



LANGTON HOUSE



Langton House, 2021, photo by Peter Greene

After the Abbey Langton House is probably the most impressive building in Battle. It stands more or less opposite the Abbey, overlooking Abbey Green.

The site and its history have been recorded in some detail by the Martins.¹ This was always freehold land and must have been occupied from a very early date in the history of the town, almost certainly before its first mention in the records, in 1367. It was one of the wider plots of land in a well-organised High Street, measuring 19.95m across. By the late 16th century it had passed to Sir Richard Sackville, who in 1552 sold it to Richard Weeks. Weeks was an

ironmaster, which implied wealth, and he had built the present house by 1569. It was always to be occupied by those of some standing, for as long as it was not divided into smaller properties.

We do not know when Weeks or his successors sold it to John Cushman, or in turn how long he held it, but by 1654 it was owned by Samuel Gott. Gott also derived his wealth from the iron business and was an MP for Sussex during the civil war; his son and grandson were also MPs. Samuel Gott died in 1671; at some point his son Peter bought Stanmer House near Brighton and moved there, so by 1699 it was occupied by the Weston (or Western) family, landowners and again ironmasters. They appear to have had a near monopoly of the cannon-making business and were remarkably rich. Samuel Western was MP for Winchelsea from 1689 to 1699. There is a report of the house remaining in the ownership of the Gott family to 1768, so presumably Western was a tenant. The last local Western died in 1720, who left it to the Dean of Battle in trust for supporting the poor. The next occupant, presumably as tenant, was another ironmaster, Richard Hay, whose family passed it to David Langton.

Langton was from Southwark and may have been in the iron industry: a connection with Battle would otherwise seem unlikely. He and his family were Presbyterians. He married Elizabeth Hammond, of the gunpowder and iron family of Battle, at Battle, but all their children were baptised at the Presbyterian meeting house at Southwark. There has been an attempt to link the Langton family with Sussex, though unconvincing, in a paper published by the Battle and District Historical Society in 1960. Here the quest was to find an earlier reference to a Langton in connection with the house, whose name might have remained in use. The only candidate found was one William Langton of Lancashire descent (died in 1588), whose sister Anne married into the Forster family; the Forsters were certainly to have Battle houses, but we do not know precisely where, and from what we know of the seventeenth century history of the house it is unlikely to have been Langton House. The author did not press the case for an early Langton name.²



Elizabeth's surname, however, has lasted. David Langton died at Brighton late in 1775; she died at Battle in 1793. Her name lives on not just in the house but in the primary school close to Market Square. Battle and Langton School is a descendant both of the National school founded in the 1830s and of the school that she endowed in her will. The modern road Langton Close is next to the nineteenth century school.

The house itself has of course has undergone major change. As Weeks built it, it was of two stories (no doubt with a loft above), organised around a central courtyard. Some of this survives despite all the later works. In the next century the changes were minor, being mainly confined to plasterwork and panelling, but in about 1765 the upper parts of the house assumed their present appearance. In 1902 the property was divided into two dwellings and the last major external changes took place.

Later owners

The 1785 land tax records show a very low tax indeed being paid by Elizabeth Hammond, which suggests that the main house was by then leased to others. Langton House was put up for auction at the end of 1808, described as formerly the property of David Langton Esq but then of Thomas Barton.³ It sold for £1315 in 1809, and in 1829 it went to William Ticehurst, schoolmaster and high constable of Battle.⁴ When Ticehurst bought Langton House from John Roberts in 1829 it was described as formerly the property of Western.⁵ At some point the Dean must have relinquished the ownership in trust assigned in 1720.

The Memorial Hall website (31 May 2015) gives information on the house, some of which conflicts with others. For example, it gives the date of 1718 for Langton House becoming a poorhouse and of 1730 for it being taken over by the Hammond family, which would account for Elizabeth Hammond, later married to David Langton, coming into possession of it. It also states that it was again a poorhouse from 1805, and this seems to be true. It is possible that the poorhouse was in the yard at the rear of what was a fairly extensive property, rather than in the house itself. Indeed, it would be unlikely that such a sought-after property would be used other than for private residence. The poorhouse then moved to the lower part of Battle Hill, probably on the site of what is now the Senlac Inn.

The last Ticehurst owner was Frederick Gorham Ticehurst, who died in 1922. He had had a notable career in the town: he was a public official for nearly 44 years in connection with the workhouse, with the registration authority and the Burials Board before succeeding his father (a son of William) as clerk to the workhouse Guardians, and to the Rural Sanitary Authority (the precursor of the first Battle Rural District, which was based in the house). In addition he was one of the earliest members of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and a specialist in electrical clockmaking. In 1936, when the new Rural District Council took over Watch Oak, the house was bought by Richard Prebble Rowe, a dealer in antique furniture. Up to then the façade had been in principle symmetrical: although there were now three storeys, the central one was set back, behind the balustrade. To the south there was a yard by which access could be had to its rear.



Rowe planned to refront the ground floor with the plate glass windows then coming into fashion for shops. The district council refused him but he won his appeal to the ministry. Mercifully he then changed his mind and instead built a very sympathetic extension to the south, over the lane that had led to the rear. He also planned a large hall behind, but never built it. The extension over the yard was in exactly the style of the rest of the house but only of two storeys, and two large bow windows were inserted at ground level.

Rowe died in 1957, and the translation of part of the northern part of Langton House into the Memorial Hall can be found elsewhere.

Sources *where not referenced in end-notes*

Much use has been made of *The Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, various dates, and some of ancestry.co.uk on the internet. Others are

Members of Parliament (for Western, Sackville and Gott) at Members 1690-1715
[History of Parliament Online]

BDHS Collectanea: Education in Battle and district (for Elizabeth Langton).

BDHS Collectanea: Battle War Memorials and the making of the Memorial Hall

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¹ David and Barbara Martin, with Christopher Whittick: *Building Battle town* (2015)

² Lewis Pyke: *The Langton Connection*, in *Langton House, Battle* (BDHS, April 1960).

³ London Gazette, 31 December 1808.

⁴ <http://www.battlememorialhall.co.uk/page16.htm>

⁵ ESRO file ACC5218/2/32