GUNPOWDER AT BATTLE, SEDLESCOMBE AND BREDE

Introduction

The Battle area was once famous for its gunpowder. A rumour suggests that the 36 barrels placed by the plotters of 5 November 1605 were packed with Battle powder; a century later Daniel Defoe was writing that Battle produced the best in Europe. Nevertheless it never employed more than a few people.

The making of gunpowder is long gone from the district, and indeed its uses in warfare have been overtaken by more powerful substances, but it is still made because it remains important in sports shooting and in fireworks.

The modern local manufacture of gunpowder is contained within the dates 1676 and 1874. It is remembered through the place name Powdermill, of which the best-known examples are in the Powdermill reservoir near Brede, which opened in the 1930s, and in Battle itself.

Licences had to be obtained to make gunpowder, initially from the king, but the regulations governing the process were effectively non-existent until the eighteenth century and were not properly tightened for another hundred years. The main Act was in 1772, which among other things gave licensing powers to the local magistrates, but it specifically did not apply to the parishes of Battle, Brede and Crowhurst. The reasons for exemption are unclear and may be the result of intense lobbying, which given the times may be a better explanation than arguing the quality of the local powder or the remoteness of the various works compared with those around London.

Origins

It is accepted that the earliest makers of gunpowder were the Chinese, but how or why they did it remains a little unclear. One researcher has found a story that alchemists working for the emperor came across it in the course of their experiments, but it remains a story. It is not fully accepted that the Chinese developed guns, though they did have a kind of flame-thrower.[1] But in the early fifteenth century their extraordinary inventiveness was deliberately brought to a sudden end: Chinese science and technology then remained more or less unchanged until the end of the empire early in the twentieth century. Before then, in fact in the early fourteenth century if not earlier, knowledge of gunpowder-making had reached the west or had been separately discovered there and was already being used in warfare.

To make gunpowder one needs three constituents.

In Sussex the easiest to supply was charcoal. The wood most used locally for charcoal-making was alder buckthorn, then abundant in the area, well-seasoned for some years and cooked without air at about 600°C for about six hours. It was then ground to a fine powder.

The other two ingredients were less easily found. The main source of sulphur, known as brimstone, is volcanic, which meant importing it from volcanic areas such as Italy or Iceland. This too has to be ground very finely. The last is saltpetre or potassium nitrate, which has to be made. The simplest way of doing this was to create a dungheap and leave it covered for about two years where it formed naturally. It could then be drained off with water and put to settle in a container, where it concentrated into crystals, also to be ground.

These three ingredients had to be combined in the right proportions, though there was a range. Saltpetre was the largest constituent, always over half and sometimes three-quarters; the remainder would be made up by the other two powders, the greater, perhaps by half, being charcoal. This was done in the mixing house. They then had to be milled. In surviving mills, used up to recent times, this was done by pouring the mixture (dampened to reduce the risk of explosion) into a flat pan to be crushed to a fine powder by vertical millstones.

A witness stated that the same process was used at Battle:

> The grinding or amalgamating was the first process after the preparation of "the charge," viz., the three ingredients, saltpetre, charcoal and sulphur, and from 80 to 100 lbs. of this mixture two or three inches thick was placed under each pair of stone "runners" in a pan of about nine feet diameter, the stones weighing six or seven tons each, rolling round like two huge waggon wheels in this pan for about ten hours on this dangerous mixture. The buildings in which this grinding was done were always termed "The Mills".
>
> The gunpowder was then taken to the "presses", where it was placed layer upon layer until about 25 cwt. was in position, when hydraulic pressure of 400 tons to the square inch was applied by steam power, the powder then resembling hard tile or slate. *[NB Steam power came to the Battle works at least before 1870, though there is a reference for 1814.]*
>
> It was next conveyed to the "Corning Houses", where the hard cakes were broken up and sifted (or combed) to the various sizes required, from the coarsest blasting powder to the fine-grained sporting powder.
>
> The gunpowder then had a dull brownish appearance, and at this stage was taken to the "Glazing Houses", where it was placed in cylinders resembling barrels, which slowly revolved in a horizontal position, this motion in time producing the well-known black and shining appearance of gunpowder.
>
> It was then passed on to the "Drying Houses" or "Stoves", the final process being in the "Packing Sheds" where it was packed in various sized kegs, and the sporting powder in one pound canisters.

Another vital presence was running water to drive the various processes, and water in any form to dampen the powder at various points. This was supplied by ponds at levels higher than the works.

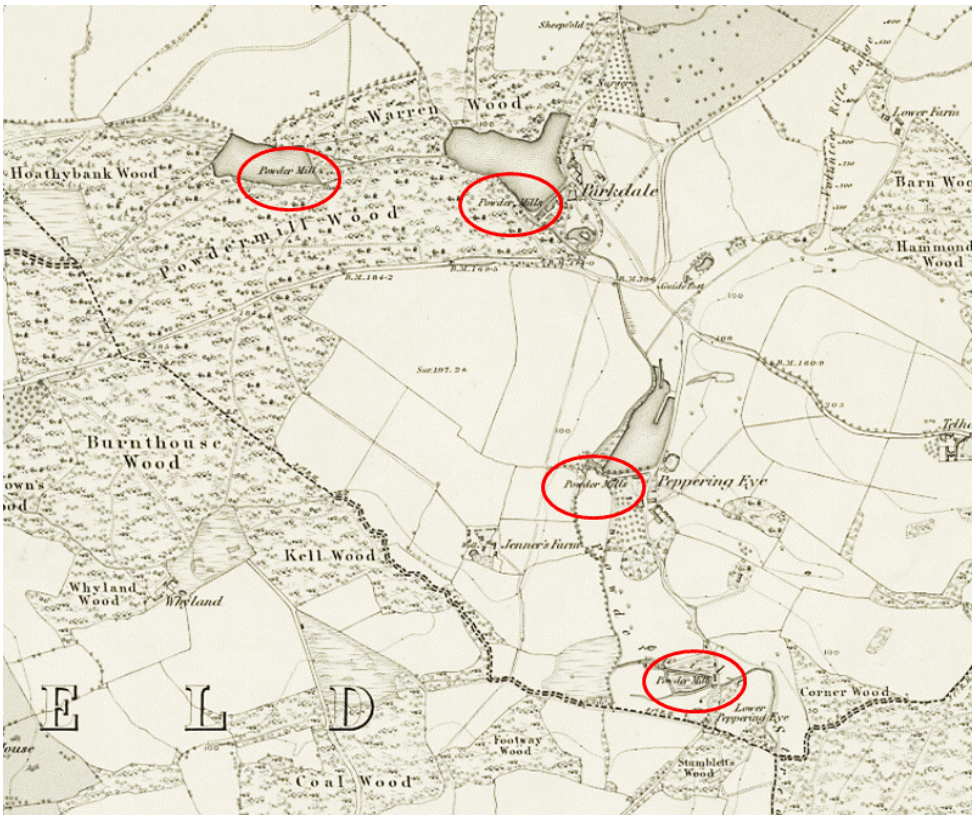
In the case of Battle and its environs the finished product was carted to the nearest port – almost certainly at Sedlescombe bridge – and then taken by barge downstream to Rye for transhipment to a sea-going vessel. This was much quicker and safer than using the roads, though after turnpikes arrived they were also used, and later even the railway. There are no

records of explosions on the way from Battle, even though gunpowder was a highly volatile and dangerous material, as will be seen. Only one record of road transport survives, reported later in this account.

Local powder mills

On safety and economic grounds powder mills were composed of separate buildings, none of them stoutly built; in the case of explosion no-one wanted stone blocks or bricks to be hurled about. They were also cheaper to build and re-build.

Battle and Crowhurst



There were several places in and near Battle where gunpowder was made. In Battle itself they used water from the Asten stream running down towards Combe Haven and the sea at Bulverhythe. By the mid-eighteenth century there were five mills (some say six or even seven – it depends on how many buildings one counts) along the Asten, all part of the same business. Highest up the stream was that on the eastern bank of Farthing Pond, of which nothing now remains. In 1911 it was recorded as nearly 5 acres in area. The map above shows the four sites at Battle.

> Until a few years ago two pairs of stone grinding-runners lay on view at the site of Farthing Mill but when the millpond was cleared of mud the stones were tipped over the dam and now lie buried in several feet of mud. There is no trace of the mill or its wheel … but the bay is in good order and the pond in water.[2]

Next was the house mill. This was the largest of the five mills, at a little over seven acres.

> The millwrights' shop and charge-room are still standing, also the cylinder houses adapted for cottage and stores. Site of ?iron furnace or forge, possibly in operation from 1652 - 1677. Owing to the long occupation of the powder-mill, and the conversion of the ground below the bay of the pond, which is still in water, into a garden, no trace of slag remains. The mills and wheels … have been destroyed but the ancillary buildings, as described by Blackman, survive. The bay is in good order and the pond in water. There is no trace and no local knowledge of ironworking. [3]

According to a worker there the pond was of 12 acres (which seems excessive) and fed water to four pairs of running stones that ground the powder; all four were taken to Dartford on closure.

The third mill was Pepperingeye, a little smaller than the house pond, probably where there had been a millpond since mediaeval times, just downhill from what is now Miller's Farm. The pond is dry and there is only scant trace of any gunpowder-making activity.

The dam of the Pepperingeye pond, March 2019

The mill was immediately to the south of the pond bank, behind it as it is seen in the Photograph. Here there were two running stones, which were still on the site in 1920.

One building survives, maybe strengthened since 1874 to provide a stronger construction. This is what two researchers describe as the corning house.

The Pepperingeye corning house, April 2019

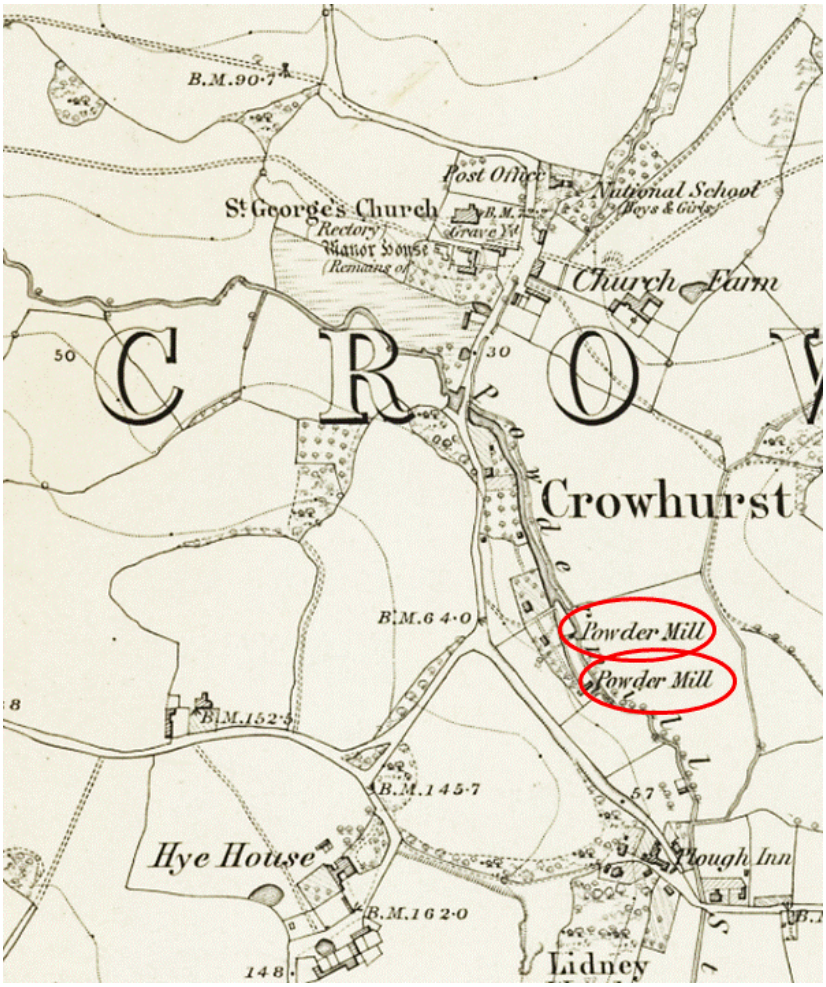
Then there was Lower Pepperingeye.

> The old glazing-house, the corning house with engine-house adjoining and the magazine still remain adapted for agricultural use, as well as the old grinding stones lying on the site. The powder mills and wheels … are destroyed without trace. The pond-bay is breached and the pond is dry. Of the ancillary buildings mentioned by Blackman, the magazine has been destroyed. [4]

Powdermill Cottage close by is a reminder of the old industry.

Last of all was Crowhurst.

> It is probable that … the industrial buildings were situated on the SE bank of Powdermill stream. None of these buildings survive, but the site is known by local tradition.[5]



The site is also clearly marked on maps of the period. Crowhurst had three pairs of running stones, of which four stones went to a mason of Hastings, who presumably cut them for use in his business.

The site (shown here as two) are just to the east of the road through the village where there is the turn towards Henley's Cross. Various reports say that there were two mills at Crowhurst, making the total for the business six, but in the absence of information this cannot be confirmed. It is more than likely that in fact there were two buildings rather than two separate concerns.

Sedlescombe and Brede

The nearest mill outside the Battle/Crowhurst arrangement was at Sedlescombe, close to where the River Line and the Marley Stream combine to form the River Brede. The mill buildings were behind what is now the Bridge Garage. The Sedlescombe mill had close connections with that at Battle, and became part of the same concern that closed in 1874. It was originally a flour mill and turned to powder shortly before 1750, probably in 1747. On closure one of its six running stones went to Dartford.

Further away was the mill at Brede. This was on a spot now identifiable as lying between the embankment of the reservoir and the lane leading past Jacob's Farm; there was a junction of lanes there, with one of them leading north through the area now filled with water. A furnace and gun factory (the Sackville works) was there by 1578 but it ceased production in 1763. It was then leased to two men, Durrent and Jeakins, and the gunpowder mill began operation at least by 1770. It is possible that milling ceased immediately after the explosion of 1808 that killed three men, but the pond was not drained until 1825.

The beginnings

There is little doubt that modern and legal powder-making in the Battle area began in 1676, initially at Pepperingeye, though a later manager of the works was to insist rather sharply that his Gilmore ancestors were making powder earlier in the area.[6] He offered no evidence for this very strong assertion, but it is indeed possible that the Gilmores were making powder at Battle, perhaps when an earlier and illegal mill had been found and then closed in 1627. One researcher, unfortunately not giving references, reports that there was a long-standing feud between the Hammond and Gilmore families, dating from dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, when a Gilmore was charged with demolishing those parts of it no longer required and the retiring abbot was a Hammond. He goes on to suggest a rivalry based on the families being each involved in clockmaking, ironmongery and gun-making and states the one John Gilmore (1677-1726) ran a powdermill.[7] Even if this is true there is no hard evidence that the Gilmores were powder-makers. What we know for certain is the 1676 date.

Making gunpowder is a relatively simple operation but it takes knowledge of where to find the ingredients, what their proportions to each other should be, and how to treat them, let alone how to take the necessary measures to ensure as far as possible that one is not going to be blown to pieces. This is not an operation to be learned by trial and error. The founder, John Hammond, must have obtained these skills somewhere. He was to die in 1709, so it is highly unlikely that he was connected with the 1627 works. There was an iron works and mill at what is now the Powder Mills Hotel site, run by one Jarvis, but because of the presence of iron and flame no powder could have been made there, legally or otherwise. It remains possible that a Gilmore, perhaps the man who founded the Sedlescombe mill in about 1747, had had his training at Battle; perhaps the story is true that a Gilmore preceded Hammond and taught him his business. All this must remain speculative.

Hammond's lease was from the owners of the Abbey, to make gunpowder. This was for 21 years in the first instance, and it was regularly renewed until discontinued in 1874. It is clear that he and his son bought several plots of land as freehold, presumably from the Abbey, including Pepperingeye. John's will refers to a gunpowder house in the garden of his new house at Battle, which was almost certainly on the site of the present hotel, but this remained Abbey freehold until the final dissolution of the Webster estate in 1976.

He was succeeded by his son William Hammond, ironmonger, who died in 1742. By then he owned the Pepperingeye and Crowhurst lands but still rented the present hotel site from the Abbey. (His daughter Elizabeth married David Langton, and under her married name bequeathed sufficient resources to start a school in Battle: her name lives on in that of the primary school.) William's son John inherited the business and on his death in 1762, his only son and his younger brother having predeceased him, he left his estate to his wife Eleanor. She died in 1797, effectively leaving it to her daughter, Ellen, wife of Henry Woodgate (1747-1834). Woodgate inherited the freeholds of the Hammonds in 1810. There is a suggestion that then a man called then Gill took over but this is hard to establish. At the time a William Gill was a banker with the Hastings Old Bank, and there are records that associate him with the name Harvey, so it is possible that he was the administrator of Lester Harvey's estate when Harvey went bankrupt in 1817; but Harvey did not own the land.

Newspaper reports of 1825 indicate that the lands were up for sale, and it is clear that they were bought by Charles Laurence.[8] (Another branch of the Hammonds owned and ran the ironmongery business known to later generations as Till's – William Till married one of the daughters and later took it over.)

If freehold ownership is reasonably clear the same cannot be said for those running the powder business. Up to 1747 it is clearly John Hammond. Late in the eighteenth century it appears to be one William Gibbs, probably in association with Lester Harvey and then his son William Gilmore Harvey. Lester Harvey Son and Co. are listed as proprietors of the business in the 1791 Universal Directory. (The Harveys, from Rye, have no proved link to the Lewes brewing family.) A Charles *Lawrence* is also listed there, as a clerk in the powder mills.

The Harveys bought out the remaining Webster interest, at least at Sedlescombe, in 1801. The younger Lester Harvey, however, overstretched himself and in 1817 he went bankrupt, owing an enormous sum for the time, leaving the management of the business to Laurence. That family kept the business until leaving in 1874. In 1820 Harvey retreated to Hounslow with his partner Curtis, and as Curtis and Harvey their large and successful explosives factory lasted until Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) took it over in 1934.

As to Sedlescombe, by 1817 the mill had been going for some 70 years. By 1747 William Gilmore, its founder, had taken over the lease with the support of the Websters and their steward George Worge, of Rose Green in Battle. The Websters remained in partnership with Gilmore's successors until 1801. Gilmore died in 1767, and his two sons had predeceased him in an explosion at the mill, which is described later in this study. This left the succession to his daughter, who had married Lester Harvey; their son William Gilmore Harvey later joined the partnership. Lester's interest went to his son in 1800. Before 1819 the Sedlescombe operation was run by William Gibbs.[9]

Thanks to the link with the Harveys the Battle and Sedlescombe concerns were now one, and they remained in joint operation until 1874. Notice to quit may have been welcome, for by contemporary standards the operation was small and offered no opportunity for expansion to satisfy a growing market. Moreover it had not begun to expand into making the new form of explosive known as guncotton. The business moved to Dartford in Kent, close to the Thames.

Battle gunpowder had three uses. It was well-regarded as a powder for game shooting, and although no figures exist it is probable that this sport increased considerably during the period that powder was made there. It was an explosive used in mines, quarries and demolitions of various kinds – again, probably an increasing volume. And it was in demand by the military.

> … the Gunpowder Works did not fail to take advantage of war conditions, and to benefit thereby … During the years of the Crimean War, from 1854 to 1856, [James Morgan, carrier] took 1,300 barrels of gunpowder by road to Tonbridge, where it was loaded on barges to be conveyed to the magazines at Erith.

Unfortunately no other information on military use is to hand. The idea is strangely at odds with the peaceful countryside that we know today: that up to and including the mid-eighteenth-century wars Sussex-made artillery would have been using Sussex-made powder to fire Sussex-made cannon-balls.

Dangers

If one looks at newspapers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are very frequent reports of explosions in all walks of life. Boilers blew up at home, in factories, on ships, on railways. Gas leaks blew up houses, as indeed sometimes they do today. Firedamp in collieries was a real hazard. Gunpowder at home, in factories and in mines contributed to the death toll. But the danger in powder mills was more obvious.

Danger lurks at a powder mill from the moment that the three ingredients are mixed. Explosions were common across the country. A spark was enough to set one off, which is why iron tools were generally banned; fires near the workings, when needed, had to be scrupulously guarded; anyone who smoked had to be careful to put his pipe down outside sensitive areas. Not everyone obeyed these simple rules, and some paid with their lives for their failure. Some of these incidents elsewhere killed more than a hundred people; the number at any one time in the Battle area did not exceed four. The recorded number of workers at the sites does not appear to have exceeded twelve overall, though at times there would have been jobbing labourers, carriers and other callers. Gunpowder can still cause loss of life. In 1937 a man died in Wellington Gardens, Battle, when preparing fireworks. And near Halland in 2009 a fireworks factory exploded and two fire-fighters died.

Several local explosions at gunpowder mills are recorded that involved serious injury or loss of life; there were also some that caused no injury or death. They were trivial by comparison with those elsewhere – Faversham in 1916 (105 dead) and Silvertown in 1917 (73 dead), for example, or that of a fertiliser factory at Oppau in Germany in 1921, which killed more than 560 people. As to the Battle area, some names of casualties cannot be determined with certainty.

The first recorded explosion appears to have been at Battle – location not given – in October 1759, when a new powdermill owned by Hammond blew up. William Hyland was at work in the shed at the time and he was ‘terribly burnt and bruised, but there are some Hopes of his Recovery’.[10] (He appears to have done so, for no Battle or Crowhurst burials are recorded in his name for some years.)

In December 1764 a major explosion occurred at Sedlescombe, killing four men including James and Thomas Gilmore, sons of William Gilmore, the owner. The other two were John Watson and James Coldgate. The Gilmores were buried at Battle, the others at Sedlescombe. Reports suggest that a ton of powder blew up; there are no reasons given for it having done so.

One researcher suggests an explosion in 1776 that killed Mark Archer.[11] The date may be wrong, and the cause might not have been an explosion. Sussex Family History Group research reports that Archer died in 1766, ten years earlier, and was buried on 8 November of that year. He was reported in the church records as driving a waggon loaded with brimstone and tub staves, not substances by themselves given to explosions, and whatever happened took place ‘near Mr Pelham’s mount’, which is almost certainly the top of Telham hill.

Public reports are incomplete: one researcher says, for example, that there were explosions at Brede in 1778 and 1787. She records a newspaper report of 16 July 1787, by implication referring also to the 1778 event:

> On Wednesday last, between 10 and 11 o'clock in the forenoon, Brede Powdermill belonging to Messrs. Brooke, Jenkins and Company, blew up, by which accident two men that were in it at the time, were most miserably burnt, one of whom named James Gutsel languished until next day and then died in great agony, and the other lives with little hope of recovery. The deceased, though he had the presence of mind to strip himself of his clothes immediately after the accident was scorched from head to foot, and in that miserable condition ran home to his family, who lived about a quarter of a mile off. The other in some degree lessened his sufferings by jumping into a pond and extinguishing the fire about him. Had they been at the other end of the Mill, where the powder was running they must have been blown to pieces. The explosion was felt at Westfield, a few miles distant, like the shock of an earthquake. A Powdermill at the same place blew up some years ago, when one man was blown to pieces, whose limbs were found scattered a great distance from each other. Another man, named Henley, was seriously injured at the same time.[12]

At the end of the century there was one of the most costly of the explosions at Battle. A newspaper report reads:

> *Powder Mills at Battle blown up*
>
> About noon on April 27th, 1798, one of the Battle Powder Mills, with a drying house and storeroom nearly adjoining, were by some unknown accidental communication by fire, blown up with two tremendous explosions and totally destroyed.
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> Three men employed at the mill were blown into the air, one was instantly killed; the other two only survived about two hours. Seven separate buildings were completely destroyed, though only two reports were distinguishable.
>
> The quantity of powder exploded exceeded fifteen tons in weight, and the damage is estimated at upwards of £5,000.
>
> A house situated about one hundred yards from the nearest building blown was so shaken that it had to be re-built; while a heavy sandstone from the mill was carried several yards over the roof of the dwelling, and pieces of timber to a large wood about half a mile from the mill.

Unfortunately the names of those who died have not been preserved. One researcher gives the names as Mrs Lavender, William Pimm and John Blundell,[13] but there are no Sussex burials recorded for these people, or any other helpful information available. A *Thomas* Lavender was buried at Battle on the day of the explosion but that is the nearest we can get.

The next explosion reported was at Brede in March 1808, and it resulted not only in three deaths but possibly also in the closure of the mill there.[14] Three men died. William Sinden was buried at Salehurst, Henry Harrod and William Wenham at Westfield. What happened to Sinden has got into print. The unfortunate man was blown into five parts: head; one leg/thigh; body/leg/thigh; an arm; the other arm. It is an indication of what probably happened to others.[15]

It was not long before the next explosion at Battle was reported. It was at about 10 a m on 19 July 1814. This was in a corning house, and three men 'were blown to atoms'.

Nevertheless funeral services were held and what was recovered of the men was buried two days later. All married men, they were John Sinden, aged 51, Philip Mann, aged 36, and John Eldridge, aged 62. All these surnames appear in the first census identifying people, in 1841, but without any convincing connection.

Less than a year later another death occurred. The explosion at about 9 a m on 26 May 1815 killed Stephen Middlemas, a workman. He was buried at Battle two days later. He appears to have been a native of St Clement's parish at Hastings.

On 18 August 1827 there was an explosion at Crowhurst that killed two men. They were James Hounsell and Reuben Morris. Hounsell had been born at Whatlington in 1795 and Morris at Crowhurst in the following year. The corning house blew up, and the reasons for it having done so are not known. Hounsell's wife Mary (who was also his cousin) must have been well-known in the area, being somewhat free with herself and mothering a large number of children, not all legitimate. After James's death she remarried and died in 1872.[16]

For some time after that it appears that some form of peace reigned. But then, in 1857, 1859 and 1864, there were further deaths at Battle. It was almost certainly these, coupled with continuing stories of explosions at other mills elsewhere and on the Regent's Canal in what is now London, that convinced the Clevelands that powder making must stop when the lease for the Powdermill Lane site came up for renewal. Testing the powder on site at Battle must also have caused regular, if minor and controlled, explosions heard at the Abbey, to the annoyance of the duchess.

The record of each of the late and serious explosions is fuller than at earlier times. In 1857 one took place in the morning of 17 August. It was caused by a workman not following the rules set out for him.

> The accident was caused by the unfortunate deceased using a brass hammer for removing some small portions of powder that had adhered to the bed upon which the runners revolve, the rules of the manufactory being, firstly, to wet the powder with water, and then to remove it with a copper spud kept for that purpose. This is the only fatal accident that has happened for 30 years, which must in great measure tend to show the caution used at these works....
>
> William Watts, of Battle, surgeon, deposed—I was this morning sent for after the explosion at the powder mills had happened. On arrival I found the deceased in a building near where the explosion had taken place. He was quite dead. The body was burned all over, more or less; the skin peeling off where touched, the face very much charred and otherwise disfigured. The cause of death was no doubt from the shock occasioned by the explosion of the gunpowder.

The verdict was accidental death. The man was William Eldridge, born at Battle in about 1815. He had used a brass hammer but had chipped the iron wheel, creating a spark. Eldridge left a wife and at least the four children recorded in the 1851 census.

Two years later a further death took place, early on 13 April 1859. A corning house blew up, killing William Putland, aged 56 and a labourer at the mill for a long time. As was routine, Putland had taken about 90lb of powder into the corning house to be pressed into cakes. He had changed into iron-free shoes before doing so, and the cause of the explosion was unknown. The force of the explosion was immense:

> The "house" itself stood at the corner of a piece of land of about four acres. This, as well as the adjoining lands, strewed with timber, flooring, brickwork, portions of the deceased's body, his hat torn into several pieces, and pantiles—presenting a sad scene of destruction. The structure was of comparatively small extent, and built of wood, with six small brick pillars let into the ground as a foundation; the whole of this was shattered into thousands of pieces, and some the heaviest timbers, and portions of the brickwork, weighing half-a-cwt, were hurled to distances of 150 to 200 feet. The hedge row at the back and side of the house was completely destroyed, the ground of a "shaw" of underwood at the west side was quite cleared, in a parallel line with the building, and a portion of the floor beams had been firmly imbedded in the ground. Not the slightest idea exists as to the cause of the accident.

Not much of Putland was left for burial. The verdict of the inquest was:

> Accidental Death by an explosion of gunpowder—the cause of the explosion being unknown. Unanimous opinion was also expressed that the proprietors used great caution and care in the management of the works and manufactory.

Putland had lived at Pepperingeye. His wife and eight children survived him.

The last great explosion at Battle took place at the end of September 1864. Two men died, William Wait and John Chapman. Their work was to sweep up refuse powder in a press room and water it, and then repair a small part of the floor. The explosion happened at about 12.45 p m and the two men were thrown some distance, very badly burned.

Both men spoke before they died, and Chapman, a carpenter regularly employed at the mills, confessed that in raising a floor board he had used a steel tool instead of a wooden one. A spark from it had begun a fire and the men fled, but the explosion overtook them. A verdict of accidental death was recorded.

The very last powder explosion at Battle was after it closed, though the date is uncertain:

> The buildings at Pepper-in-Eye were being dismantled and the wooded shaft on which the revolving barrels had been fixed in the "glazing house" had been taken into the engine house. This shaft was circular, between twenty and thirty feet long and five inches in diameter.
>
> The carpenter was knocking off the iron rings from the ends of this shaft and a spark was by some means raised. The powder which had penetrated the cones and cracks in this shaft proved to be sufficient to cause an explosion of such force as to move the roof considerably and blow out the windows, while the carpenter was incapacitated for some weeks.

That was the end of it. The intrusive sounds of today are rarely of sudden explosions but always of motor traffic and the occasional aeroplane. As will have been observed, little remains of this undertaking, either at Battle or at Sedlescombe. The site with an observable gunpowder background – thanks to the pond and the name – is that occupied by the Powder Mills Hotel, which was for some three quarters of a century the home of the Webster family after they had returned to the Battle Abbey estate in 1902.

What is left is very little: the ponds by the Powder Mill Hotel and Farthing Pond and the overgrown Lower Pepperingeye pond are all in water; those at Pepperingeye, Crowhurst and Sedlescombe are dry. Some relics remain at Sedlescombe.[17] But in 2018 Battle Town Council received from the Hastings Museum two relevant objects, both connected with the refining of saltpetre. One, from Brede, is a cauldron used for boiling the source substance. It is a cast-iron basin 400cm in circumference (the gift of Dion Fielding). The other, from Battle, given by a Mr Quaife, is a saltpetre settling tank, some 570cm in circumference.[18]

A settling tank at Powdermill, Battle. The man is James Morgan, then 96 years old, and the date is about 1920.

Sources

Except where given in the end-notes these are from Herbert Backman's articles in the Hastings and St Leonards Observer in 1920 and from Bruce Cripps and Nicola Stell: *The Asten gunpowder trail, a Crowhurst heritage walk* (Newvista Publications, 2017). The maps were adapted and supplied by Keith Foord.

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[1] BDHS Journal 2018, pp 37-41
[2] https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/
[3] As 2
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[7] E J Tyler: *The clockmakers of Battle* (in *Antiquarian Horology*, autumn 1978)
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[11] Ian Gordon in *A tapestry of Battle* (2002), pp 64-74
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[15] https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=x62bd3BTmU4C&pg=PA101&lpg=PA101&dq=brede+gunpowder&source=bl&ots=3JBL4YRjpO&sig=ACfU3U3D3n6htW4HjzoyXiUr03SZbt0edQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjDtc3Z8KbgAhVHKuwKHTTvDIE4ChDoATAGegQIARAB#v=onepage&q=brede%20gunpowder&f=false
[16] Personal communication from Keith Foord.
[17] As 12
[18] From Trish Hutchison (Battle Museum)

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