Battel Mechanics Institute minute book 1844-65

Journal commencing 10 October 1844

List of members 1845: photo taken of first page

Annual meeting 10 October 1844: thanked Horace Martin for his services as president over the previous year and Mr Till as Vice President. Also thanked James Lawrence for his work as Treasurer and James Sargent as Secretary. Thanked Mr Martin for his services as Librarian and agreed unanimously that he should continue in that role. Then elected committee for the ensuing year:

Thomas Foord, George Sargent, Mr Weller, James Crouch, Mr Metcalf, J Vidler, James Burgess, James Slatter, Mr Burgess, F Butler.

They also thank Rufus Martin and Mr Davis for their excellent lecture delivered to members of the institution. Also, thanks those gentlemen who have offered to give lectures to this Institution during the winter.

Lecture programme:

Mr Weller and Mr H J Holmes each to deliver a lecture.

19th Annual Report of the Institution:

Account of the finances

38 members in 1844, decreased in the last few years.

1835 69

1839 75

1840 64

1841 66

1842 60

1843 54

2 lectures given since previous meeting: one on History and Laws of Lycurgus⁴ by your respected president and the other in memory of Mr W Davis Independent Minister of Hastings.

Finish off by Horace Martin saying in his report that it is up to the next committee to put in extra effort to ensure the continuance of the Institution. On 1 Nov 1844, they agree that Horace Martin will lecture on the poetry and genius of Shakespeare. Then Mr Barnes agreed to do a lecture on electricity and Mr Sargent on 'popular delusion'. Mr Metcalf was to give a lecture on astronomy and chemistry.

18 November 1844 Public Meeting. Lecture on Shakespeare delivered. Then a lecturer on the early ages of civilisation, proposed to be found.

December committee meeting 1844: lecture list drawn up

March Machinery: advantages and disadvantages

Oct: whether the savage or civilised state is the most natural

Nov Renewed discussion on same question

Nov whether the male or female mind is the strongest

Dec renewed discussion on the same question morally, physically, intellectually

Circular issued appealing for members.

⁴ Lycurgus was a lawgiver of the Greek city state of Sparta, very roughly 700BC. He introduced major reforms eg rule by the Senate instead of by a king; and smaller ones eg all Spartans had to eat together in public mess halls.

January 1845 Acoustics delivered by L H Wiseman, Wesleyan Minister

9 May Committee fleeting reference suggests that they had subscriptions to periodicals.
Also had a collection of books

For one of the lectures at least Holmes and Tills were asked to close their shops one hour earlier so people could get to the lecture.

At the 14 November 1845 Annual Meeting a band of music was in attendance. There were about 180 persons partook of tea. Held at the Assembly Room, George Inn, with a view to combining amusement with instruction!

Appear women were admitted.

Books obtained included History of Europe during the Middle Ages, Byron's Poetical Works, the Pathfinder, works by Walter Scott.

Institution open on a Friday evening as a reading room.

1 October 1846 membership 50 (1845 42)

Lecture on Phrenology

1846 decided to open reading room twice a week but did not work so went back to once a week

In 1846 report the Committee welcomed the advent of the railways and the awakening of the public mind and they fervently supported the universal desire for a national system of education.

23 Oct 1846 Committee noted the Institution was in debt.

Lecture on Optics

Oct 1847 Oscar Thorpe was proposed as a member of the Committee

Lecture on the planetary system and one on horticulture

In 1848, they find themselves talking about selling part of the library

Also in 1848, they are agonising as to how to make the Institution more effective and popular

In 1848 report, they came out strongly to justify the role of the Institution in a town like Battle 'where little encouragement is given to science and literature'

Wringing their hands that there are Institutions in other towns in the region that are more effective than Battle's.

Series of byelaws about the borrowing of books – smoking is prohibited.

In Oct 1849 report, they go into the difficulties of future of reading room – Mr Hale has had to stop looking after it and the subscriptions to the reading room do not cover the cost. They report the number of members as 40.

T Chettel was a committee member in July 1861- possibly the T Chettle who made the clock on display in the Museum.

19 June 1862 Committee proposed by Mr A Slatter that as the Institution did not appear to be doing any good it would be advisable that the Institution would be closed as a reading room and open one night a week only for the exchange of books

26 June 1862 General Meeting: they learn the unwelcome news that the situation is that the Institution is a sub tenant of the free thinking Christians. They were having to give up their tenancy so as a result they have served notice on the Institution but Mr Edwin Martin was going to hire the room and pay the rent provided that it is kept open as a Reading Room. Thomas Chettel is to be the Librarian to exchange the books on Monday nights from 8.00- 8.30 pm

2 Oct 1863 Committee meeting : Chettel and Slatter propose that the Institution enter into some group of libraries -Churches United Libraries.

Still going in 1865 – that is when the minute book ends .

Selected Recipes from Betty Barber's Receipt Book Battle 1801: "all proved and answer May 15th "

Can anyone recreate these example recipes from the recipe book on display in the Books of Battle exhibition? Does anyone know anything about Betty Barber? Xxxx means the word cannot be read.

Beautiful polish for mahogany furniture

Dissolve beeswax (equal parts) in oil of turpentine till the mixture attain the consistency of paste . After the wood to be polished is well cleaned, let it be thinly covered with the above composition, and well rubbed with a piece of old carpet, till the wood attain a fine polish and till no dirt will adhere to its surface.

Certain cure for shortness of breath

To the flower of brimstone⁵ and elecampane root finely powdered, of each an equal quantity, mix this into an electuary with clarified honey and take it whenever you cough or find it difficult to breathe.

Daffey's elixir

Take best raisins (stoned, four ounces), sena three ounces, carraway seeds two ounces, coriander seeds two ounces, aniseeds two ounces (bruised). Put in a quart of best brandy in

⁵ Flowers of brimstone is powdered sulphur, which does have some antibacterial properties. Elecampane root is a primitive anti-inflammatory.

a bottle close stopped , for a month: shake the bottle often. Then strain it and pout in half a pint of boiling water in the same bottle for a month which will then be good for present use.

Excellent currie- an East Indies dish

After having prepared the necessary quantity of cold fowl, rabbit, turkey or veal as for hashing with a rich gravy, take a small quantity of turmerick root, of which grate about a tablespoonful , mix it with cayenne pepper, long pepper and grated ginger , about a teaspoonful of each.....draw off the xxxxx, and cast the powder into it with a clove of garlic shred fine, let it boil a few minutes then strain it and pour over your meat, which must be served up with sliced lemon and boiled rice in a separate dish.

Ginger bread cakes

One pound and half of flour , half pound of butter, half pound of sugar, one pound of treacle, one oz of ginger.

After it is beat add a glass of brandy mixed and made in cakes and bake them in moderate oven.

Italian Cream “Abby”

Take three glasses of white wine and one of brandy, near ½ oz of sugar, the juice of two small lemons and the peel of one, and one pint of cream.

Lemon Cake

8 eggs, the same weight of sugar and half the weight of flour, the rind and juice of one lemon.

Beat yolks , lemon and sugar together and put the whites in as soon as you beat them to a snow.

Mix all together and stir in the flour just as you put it in the oven- it must be put in a moderate oven.

Lemon pudding

Take three quarters of a pound of butter. Work it to a cream (with?) three quarters of a pound of lump sugar and mix with it 8 eggs , (leaving?) out the whites. One sponge cake grated , the rind of 2 lemons grated, and the juice of half lemon. Add a glass of brandy. THEN WHAT?

Mince pies “Abby”⁶

Three lb of raw beef or the middle of a leg of mutton. Scraped fine, two lb of beef suet. Shred fine two ib of raisins stoned and chopped. 1 lb of apples, shred a little lemon peel grated, two pounds of fine Lisbon sugar, one ounce of mace, half an oz of nutmegs, a

⁶ This recipe shows how much mince pies as we know them have changed since the turn of the eighteenth/nineteenth century.

quarter of an oz of cloves and a little salt with xxx currants. Half a pint of brandy or port wine to your taste, and what sweetmeats you please.

Never failing remedy for a cough

Roast a large lemon very carefully without burning it. When it is through hot, cut and squeeze it into a cup . Upon 3 oz of sugar candy finely powdered . Take a spoonful whenever your cough troubles you, it being as efficacious as it is pleasant.

Adrian and Sarah Hall

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