

3 HISTORY

3.1 Origins: 11th-12th centuries

3.1.1 Place-name

While all supposed pre-Conquest references to Seaford have been dismissed as spurious,²¹ mostly quite rightly, the most recent and authoritative analysis of the contemporary account of the translation of the relics of St Leofwynn in 1058 supports the interpretation of *Sevordh* (literally *sea-ford*) therein as the estuarine harbour of the River Ouse with its long shingle bar (section 2.2.2).²²



Fig. 3. St Leonard's church – in existence by c.1100.

3.1.2 Norman origins

Recently it has been suggested that 12 unidentified messuages in Domesday Book belonging to the manor of Laughton represent the new town of Seaford under construction in 1086.²³ More convincingly, it has also been argued that the 39 inhabited and 20 uninhabited dwellings listed with the Lewes borough entry in Domesday Book, yet within Pevensey Rape, are not evidence for an early suburb at Cliffe, but relate to Seaford.²⁴ However, Seaford is not mentioned by name in Domesday Book. The absence is consistent with the fact that the only

reliable pre-Conquest reference to Seaford applies to a geographical area rather than a settlement (section 3.1.1). The earliest reference to the town is a charter of William de Warenne in which he granted to Lewes Priory the pre-emption (*primum mercatum*) for the purchase of meat, fish and other goods, after the purchases of his own household, at his markets at Lewes, Seaford, and elsewhere.²⁵ The apparent late 11th-century date of this charter has been used as evidence for the date by which Seaford had become an 'established market centre' in the most authoritative review of medieval Seaford.²⁶ However, after initially dating the charter to c.1089 Louis Salzman corrected what had been a considerable error: it was in fact a charter of no earlier than 1138.²⁷ While a much later foundation would help explain the absence of 12th-century documentary evidence for growth of the town (and, indeed, the lack of 12th-century archaeology), the architecture of the substantial church supports origins for the town before the late 11th century (section 4.1.1). Moreover, a grant of land in Seaford to Lewes priory c.1140 affirms the same gift made 'long before' by the grantor's father (i.e. between 1088 and 1138).²⁸ What is less clear, however, is the nature of the settlement served by the church before the mid-12th century.

The new port evidently replaced Lewes, 14km upstream, in a similar way to which New Shoreham replaced Steyning. However, the creation of a port on the Ouse was not driven by the rivalry seen on the Adur (between the lord of the Rape of Bramber and Fécamp Abbey), for Seaford was held partly by William de Warenne (lord of the Rape of Lewes and holder of Lewes itself), the Prior of Lewes, and the Count of Mortain (lord of the Rape of Pevensey).²⁹ This does not imply that Seaford was the planned result of lordly collaboration. As elsewhere, the involvement of the lords is likely to have been no more than an attempt to regularize the development of an impromptu settlement brought into being by its convenience as a location for trade.³⁰ The natural inadequacies of both Lewes and Pevensey as ports in a period of increasing coastal trade and the obvious value of the river-mouth location are likely to have stimulated the evident co-operation between the lords of the two rapes and the prior. The fact that emergent Seaford effectively controlled seaborne access to inland Lewes also meant that for the de Warennes a stake in the new town was essential notwithstanding its location in the neighbouring rape.

Whatever the uncertainties of its origins, it is clear that by 1204 Seaford was established as a

significant port, since a tax on merchants saw Seaford render nearly £13. This was slightly more than the payment from Rye (£11), considerably more than Pevensy's £1, but less than Winchelsea's £62, Chichester's £23, and Shoreham's £20.³¹

3.1.3 Early urban characteristics

Evidence for the early development of the town is limited. The hospital of St Leonard was founded for lepers in 1147, but was located outside the town.³² A grant of land to Lewes priory in 1150 refers to seven house-plots (*mansuras terre*) that lay in the direction of the portion (*versus partem*) of the monks (seemingly the part of the town held by the priory).³³ These may have been burgage tenements that initially paid 12d each. In 1180 the market was shifted inland away from its previous site by the shore.³⁴

3.1.4 The church

There is no early documentary record of the church, and it is only the architectural evidence that tells us of its probable late 11th-century date and its substantial enlargement in the early 12th century (section 4.1.1). The parish itself was known as Sutton *cum* Seaford as late as the 19th century, and it is likely that an estate called Sutton (within which the town developed) formed part of the Anglo-Saxon *parochia* of the minster church at Bishopstone.³⁵ The French dedication of St Leonard for the church in Seaford certainly suggests a post-Conquest foundation,³⁶ and, given the architectural evidence, a late 11th-century carving of the parish out of the earlier Bishopstone *parochia* is most probable.

3.2 The later medieval town

3.2.1 The port

Seaford's new-found significance is evident in the reign of King John. Gervase of Canterbury records that in coming to claim the crown in 1199, John landed at the port.³⁷ More significant, however, was the role played by Seaford during the invasion of England by Prince Louis of France in May 1216. This saw the desertion of King John by Gilbert of Laigle, an Anglo-Norman magnate who held lands in England and France that included Seaford. The port remained loyal, however, and in September 1216 was the recipient of a thankful letter from the king.³⁸

From the end of the 13th century Seaford was an important centre for the export of wool and corn.³⁹ Detailed study of the wool trade in the late 13th century has revealed that, in sharp

contrast to Winchelsea and Shoreham (and even more so to the Kentish ports), Seaford was not used by alien (i.e. continental) merchants or ships. Merchants exporting from Seaford were local, dominated by those based in the town and an almost equal number at Lewes. Thus, while the 1296 Subsidy Rolls show Seaford with the greatest number of resident wool merchants in Sussex, the exported volume in 1289-90 was a quarter of the c.400 sacks of wool leaving Shoreham. Nevertheless, Seaford's export of wool was similar to that of Chichester around this time, and more than twice that shipped from Winchelsea and Pevensy combined.⁴⁰

It remains unclear as to what degree Seaford functioned as the coastal out-port of wealthier Lewes, and what this meant in terms of mercantile practice. Evidently direct trade between Lewes and the continent simply made use of Seaford – such as when Lewes Priory imported a cargo of Caen stone through Seaford in 1225, and when John le Beure of Lewes hired a ship and crew of 13 from Seaford for the Gascon wine trade in 1258.⁴¹ The number of merchants residing within Seaford itself, and the interest of the Count of Mortain (lord of Pevensy Rape) and, subsequently, the Duchy of Lancaster suggest, however, that it was much more than a mere down-river harbour for Lewes.

The Cinque Port status of Seaford is a further indication of the significance of the port. Although lying west of the Cinque Ports (a confederation with privileges in exchange for ship-service to the king), Seaford became a member, or limb, of Hastings by 1229-30, and possibly had this status earlier.⁴² In 1302 Seaford was required to supply a ship for the war with Scotland. In 1336 Seaford's quota of ships for national service was increased from one to two.⁴³ The following year, however, Seaford was only able to provide one ship when Edward III summoned his fleet in response to Philip VI's invasion of English-held Aquitaine. This was a small part of the 169-strong fleet, of which a considerable 55 were from the Cinque Ports. Seaford's modest contribution put it in the same naval service league as Pevensy and Faversham, and, of the Cinque Ports in Sussex, below Rye (four ships), Hastings (10) and Winchelsea (25).⁴⁴ Only 10 years later, however, Seaford apparently provided five ships and 80 men, but, if so, this was exceptional.⁴⁵

3.2.2 The town

In parallel to the port on which it was so dependent, the town was successful during the 13th and early 14th centuries. Borough status is

recorded from 1235, but probably dates from c.1140.⁴⁶ The hospital of St James of Sutton by Seaford was founded before 1260.⁴⁷ In 1298 the town was called on to return to members to the parliament that met in York, and in 1301 an annual fair was granted (25th July, St James's day).⁴⁸ By the late 13th century most of the tenements comprised fractions or multiples of the original burgage holdings,⁴⁹ suggesting an active property market and typical shaping of the urban environment by burgeoning distributive trades. Seaford's watermill was located next to the marsh in the 13th century and, thus, may have been a tide mill.⁵⁰

Early in the 14th century fire and piracy were reported as causing poverty. A trebuchet is recorded in 1334, assumedly as a defence measure. The advent of the Hundred Years' War (1337) accelerated French raids on the unwallied town, and fields nearby were abandoned. The Black Death had a considerable effect in the late 1340s, with tenements lying unoccupied in 1355. French raids that had burnt much of the town, and pestilence were both blamed for the dire state of the town in 1356-7. Another attack and burning of the town occurred around 20 years later (probably in 1377).⁵¹ In the midst of this, inundation by the sea in 1368 had ruined the hospital of St Leonard, and there is no evidence that it ever recovered.⁵² Mark Lower (a 19th-century antiquarian) suggested, without sound documentary evidence, that Seaford was temporarily relocated to a new town ('Poyning's Town') south-east of modern Chyngton Farm in the mid-14th century (see also section 4.1.3).⁵³

The dramatic events seem to have accelerated an earlier economic decline seen in a fall in rentals in the second half of the 1280s.⁵⁴ Moreover, the 14th-century waning of Seaford was inevitable as the interests of the king and English merchants shifted westwards, away from the Cinque Ports. This was compounded by other economic factors, such as the decline of the Great Yarmouth herring fisheries (to which the Cinque Ports had such privileged access)⁵⁵ and, more locally, the misfortunes of Lewes (from 1361 no longer a key centre of seigneurial power).⁵⁶ Thus, a slight recovery in the 1390s still saw Seaford considerably impoverished compared with its state 100 years earlier.⁵⁷

More significant was the sustained economic growth from the mid-15th century to the early 16th century, as measured in steadily rising rents.⁵⁸ This may have been in part stimulated by the increased dependency of Lewes on Seaford as, possibly from c.1400, the River Ouse ceased to be navigable by sea-going vessels.⁵⁹ Simultaneously, however, the same natural

forces were at work at the port (and, indeed, most other Cinque Ports), and it is likely that its capacity to provide an adequate harbour for (the now larger) ships was less than it had been in the 13th century.

3.3 The town c.1500-1850

3.3.1 Economic history

Deterioration of the harbour was obvious to all by the early 16th century. The longshore drift that had created the shingle spit forcing the exit of the river eastwards towards the cliffs of Seaford Head was a continuing process that had been exacerbated by medieval reclamation of salt-marsh, and the consequent reduction in tidal scour and increase in silting. By 1500 it is likely that there was a shingle bar across the river mouth above low water level. Drainage of the valley had also deteriorated so that formerly valuable meadows were now mostly under water and devalued. A radical solution for both the navigability of the River Ouse and, especially, the drainage of the valley was sought by the Prior of Lewes and other Commissioners of the Sewers. The possibility of realigning the lower Ouse and creating a new haven was raised as early as 1528. This was finally undertaken in 1539 by cutting through the shingle spit approximately at the location of the current outfall of the river at Newhaven. At this date Seaford's harbour was described as a 'duckpool' not worthy of military defence.⁶⁰ By 1596 the only landing place at Seaford was the beach itself.⁶¹

For a town so heavily reliant on its function as a port, the loss of its harbour and its river connection to Lewes must have been considerable and immediate. That Seaford had an insufficiently diversified economy to survive this loss is indicated by a survey of tenements held by the Duchy of Lancaster in 1563. This shows a large and central part of the town characterized by spacious plots, with numerous gardens presumably occupying the site of abandoned tenements.⁶²

The granting of a charter of incorporation in 1544 seems ironic given the decline of the town, but was more a reflection of Henry VIII's need for ships and the inability of Hastings (a head Cinque Port of which Seaford was a limb) to provide sufficient at this date.⁶³ The following year saw an attack immediately west of Seaford led by Claude d'Annabant, high admiral of France, which was quickly repelled by Sir Nicholas Pelham and a local force. Despite such action within living memory and its incorporated

status, Seaford only offered one *fawcon* and two *fawconettes* in the pre-Armada survey of the Sussex coast in 1587.⁶⁴

The coastal location meant more modest marine activity after the loss of Seaford's harbour. Seven fishermen were recorded in 1565, but the largest boat was only two tons.⁶⁵ Beach landings of small trading vessels were also possible, and later the occasional collier is recorded doing just that (in 1793 and 1848).⁶⁶

Use of Seaford for bathing from the 1750s echoed much more dramatic development at Brighton and, to a lesser degree, at Hastings. By 1813 there were only three bathing machines and baths, and the town had failed to establish itself as a significant resort.⁶⁷

The immediate effects on population of the replacement of the port by Newhaven are difficult to gauge as the Cinque Ports were largely exempt in the 1524 subsidy: only aliens were assessed and Seaford had none.⁶⁸ The total population of around 170 recorded in 1565, however, is likely to have been considerably smaller than 40 years earlier. Population remained at c.170 in 1577, but had risen to c.180-225 in 1620, c.270 in 1676, and c.315 in 1724.⁶⁹ In 1801 the population was 847, hardly rising to 997 in 1851.

3.3.2 Church and religion

This period began with the drama of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries. Although the hospital of St Leonard is not recorded after the 14th century, the hospital of St James was still in the patronage of Robertsbridge Abbey in 1534, and it presumably ceased when the abbey was dissolved soon after.⁷⁰ The parish church was institutionally more robust, and the post-medieval decline in fortune of the town had a greater impact.

Bishop Bower's survey of 1724 identified no Roman Catholics (no recusants having being recorded in 1676 either⁷¹), but Protestant nonconformity was represented by three families.⁷² A Congregationalist chapel was established in East Street in 1823.⁷³

3.3.3 Urban institutions

Although post-medieval Seaford had many of the features of other decayed towns, such as its returning of two members of Parliament until identified as one of 56 rotten boroughs and disenfranchised under the first electoral Reform Act (1832),⁷⁴ the evidence of population shows that its decline was not as dramatic as, say, that of its fellow Cinque Port of Winchelsea. During

the steady population growth of the 17th century the settlement still merited description as a town, retaining its market (recorded as late as 1712)⁷⁵ and borough institutions that included the town hall. The latter also seems to have functioned as court house, and provision for punishment and correction apparently extended to stocks, pillory, and gaol.⁷⁶

Seaford had its own workhouse in the 18th century, but this closed as a result of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, with Seaford falling under the new Eastbourne Union (1835), served by the workhouse established in the former cavalry barracks at Eastbourne.⁷⁷

3.3.4 Defence

The vulnerability of Seaford Bay to attack meant that defences were required even after loss of the harbour and river outfall. In the pre-Armada survey of 1587, trenches and flankers for 'small shotte' were proposed in front of the town, while two demi-culverins were required for the cliff (i.e. Seaford Head).⁷⁸ Seven new brick batteries were proposed in Sussex in 1759, in response to the Seven Years' War (1756-63),⁷⁹ including one at Blatchington and one at Seaford. The battery at Seaford Beach had five 12-pounders, a powder magazine, gunners' barracks and a well.⁸⁰



Fig. 4. The Martello Tower, looking towards Seaford Head.

The advent of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) saw the creation of a chain of Martello towers along the south and east coasts of England – a decision apparently made following robust defence of a stone tower at Mortella Point, Corsica, against a Royal Navy attack in 1793-4.⁸¹ That at Seaford (No. 74) was finished in 1810, the last to be built and the westernmost of the Sussex and Kent line that

stretched from Folkestone.⁸² Originally it was armed with one 24-pounder.⁸³ At the end of the war the Martello tower system ceased to be maintained. Ironically the only action seen at Seaford during the war was mutinous. In April 1795 the Royal Oxfordshire Militia at Blatchington barracks, having endured the harsh winter of 1794-5 and suffering from poor food supplies, rioted and looted foodstuffs in Seaford and at Bishopstone Tide Mills.⁸⁴

3.4 Expansion: c.1850-2004

3.4.1 Economic history

The development of other resorts along the south coast gave some urgency to Seaford's wish to be connected by railway, and to catch up on its earlier failure to join the likes of Brighton and Eastbourne. Eventually, in 1864 the line from Lewes to Newhaven (of 1847) was extended, as a single line, to a terminus in the town. Work on a sea wall began the following year, though this was destroyed in storms in 1875. Early speculative development of large terrace housing occurred at Pelham Road (by 1873). Seafront development by this time was limited to the Assembly Rooms (1770) and baths (in isolation at the end of The Causeway), but subsequent replacement of the sea wall encouraged development of an esplanade and more roads across the marshy common and former harbour between Steyne Road and the seafront (St John's Road and West View). The most impressive feature of the nascent resort was the Esplanade Hotel (1891). In the early 1890s the Seaford Bay Estate Co. proposed a pier opposite their hotel, and eight parallel roads of terraced housing to the south-east of The Causeway, extending as far as the cliffs. By the outbreak of the First World War, however, almost no part of the scheme had been executed, and the failure of Seaford to develop as a resort was all too evident. The schemes failed since they were undercapitalized and lacked the social cache of a major patron that marked the contrasting successful development of Bexhill between 1870 and 1910.⁸⁵

Seaford did see some growth in the aftermath of the railway, however, as the population rose from 1,150 in 1861, to 2,651 in 1901. The development of convalescent homes and residential schools were a particular feature of the subdued coastal town, and this continued to be so during the first half of the 20th century. During the inter-war period, schools were concentrated to the east of the town and to the north (around the former village of East

Blatchington), with grounds equal to the whole of the town's built-up area.⁸⁶

The distinguishing feature of the 20th century, however, was the growth of the residential area and population, both between the wars and, especially, since 1945: the population more than doubled in the second half of the 20th century,⁸⁷ and in 2001 stood at 22,826.⁸⁸ The context of Seaford's 20th-century growth, however, is more remarkable than the event in isolation: the town became the eastern limit of a linear suburban development stretching almost unbroken along the coast from Pagham to Seaford.⁸⁹

3.4.2 Church and religion

The increasing population required additional provision of Anglican churches. St John the Evangelist, Wilmington Road, was a church hall used for services from c.1914, built as the first part of an unrealized scheme to build a new church and rectory,⁹⁰ and absorption of East Blatchington brought with it the pre-existing medieval parish church of St Peter. Provision for Protestant nonconformism and Roman Catholicism also developed in the later 19th century and early 20th century. The Congregational chapel in East Street was replaced by the church (now styled United Reform) in Clinton Place (1877); a Roman Catholic chapel was built in 1900 in Southdown Road (Anney Convent) and the Roman Catholic church of St Thomas More, Sutton Road, in 1935; a Methodist chapel was built in Steyne Road in 1894; and a Baptist church was built in Broad Street in 1901 (now replaced by the 1970s church in Belgrave Road).⁹¹

3.4.3 Urban institutions

After over three centuries of questionable urban status, it was in a period of growth that saw the demise of the town's corporation (1886).⁹²

4 ARCHAEOLOGY

4.1 The medieval town

4.1.1 Buildings



Fig. 5. St Leonard's church: west end of south wall. This shows the Romanesque clerestory window and nave arcade.

The parish **church of St Leonard** provides the earliest clear evidence for the foundation of Seaford. Taylor examined the building in considerable detail in the 1930s, identifying two distinct Romanesque phases: initial construction of the church with a cruciform and aisleless plan c.1090; followed c.1120 by the addition of aisles to the nave, which involved cutting through the side walls to make arcades opening into aisles and leaving lengths of the earlier nave wall c.2.75m long between the arches of the arcades in preference to piers. Rebuilding c.1200 included replacement of the nave arcades (with cylindrical piers and stiff-leaf capitals) and addition of a new clerestory (with window shafts on the exterior), so that the main structural evidence for the early development of the church is now confined to the western bay of the nave, since c.1485 occupied by a west tower.⁹³

Taylor's reconstruction of the church from the early 12th century onwards appears correct, but his evidence for a c.1090 church is perhaps not

as conclusive as he argues. Of particular concern is the fact that the fabric of the Romanesque clerestory and that around the earliest arcade is significantly different (e.g. there are considerable inclusions of ashlar at the upper level), which undermines the argument that this is a wall of one build and through which arches were cut c.1120. Also suspect is his argument that the lack of the alignment between the surviving western arches of the north and south nave walls and the small clerestory windows above them is indicative of different periods, for a similar lack of alignment is evident between the windows of the 12th-century aisles and the arcades (coeval in Taylor's analysis).

These anomalies suggest a more complex series of phases, perhaps including modification to the design during protracted construction. Without more detailed analysis, the earliest reliably datable evidence for Seaford church is the sculptural detail for the earliest arcade (which includes scalloped capitals) and *ex situ* fragments of the Romanesque west doorway: these suggest a date of c.1100-20. Any previous phase is dependent of the dating of the earliest clerestory windows, for which a date range from the late 11th century to early 12th century is likely.

The decline of Seaford in the 14th century is evident in the structural history of the church. At some point before c.1450, much of St Leonard's church had fallen into ruination. Modest repairs saw the rebuilding of the south aisle of the nave and the insertion of the present tower within the arcade of the west end of the nave, but the eastern arm, including the likely transept and crossing tower, was not rebuilt.



Fig. 6. St Leonard's church: early 12th-century capitals of the former nave north arcade (now in the vestry).



Fig. 7. St Peter's church, East Blatchington: view from SW.

The **church of St Peter at East Blatchington** was, along with the rest of the small village, wholly detached from Seaford until the town reached it by the 20th century, and especially the post-1945, suburban expansion of the town. The earliest datable feature is of c.1200, but the north and south walls of the nave appear to be earlier (i.e. 12th century). The walls have internal offsets towards the east end of the nave, and this greater thickness suggests that there was an eastern tower as at Newhaven.⁹⁴ The surviving west tower is 13th century, as is the chancel and the former south aisle. The latter is represented by the blocked arches of the arcade.

The vaulted undercroft known as **The Crypt** in Church Street is a rare survival of secular medieval architecture in the town, and one of the few pre-1350 townhouses in Sussex outside the unusually well-preserved group at Winchelsea. The combination of details (the shouldered windows, the stop-chamfers of the doors, the wide vault ribs without corbels, and most especially the vault bosses with their naturalistic vegetation) dates it to c.1290-1300.⁹⁵ It has features found in many undercrofts in English townhouses of this period: it is oriented at right-angles to the street, is semi-subterranean, has a principal doorway to the outside, has a narrow intra-mural stair, is well lit, and has some architectural pretension (especially the quadripartite rib-vault with bosses). Unusually, however, it was not set on the contemporary street, but over 13m back, to the rear of a street-front building. In this it appears to echo the location of stone-built chamber blocks found on narrow tenements in the 12th century (surviving

examples include The Norman House, 48-50 Stonegate, York; and the former Guildhall, Canterbury).⁹⁶ However, it has been suggested that the undercroft may have been more easily accessed from the rear, perhaps from a yard.⁹⁷ Even if this were not the case, the location of the Seaford undercroft near the quay and its otherwise conventional late 13th-century form suggest that it owes more to the commercial split-level townhouses (of which 58 French Street, Southampton is a restored archetype) of the larger towns of this period than earlier residential chamber blocks. As such, the undercroft would have had a commercial function, either for bulky and expensive goods such as wine, or as a tavern, or, indeed, multiple or changeable use.⁹⁸ The decoration of one of the vault bosses with grapes and vine leaves has been connected with the wine trade,⁹⁹ but, while possible, it is well to remember that this sculptural motif is one of the most common at this period in any context.



Fig. 8. The Crypt, Church Street: view from rear of undercroft towards the street.

Chyngton House, Chyngton Lane, is a former farmhouse engulfed by 20th-century expansion of Seaford. Although it appears to date from the 18th century, 13th-century architectural features are reputed to have been discovered during works.¹⁰⁰ If so, it could represent survival of the manor house of the deserted medieval village of Chinting.

4.1.2 Excavations (Map 5)

Excavations of a small (7m x 7m) trench prior to demolition and redevelopment of **1-3 High Street** in 2001 produced some evidence of early to mid 12th-century activity, although most of the features were datable to the period 1200-1350. The 14th century saw the construction of one, probably two, buildings oriented at right-angles to the street. This period was accompanied by an absence of rubbish-pits, indicating that the area of the site fell inside wholly or partly stone-built houses on what had become a built-up street front. The site appears to have become open again by 1400, remaining so until the early 20th century. Pottery mainly dated from the 13th and early 14th centuries, and was dominated by locally made undecorated cooking pots. Sherds representing at least two 13th-century Rouen jugs and Scarborough ware indicate limited seaborne trade, as does the presence of West Country roofing slates.¹⁰¹

The construction of the new **Post Office, Church Street**, was preceded by archaeological excavation (1976). The site produced evidence of intensive activity in the form of 32 pits, a well, and the corner of a timber-framed building. Features and finds dated from the 13th and 14th centuries, but, despite proximity to the Romanesque church, there was no evidence of 12th-century activity. Only the south-western corner of the building was excavated, but this appeared to be oriented at right-angles or parallel to the street: it was demolished after 1400. Pottery was mainly local with only limited imports. Coastal trade is indicated by the presence of Rye wares, and West Country roofing slates.¹⁰²

Excavations at **The Crypt, Church Street**, took place in 1993, prior to restoration of the medieval undercroft and enclosing it in a protective building. The area excavated lay outside the undercroft, abutting its north and east faces, and extending as far as the street frontage (since 1947 set back c.3m from the previous and, possibly, medieval frontage). Four narrow tenements were identified, oriented at right-angles to the street. Hearths and an oven in the three northern tenements, and remains of a stone wall in the southern tenement (that with the undercroft at the rear) confirm that the street front was continuously built up by the second half of the 13th century. Rubbish-pits marked open areas behind the buildings. Pottery ranged from the 12th to 16th centuries, with the bulk from the 13th and 14th centuries. Surprisingly little was non-local, but coastal trade is indicated by sherds of Rye and Scarborough ware. The few

finds of imported pottery, and the presence of Flemish brick, provide evidence of limited trade with France, the Low Countries and the Rhineland. This is consistent with the evidence for surprisingly little seaborne trade at the other Seaford excavations, and is in sharp contrast to the large proportion of imports at the Sussex port of Winchelsea.¹⁰³

Small-scale archaeological evaluations on **Steyne Road** have attempted to locate the medieval quay. The 1977 excavation was located immediately west of 19 Steyne Road, on the north side of the street. A well, beam slot, pits, and a possible yard surface were located. Pottery was mostly 14th and 15th century, with some possibly of the 12th century. No evidence for the quay was discovered.¹⁰⁴ In 1979, two trenches were cut by machine on the south side of the street, some 250 east of the earlier excavation, on the site of 2-3 Court Leet and 1 Sea Cottages. The former was longer and the revealed slope suggested that it was located near the river bank, though evidence of a quay itself was lacking. Pottery was recovered dating from the 13th and 14th centuries.¹⁰⁵

Another trench was cut by machine in 1980 at the rear of **33 Broad Street**, near and parallel to the eastern boundary of the churchyard. Discoveries were minimal: two post holes, and two sherds of medieval pottery, one of which was 13th century.¹⁰⁶

Outside Seaford, recent excavations at **Bishopstone** have produced imported pottery and coins of 11th-century date, which suggest a port at the mouth of the Ouse at this time.¹⁰⁷

4.1.3 Topographic analysis (Maps 6-8)

The absence of substantial archaeological evidence has resulted in considerable ambiguity as to the chronology and topographical development of the town, especially during the late 11th and 12th centuries. Moreover, although the 13th and 14th centuries are better represented in the archaeological excavations these cover only a small area of the town and are not supported by any significant survival of medieval buildings.

The location of the river and harbour south of Steyne Road and west of College Road is suggested by evidence of early maps. Budgen's 1724 map of Sussex shows no evidence of the former outfall of the River Ouse, but Yeakell and Gardner's larger scale (i.e. 2-inch) 1778 map shows areas of standing water to the rear of the shingle. These are depicted as more fragmentary on the Ordnance Survey surveyors'

drafts of c.1805, and equate with the marshy 'Beame Lands' that separate the town and the seafront on the Ordnance Survey 1873 25" map. Given the corroborative evidence for the proximity of the river bank to the 1979 trenches at Steyne Road (section 4.1.2), it is almost certain that the mapped lagoons represent the outfall of the River Ouse, prior to the new cut at Newhaven c.1539 that effectively reinstated the outfall of the Roman period.

What remains unclear, however, is how far east the river outfall had been deflected by the developing shingle spit by the time Seaford was founded. It would seem unlikely that the Ouse was already in its early 16th-century position by the 11th century, since this requires that the river mouth stayed static and unchoked for nearly 500 years, despite long-shore drift and the reclamation of salt-marsh in the Ouse valley. What appear to be two residual outfalls on the Yeakell and Gardner, and the Ordnance Survey surveyors' draft maps (one west and one east of the Martello tower) appear to show this eastwards progression, but the dating of this to the medieval period is not certain.



Fig. 9. Yeakell and Gardner 1778 map (detail).



Fig. 10. Ordnance Survey surveyors' draft, c.1805 (detail).

Even if an eastward shift of the outfall during the medieval period is probable, it is unclear what impact this would have had on the location of the quay, or quays. David Freke has suggested that the town shifted or expanded, albeit improbably, from the south and east:¹⁰⁸ this has since been discounted.¹⁰⁹ There is significant evidence, however, that by the 18th century the town had shifted eastwards, or had contracted, by abandoning its western parts. A survey of the part of the town belonging to the Duchy of Lancaster (i.e. formerly of the Count of Mortain, lord of Revensey Rape) in 1563 largely corresponds to the extent of the town by the late 18th century. However, in 1563 the duchy holdings were abutted on their west by those of John Caryll, and these appear to represent the former holdings of Lewes Priory. Mark Gardiner has suggested that the fields shown as surrounded by roads in this area on the 1839 tithe map represent medieval built-up areas, extending as far as the modern junction of Dane Road and Marine Parade.¹¹⁰ The properties towards the west side of the 1563 part-town survey lie on Church Street and are more concentrated than those to the east, suggesting that they occupied the town centre at that date. Significantly, the architectural and archaeological evidence is concentrated on Church Street, although this in part reflects the choice of archaeological sites.

The tithe map shows other parts of the town within what appears to be the earlier, and presumably medieval, street plan that are likely to have been built up. These comprise the area north of the church, between Church Street and Broad Street; and the areas on the east side of Broad Street north of Croft Lane and Sutton Road.

A north-western limit to the town is provided by the ancient boundary of the Liberty of Seaford, here coincident with a former tributary of the River Ouse. Although built over today, this is evident from the drift geology (Map 2) and is still marked by East Blatchington Pond. To the south-west of this the line of the former stream runs immediately alongside Blatchington Road to the recreation ground next to the station.

There are no upstanding remains of Seaford's two medieval hospitals. The location of St Leonard's leper hospital remains uncertain, although its ruination by the sea in the 14th century suggests the coastal, or estuarine, area west of the town. By contrast the location of the hospital of St James of Sutton by Seaford may have been close to the town on the site later occupied by the workhouse (now Twyn House and Twyn Cottage, 3-5 Blatchington Road): this

has been argued on the basis of the workhouse occupying part of an enclosure named Spital Field, and lying adjacent to Chapel Field.¹¹¹



Fig. 11. 44-50 High Street. Behind the early 19th-century No. 50 (foreground) is the gable of a timber-framed 17th-century house, re-fronted with cobbles c.1800.

We have seen that Lower's suggestion for the temporary relocation of the town in the mid-14th century lacks sound documentary evidence (section 3.2.2). His theory partly drew on archaeological and topographic evidence too in that he observed earthworks and masonry relating to former buildings in fields known as Poyning's Town and Walls Brow, immediately south-east of Chyngton Farm, on the western slope of the Cuckmere valley.¹¹² It is far more likely, however, that such evidence – if indeed it represents medieval occupation at all – derives from the well-recorded settlement of Chinting (with a population of c.100 in 1327¹¹³), reduced to surviving Chyngton Farm by the late 16th century.¹¹⁴

4.2 The town c.1500-1850

4.2.1 Buildings

Seaford has 42 surviving buildings that date from between 1500 and 1850: four from the 17th century, 17 from the 18th century, and 21 from the first half of the 19th century

Only one of the 17th-century buildings is timber framed and this (44-8 High Street) is hidden by a later flint-cobble façade typical of the pre-railway building in the town. One of the 17th-century and four of the 18th-century buildings form part of what was a substantial farmstead at Chyngton House (the earliest of these being the dovecote) and two of the 18th-century houses are at East Blatchington (the extensive former Star Inn, and 26-8 Blatchington Hill). Within the historic town, the surviving 18th-century houses are predominantly modest in scale and architectural detail, and form a small cluster south-east of the church, with the exception of the former parish workhouse at 3 (Twyn Cottage) and 5 (Twyn House) Blatchington Road. Flint, or cobble, dominates the building materials. Stone House, Crouch Lane, (named after its mid-18th-century residents¹¹⁵) is in fact of brick and the most substantial surviving townhouse of the period.

Of the 21 buildings from 1800-40, three are within what was still the distinct village of East Blatchington, two are at Chington (cottages and a barn), and one at Sutton (Sutton Place itself, now confusingly styled 'Newlands Manor'). Within the historic core of the town, 1-4 Marine Terrace, Steyne Road, faces the sea at what was the southern edge of the town and, with its cast-iron verandas and rusticated ground floor, represents an early example of more ambitious resort architecture in the town (see cover). By way of contrast, nearby cottages at 5-9 Steyne Road are in modest vernacular style with tile-hung upper floors. Minor commercial buildings of flint and brick are also represented from this period in the form of the unlisted forge in Crouch Lane and the outbuilding in Pelham Yard, at the rear of 18 High Street.



Fig. 12. Early 19th-century outbuilding, or former workshop, Pelham Yard.

Corsica Hall represents the most substantial new residence of the 18th and 19th centuries, again sited to overlook the sea, slightly detached from the contemporary towns in its spacious holding (partly surviving as school grounds). Recently, and following a long tradition on similar lines,¹¹⁶ it has been suggested that the building was moved to Seaford 'en bloc' in 1783 from Wellingham, Ringmer, by Thomas Harben, and then rebuilt in 1823 on the hillock site of an old mill, and renamed Millburgh.¹¹⁷ Certainly Wellingham House was called Corsica Hall in the 1771 land-tax assessment.¹¹⁸ The Ordnance Survey surveyors' drafts (c.1805) are the first to show Corsica Hall at Seaford, at which point it is on its present site and with the 'L' shaped plan that it had later in the 19th century and which is still discernible today.¹¹⁹ The building has been modified and extended since, but the architectural details (including the austere Doric porticos) suggest a date of c.1800, consistent with its absence from Gardner and Gream's map of 1795 and the date of the present Wellingham House. Materials may have been bought from old Wellingham House, but the supposed construction date of 1783, a rebuild of 1823, and the role of Harben (a Lewes banker who died in 1803, but bankrupted in 1793¹²⁰) are implausible.



Fig. 13. Corsica Hall, south-west front.

The Martello Tower (No. 74) at Seaford has been restored (including the removal of a 1930s residential top storey) to its external form when completed by 1810, although its dry moat remains infilled.

Surviving secular institutional buildings from the period are represented by the town hall (rebuilt

in the 18th century) and the former workhouse (again 18th century).

There were few modifications to the churches in Seaford or East Blatchington during this period. Perhaps the most substantial was the addition of a chancel to St Leonards, by 1812, but this was not a lasting change for it was replaced 50 years later (see below).¹²¹

No other church and nonconformist buildings survive from this period: although the Congregational chapel in East Street survived its replacement in 1877 by that in Clinton Place, it was re-used as the Albert Hall,¹²² only for this to be replaced by modern flats.

4.2.2 Excavations (Map 5)

The excavations in Seaford have less value for this period largely due to truncation of the shallow stratigraphy and, ultimately, the selection of the sites.

Excavations at **The Crypt, Church Street**, revealed little post-medieval archaeology, partly due to machine removal of uppermost deposits, but also the lack of cut features from this period, reflecting little activity. While the undercroft entrance remained in use in the 16th century, contemporary digging of rubbish pits within the former built-up area of the tenement immediately to the north suggest that at least part of the street frontage had become open.¹²³

4.2.3 Topography (Maps 9-11)

The loss of the harbour in the early 16th century and subsequent depopulation or stagnation appears to have resulted in the abandonment of the western and, to a lesser extent, northern parts of the town argued above. That said, the survival of the medieval road layout in the west part of the town at the time of the Tithe map (1839) suggests that abandonment was perhaps neither immediate nor, initially, complete. The contraction and any shift in the focus of the settlement appear to have occurred within the medieval street pattern (section 4.1.3). The growth of the town in the 18th century saw minor new developments, including the construction of Seaford Battery (1759) on the beach accessed via The Causeway across the lagoons of the former river channel. The battery later suffered from erosion and was eventually washed away in 1860.¹²⁴ The military use of the seafront was bolstered by the construction of the Martello Tower at the beginning of the 19th century. Another road was added across the lagoons and marshland to the higher ground of the new Corsica Hall, c.1800, and substantial grounds

were laid out. Any use of the seafront for bathing seems to have attracted little development, although some semi-public function is likely for the building which by 1839 occupied the site that was later (i.e. in the late 19th century) the baths and which was immediately west of the fort (still surviving in 1839).

4.3 Expansion: c.1850-2004 (Maps 3, 12 and 13)

4.3.1 Buildings and topography

The majority of the buildings in Seaford date from this period, partly as a result of loss of earlier buildings, but mainly through expansion of the town. This growth was slow to accelerate after the railway arrived (1864), but from the First World War and, especially, since 1945 has been rapid. By 2005 the historic town was entirely encircled by suburban development.

Pre-1922 expansion continued the late 19th-century building near the station, along Claremont Road and to the north (e.g. Chichester Road, Brooklyn Road, Grosvenor Road, Kedale Road and Salisbury Road), linking the previously distinct village of East Blatchington to Seaford by patchy residential development. Slow speculative development continued at the roads set out north-east of the town (principally Sutton Park Road, Grove Road and Stafford Road).

Inter-war and post-1945 development has consolidated these areas and greatly extended the town, so that today it is larger than Lewes. The expansion of Seaford's suburbs has engulfed and substantially changed three adjacent settlements with medieval origins – Blatchington, Sutton and Chinting. East Blatchington (as it is now known to differentiate it from West Blatchington, north of Hove) was still a small Downland village c.800m north of Seaford, with a cluster of post-medieval houses and a farm around the crossroads and the medieval church of St Peter. Although a probable Anglo-Saxon estate (see section 3.1.4) Sutton parish had no recorded residents in 1428 and was absorbed by Seaford parish in 1509.¹²⁵ In the mid 19th century the location of the earlier settlement, and church, was marked by Sutton Place 1.2km east-north-east of Seaford (since 1905 re-styled as Newlands Manor – one of many private schools established during this period, mostly outside the EUS study area). Excavations by Curwen in 1944 located burials (one associated with 12th-century pottery) and medieval rubbish-pits.¹²⁶ The site has been largely destroyed by the suburban residential

development. Chinting was similar to Sutton in that it had been no more than a substantial farmstead (Chington, or now Chyngton, Farm) since the late 16th century.¹²⁷ Being 1.8km east of the historic core of Seaford and on the edge of the modern suburbs, it has been able to maintain its agricultural function, albeit slightly relocated to the east as the older farm buildings have been converted to residential use.



Fig. 14. Post-railway terrace housing in Pelham Road.

The arrival of the railway heralded new architectural forms and materials. The brick-built and stuccoed bay-windowed terraces of Pelham Road and Clinton Terrace followed closely on from the nearby station building of 1864. With up to five storeys, these are substantial houses that, together with the commercial buildings at the east end of Dane Road and the 1890s Bay Hotel further south on Pelham Road (now part public house and part residential), were conscious attempts to develop Seaford as a resort. The hitherto largely undeveloped seafront itself became a focus too from c.1890. Although the Esplanade Hotel (1891: itself ultimately succeeding the 18th-century Assembly Rooms) has gone amidst widespread late 20th-century residential infill and redevelopment, some late Victorian and Edwardian terraces survive on the Esplanade between St John's Road and The

Causeway and east of Ringmer Road. For long the only development between the Esplanade and Steyne Road, the 1890s terrace of 1-6 West View has also survived. This open area south of the historic town was only otherwise developed post-1945, with the recent terrace housing and blocks of flats a modest and belated realization of over-ambitious 19th-century plans (section 3.4.1). As with the Esplanade these streets have not gained a commercial character.

Within the historic town, this period has seen continuous piecemeal development and redevelopment, and consequent loss of historic buildings. The main shopping street, Broad Street, is now a mixture of 19th and, especially, 20th-century buildings. There has been no substantial planned retail redevelopment of the town centre, however, with the largest commercial venture being a single late 20th-

century supermarket on Dane Road. Small-scale residential infill has occurred, such as west of Crouch Lane and south of Crooked Lane.

Of the new churches and chapels built to serve the expanding population in this period several survive. Within the EUS study area there are the Congregational (now styled United Reform) church in Clinton Place (1877) and the Methodist church, Steyne Road (1894). Outside the EUS study area there are the Oratory of St Francis of Sales chapel (Anney Convent), Southdown Road (Roman Catholic: 1900), St John's church hall, Wilmington Road (Anglican church hall, but used for services until converted to a nursery: c.1914), and St Thomas More, Sutton Road (Roman Catholic: 1935).¹²⁸



Fig. 15. Seaford tithe map, 1839 (copy in East Sussex Record Office).