

### 3 HISTORY

#### 3.1 Origins: 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries

##### 3.1.1 Place-name

The name *Lewes* has become one of the most debated Sussex place-names, and its derivation remains unresolved. Forsberg suggests a source in Old English *læw* ('gash, wound'), here describing the Ouse gap in the Downs, but unique in such a usage.<sup>66</sup> Coates proposes derivation from Brittonic Celtic *Lexowiās* ('hillsides, slopes'), though this requires special pleading as a near unique survival of a Celtic place-name in Sussex.<sup>67</sup> What is agreed by Forsberg and Coates (and, in the course of her broader analysis of the landscape of place-names, by Gelling<sup>68</sup>) is that the traditional derivation of Lewes from Old English *hlæw* or *hlāw* (meaning 'tumulus, hill', primarily used for artificial mounds<sup>69</sup> and typically rendered today as 'low') is no longer tenable, not least since the initial *h* is absent from pre-Conquest spellings.<sup>70</sup>

Recently there has been some consideration of the possibility of a late medieval and later monosyllabic pronunciation of the place-name (as in *truce* or *news*). There is limited evidence for such a pronunciation and at most it would have represented an alternative to the more firmly recorded disyllabic form in use today.<sup>71</sup>

##### 3.1.2 Anglo-Saxon burh

Lewes is an Anglo-Saxon *burh* founded as part of the system of 31 fortresses built by King Alfred (871-99). The most recent and convincing analysis suggests that construction of the entire system was undertaken between May 878 and August 879 as a crucial part of Alfred's successful military strategy to drive the Vikings from Mercia and London, and, especially relevant to the location of Lewes, to protect against further Viking incursion.<sup>72</sup> Lewes was one of five burhs recorded in Sussex in the broadly contemporary Burghal Hidage, the others being Hastings, Burpham, Chichester and *Eorpeburnham* (possibly Castle Toll on the Kent border at Newenden, or Rye).<sup>73</sup>

It has been suggested that Lewes replaced Ditchling as an Anglo-Saxon regional centre, with the relocation required for both defensive reasons and as a result of the increasing need for a port.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, the burh of Lewes was, or shortly became, more than a fortress, since it developed rapidly as a centre of trade. The establishment of mints in Sussex in the early 10<sup>th</sup>

century was a direct response to burgeoning commerce,<sup>75</sup> and, with two moneys in the burh c.930 during the reign of Æthelstan (924-39<sup>76</sup>), Lewes was at the forefront of such activity.<sup>77</sup> Coins of this period give Lewes the rare accolade of *urb*, a reflection of urban status found at only four other mint-towns.<sup>78</sup>



Fig. 3. St John-sub-Castro: 11<sup>th</sup>-century former south doorway, re-sited in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century church.

##### 3.1.3 Anglo-Saxon minster

The church of St John-sub-Castro has been identified as an Anglo-Saxon minster (a mother church serving several later parishes).<sup>79</sup> Although there has been no published analysis of the evidence for the minster, it is certainly consistent with the existence of the church by the mid to late 11<sup>th</sup> century and the large extent of the parish of St John-sub-Castro that (until 1894) lay outside the borough and included a large detached portion at Allington (the dependent chapel there recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century) stretching northwards almost to South Chailey (i.e. 6.1km north-north-west of the church of St John-sub-Castro). Hamsey separated the two parts of the parish and, therefore, is likely to have formed part of the extensive *parochia* (the link perhaps reflected in the fact that the two parishes together formed Southborough, one of the three divisions of the hundred of Barcombe).<sup>80</sup> It has been suggested that the *parochia* of St John's also extended westwards to Houndean and Ashcombe.<sup>81</sup>

More relevant to the origins of Lewes is the fact that several urban parishes were evidently subordinate to that of St-John-sub-Castro in that they buried their dead there: in 1337 St John's was the normal place of burial for those living in the parishes of St Mary-in-Foro and St Peter the Less, and those parts of the parishes of Holy Trinity, St Sepulchre, and St Nicholas lying north of the High Street/School Hill.<sup>82</sup> This 14<sup>th</sup>-century evidence of dependency suggests that the burh was created within the area of the minster *parochia*. Together with the likelihood that the church lay outside the Anglo-Saxon defences (section 4.1), this indicates that St John's pre-dates the burh and, thus, is likely to have attracted settlement to the area before the late 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Implausibly, there has been a recent suggestion that there was a second minster (even dating back to the time of St Wilfrid) on the site later occupied by Lewes priory.<sup>83</sup> This relies on late medieval forged documents in the Lewes chartulary to interpret an excavated free-standing chapel for which there is no secure archaeological dating.<sup>84</sup> By contrast, the only reliable foundation document is the copy of the original foundation charter (1078-81) for Lewes priory that was kept at Cluny and this simply records the gift of the church of St Pancras.<sup>85</sup> The Anglo-Saxon origins of the chapel are not proven, and there is absolutely no basis (even from the fabricated documents) to suppose that this was ever a minster here.

## 3.2 The late Anglo-Saxon and Norman town

### 3.2.1 Economic history

The history of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-century Lewes is that of a prospering town, dominating a wide area and, effectively, the capital of east Sussex. One indication of economic importance is that its mint continued after the Conquest until c.1170.<sup>86</sup>

Domesday Book (1086) provides a more detailed picture, as it describes Lewes as a borough and records that it had 127 demesne burgage tenements in 1066. The number is not given for 1086, but the total value had risen from £24 to £36, and at this date there were also 258 burgesses, dwellings (*mansuræ*) or sites (*hagæ*) in Lewes attached to manors in Lewes Rape. An additional 39 inhabited and 20 uninhabited dwellings are listed with Lewes borough, but evidently formed part of Pevensey Rape in 1086: while these have been conjectured as evidence for an early suburb at Cliffe, they are more likely to relate to Seaford.<sup>87</sup> Whatever the ambiguities

as to the population that can be derived from these statistics (and c.900 would seem an absolute minimum, with the figure likely to be considerably higher<sup>88</sup>), it is clear that Lewes was a significant town both on the eve of the Battle of Hastings and in 1086. The importance of Lewes as a port and market is also underlined by Domesday Book's record of ship-service to the king, and customary payments to the reeve on the sale of horse, ox or man.<sup>89</sup>

The Norman market is referred to more explicitly in a charter dating to the period after 1138, in which Lewes priory is granted the pre-emption (*primum mercatum*) for the purchase of meat, fish and other goods, after the purchases of the seigneurial household, at markets at Lewes, Seaford, and elsewhere in the north-south strip of Sussex called the Rape of Lewes.<sup>90</sup> The market appears to have been daily.<sup>91</sup>

The existing borough was utilized shortly after the Conquest for the building of a Norman castle. The castle defended the Ouse estuary and formed the principal fortification and administrative centre of the Rape of Lewes. Early Norman castles at Hastings, Pevensey and Arundel had the same function in relation to their eponymous rapes. Bramber Rape, and castle, were added in a pre-Domesday modification of the initial arrangement. There has been much debate as to the origins of the Sussex rapes, and their relationship to Anglo-Saxon territorial divisions. It is clear, however, that the rapes as we know them are a Norman creation or reorganization, dating from the immediate aftermath of the Conquest.<sup>92</sup>

The first lord of the Rape of Lewes and builder of the castle was William de Warenne (i.e. Warenne, 3km south-east of Arques and 8km south-east of Dieppe), who had risen from comparative obscurity to great power, with his success particularly accelerated after Hastings.<sup>93</sup> Apart from the direct construction and provisioning of the castle, the economic benefit to Lewes of the seigneurial seat was considerable. For example, the court for the whole rape met every three weeks, drawing trade and visitors to the town.<sup>94</sup> Warenne's choice of Lewes for the foundation of a major Cluniac priory (1078-81: section 3.2.3) was a direct consequence of the location of his power base, and of major economic importance to the town and surrounding countryside. The use of Lewes castle as the seat of the prospering Warenne dynasty, and their endowment of Lewes priory, continued undiminished despite, even, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century civil war.



### 3.2.2 Castle



Fig. 4. Lewes Castle keep.

As with many other non-royal castles, there are few early records of Lewes castle, and none that relates to its construction. Reference in Domesday Book to some of Warenne's lands in Norfolk belonging to the *castellation* or *castellum* of Lewes may be significant, but it can hardly be doubted that the castle was established earlier than this, most probably as part of a first wave of Norman castle building in England that was marked by rapid creation of timber and earth defences in response to urgent strategic requirements. Programmes of castle construction were begun in 1067 on William I's behalf by Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and his half-brother, and William fitz Osbern,<sup>95</sup> and, following the king's return from Normandy in December 1068, under his own supervision.<sup>96</sup>

### 3.2.3 Priory

Uniquely of the five Norman rapal centres in Sussex, Lewes gained a major monastery, in the form of the first and chief of the Cluniac houses in England. The early history of the priory is comparatively well documented, although the apparent 11<sup>th</sup>-century documents of the Lewes chartulary are in fact later medieval forgeries. While the survival of bona fide traditions within such reworked sources is possible and an interesting matter for debate, the Lewes

chartulary does not constitute a reliable documentary record of the foundation of the priory.<sup>97</sup> We have seen (section 3.1.3), however, that the copy of the original foundation charter held at Cluny survives. This lacks the detail of the fabricated documents, but dates William de Warenne's foundation to 1078-81 and records his gift of the church of St Pancras, from which the priory inherited its dedication.<sup>98</sup> A later charter of 1147 confirmed the de Warenne gifts and marked a formal dedication of the church, indicative of necessary expansion of the priory church (and monastic buildings) during its early growth.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.2.4 Churches

The scale of the Late Anglo-Saxon and Norman borough is reflected in the proliferation of churches. The first firm documentary evidence for eight of these (the churches of Holy Trinity, St Andrew, St John-sub-Castro, St Martin, St Mary-in-Foro, St Mary Westout [now St Anne], St Nicholas, and St Peter Westout) dates to 1121, at which point they were possessions of the priory. The churches of St Michael (first recorded 1301) and All Saints (first recorded 1148) must have existed at this date too, since they were mother-churches of others existing in 1121. The parish of St Sepulchre is first recorded in 1237, but possibly dates from the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. St Peter the Less may also date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>100</sup>

Of the ten churches recorded or implied in 1121, St John-sub-Castro can be dated on *ex situ* architectural grounds to the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century (section 4.2.1) and, given the evident scale of the borough in 1066, it is likely that several of the other churches have pre-Conquest origins.

### 3.2.5 Urban institutions

Lewes continued to operate a mint in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Prior to the Conquest this was the busiest in Sussex and it quickly revived, still with Saxon moneyers. Minting finally ceased c.1170, after the demise of most other Sussex mints: only Chichester continued later, during the reign of King John (1199-1217).<sup>101</sup>

In addition to the Norman rapal court, it is probable that a borough court was already functioning by the Conquest.<sup>102</sup>

There is an isolated reference to a merchant guild in a letter of Rainald de Warenne (on behalf of the third William of Warenne, absent on Crusade [i.e. 1147-8]) restoring the guild to the burgesses, as had existed in the time of 'my

grandfather and father' (i.e. before death of the first William in 1088).<sup>103</sup>

### 3.2.6 Suburbs



Fig. 5. The early suburb of Westout, at the convergence of the early routes of Rotten Row (left) and St Anne's Hill (High Street).

With the additional 39 inhabited and 20 uninhabited dwellings listed in Domesday Book alongside those of Lewes borough now seeming more probably to relate to Seaford than to Cliffe (section 3.2.1), the case for the often proposed early suburb on the left bank of the River Ouse is considerably weakened. Certainly, there is no other early documentary evidence for an early Norman suburb at Cliffe.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the first reference to activity in the area is to the repair of the bridge in 1159, though this does not imply settlement.<sup>105</sup>

The emergence of a suburb at Southover, clustered at the gate of the priory in an echo of Cluny itself, is more probably datable to this period. This suburb appears to have had two foci by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, at Westport and Eastport.<sup>106</sup> It is likely that the suburb is largely contemporary with the priory.

The existence of the churches of St Mary and St Peter by 1121 confirms the early development of

the suburb of Westout, focused on St Anne's Hill. The inclusion of this suburb within the medieval borough, although not the walls,<sup>107</sup> suggests early assimilation and, possibly, pre-Conquest origins.

With such incorporation, Westout differs significantly from the suburbs of Cliffe and Southover that long remained distinct settlements within, respectively, the lordship of the archbishops of Canterbury and the control of the Cluniac priory.

## 3.3 The later medieval town

### 3.3.1 Economic history

The improvement in the county ranking of Lewes in terms of wealth from 5<sup>th</sup> in 1327 Lewes to 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1524 could suggest a 13<sup>th</sup>-century decline from its earlier position, followed by revival.<sup>108</sup> The reality, however, was 13<sup>th</sup>-century growth (albeit masked in comparative statistics by still greater success elsewhere, most notably and temporarily at New Shoreham), followed by early to mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century decline, and, finally, revival in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

Although the Battle of Lewes in 1264 (in which Simon de Montfort and fellow barons defeated Henry III) offers little insight into the economic history of the town, it is likely that it caused the town walls either to be built or repaired in 1266.<sup>109</sup> This places Lewes within a small group of walled towns in Sussex. Walls at Arundel, Rye and Winchelsea are of similar 13<sup>th</sup>-century origins, with only Roman Chichester an exception.

The major institutions of the Norman town increased their economic contribution. Aside from new works and its draw as the centre of administration for the rape, the castle saw irregular occupation by the seigneurial household and occasional royal visits. The recorded huge entourage that accompanied Edward I in 1299 is indicative of the impact of such events.<sup>110</sup> With the great church largely completed by c.1200, the 13<sup>th</sup> century also saw the priory at its peak. To this must be added the draw of the Franciscan friary established between 1224 and 1241 on the east side of the town. There were 24 friars in 1299, and the economic impact of constructing and running the house – as well as its attraction to visitors from the hinterland – must have been significant.<sup>111</sup>

More direct stimulus to the urban economy was provided by markets and fairs. A Whitsun week fair is recorded from 1440, possibly dating back to the 1240s. In 1406, and probably earlier, the



market in Lewes was on a Saturday.<sup>112</sup> Although there was no market place in Southover, Cliffe was granted markets on a Thursday (1331), Tuesday and Friday (1345) and Wednesday (1409).<sup>113</sup> By 1410 Cliffe was also granted two annual three-day fairs.<sup>114</sup> Records of eight houses in Cliffe in 1276, and 52 messuages, four shops and three kilns there in 1285 confirm that a settlement at Cliffe had emerged by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>115</sup>

Although the late 11<sup>th</sup>-century foundation of Seaford (then at the mouth of the River Ouse) had echoed the creation of New Shoreham by William de Braose on the River Adur, the involvement of William de Warenne and the prior of Lewes (together with the Count of Mortain, lord of the Rape of Pevensey) indicates that in this case the new port was not a planned attempt to eclipse the up-river port. The convenient location of Seaford seems to have been the determining factor.<sup>116</sup> Seaford was evidently established as a significant port in its own right by c.1200.<sup>117</sup> Sea-going ships to Lewes appear to have largely stopped by this time, but the river must have been in use for smaller vessels as the town remained actively involved in the export of wool and corn that was a feature of late 13<sup>th</sup>-century Seaford.<sup>118</sup> For example, merchants exporting from Seaford were local (as opposed to alien, or continental), dominated by those based in the town and an almost equal number at Lewes.<sup>119</sup> There is other evidence that 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 John le Beure of Lewes hired a ship and crew of 13 from Seaford for Gascon wine trade in 1258.<sup>120</sup> Lewes also functioned as an entrepot for the export of Wealden timber.<sup>121</sup>

Lewes did not escape the Black Death of 1348 or the widespread economic decline that marked the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This is seen in the development of tenements on the slope south of the High Street, where both amalgamation and abandonment to gardens occurred.<sup>122</sup> The fortunes of the priory and, therefore, its local expenditure went into decline as its extensive agricultural holdings suffered from decreasing yields (especially in the increasingly inundated rich meadowland of the Ouse valley<sup>123</sup>) and – as a consequence of the Black Death – increased labour costs.

The effects of national economic crisis and pestilence were compounded by the death, in 1347, of John de Warenne, which meant that Lewes ceased to be the seat of a major magnate.<sup>124</sup> Active dislike of the new seigneurs

(the Fitzalans) could explain the sacking of the castle in June 1381 in the Peasants' Revolt, and the local economic impacts of absenteeism may have been of some significance.

### 3.3.2 Church



Fig. 6. Lewes friary: surviving 15<sup>th</sup>-century doorway, relocated to All Saints church, Friars Walk.

The economy of the priory has been discussed (above) with the decline of the later 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries matched by political uncertainty brought about by the difficulty of alien control during the Hundred Years' War (from 1337). As a result, the prior secured naturalization for the Cluniacs at Southover in 1351, and the priory was finally dissociated from Cluny, and placed under jurisdiction of the province of Canterbury in 1490.<sup>125</sup>

The friary, in existence by 1241, probably peaked in scale in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and remained a modest house. Certainly, at dissolution its debts were greater than its assets.<sup>126</sup>

The later medieval history of the parish churches of Lewes contrasts with the earlier proliferation. In 1337 the churches within the borough were sufficiently impoverished for the bishop to propose the assimilation of other parishes by St John-sub-Castro and All Saints, with St Michael's to be kept also. The scheme was not carried out, but the deterioration of the churches is evident for there are no later references to St Martin's, St Peter the Less, St Sepulchre and

Holy Trinity. St Nicholas is last recorded in 1410.<sup>127</sup>

The Brotherhood of St Sebastien is recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when it was given the 2.5 acres of what was later Lewes House (32 High Street).<sup>128</sup>

### 3.3.3 Urban institutions



Fig. 7. Lewes castle: ground-floor interior of the south turret (13<sup>th</sup> century).

The history of the castle remains largely undocumented. At the Battle of Lewes, in 1264, the castle (already vacated by John de Warenne and Prince Edward) was attacked by Simon de Montfort after his success on the battlefield outside the town. The siege was light and short, and Montfort turned his attention to the priory. Neither siege was successful and Montfort was keen to reach settlement as quickly as possible: peace was brokered the following day. Defeat at Lewes was amended at the Battle of Evesham in 1265.<sup>129</sup> As king, Edward I visited Lewes castle on several more occasions.<sup>130</sup> In a different context – that of a more consistently absentee lord – the castle was again attacked and damaged in the Peasants' Revolt, in 1381, suggesting that it no longer had the defensive capability that it once possessed.<sup>131</sup>

In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century the common gaol of Sussex was at Chichester and, thereafter, at Guildford castle, in Surrey. A prison is recorded at Lewes, however, in 1249 and 1261, and thereafter to 1305, almost certainly using the

castle and delivering prisoners to Guildford. Pleas for a country gaol in Sussex as early as 1320 were finally met in 1487, with a gaol in action by 1489 and Lewes deliveries regular by 1500. Early references to this being the gaol of the town could simply refer to the fact that it had previously functioned as the borough gaol. Certainly it was within the castle by 1497.<sup>132</sup> The choice of Lewes for the Sussex gaol was no doubt dictated by it being the meeting place of the county court, a role that it had fulfilled frequently since the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>133</sup>

Lewes had a school as early as 1248, and its schoolmaster – John of Hampton – is named in 1285.<sup>134</sup>

There were two hospitals in medieval Lewes, both controlled by the priory. The hospital of St James was at Southover, and appears to have replaced the 12<sup>th</sup>-century hospital of St John in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>135</sup> The hospital of St Nicholas was just west of the suburb of Westout, and is first recorded as a leper house at the time of the Battle of Lewes (1264). At the suppression of the priory, however, the hospital produced foundation charters dating to the time of the first William of Warenne (d.1088), so it is probable that is an early foundation. The location at a road junction outside the borough is consistent with, though not proof of, use as a leper hospital from the outset, and the dedication is also associated with early leper houses at Canterbury (here pre-1087), Carlisle and York.<sup>136</sup>

## 3.4 The town c.1500-1800

### 3.4.1 Economic history

The later 15<sup>th</sup> century saw economic revival across the country and this continued until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1524 Lewes was evidently a key town in Sussex with its population of at least 1,500 matched only by Chichester and, possibly, Rye.<sup>137</sup> This rose to a total of 2,350 by the early to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, despite a decline in the numbers living in Southover, but then fell to 1,125 by 1676 (largely as a result of epidemics). Recovery was evident with a population of c.2,000 in 1724,<sup>138</sup> and Lewes and Chichester were the largest towns of mid 18<sup>th</sup>-century Sussex.<sup>139</sup> The population of Lewes grew more rapidly during the 1700s, reaching 5,200 by 1801.<sup>140</sup> However, still faster growth in the closing decades of the century at nearby Brighton resulted in a population there of c.7,000 in 1801, and this expansion was accelerating.<sup>141</sup> Lewes was beginning to be overshadowed by its neighbour although the economic basis of the two towns remained wholly distinct.



County importance during the period from 1500-1800 is otherwise evident as Lewes was a focus of government and justice in eastern Sussex in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and, consequently, adopted as the place of residence by lawyers, a burgeoning professional and mercantile class, and gentry.<sup>142</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the town maintained the county gaol; held the county court alternately with Chichester; usually held the assizes for the eastern part of the county; and was used on occasion for distribution of military supplies.<sup>143</sup> In 1555-7, Protestant recalcitrants were burnt at the stake, and Lewes had the dubious honour of being chosen as the principal of five Sussex locations for Marian martyrdom. That 17 of the 27 recorded killings in Sussex took place at Lewes (though none of the victims was resident) was a stark warning to the perceived radicalism of eastern Sussex.<sup>144</sup> Lewes played no significant role in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century civil war, with an advance on Lewes by royalists cut off at Haywards Heath in December 1642.<sup>145</sup> The later threat of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) saw Lewes in the midst of military build-up, with soldiers billeted in the town and barracks for 1,000 men built in 1796.<sup>146</sup>

Throughout this period, Lewes's position as a centre of communications remained important. The River Ouse was made more navigable, and the valley returned to valuable meadow by the relocation of the mouth from Seaford to Newhaven c.1539.<sup>147</sup> Later, the river between Lewes and Newhaven was canalized (immediately following the formation of the Lower Ouse Navigation Company in 1791), and from Lewes to Upper Ryelands Bridge (2.5km south-east of Balcombe) in 1790-1812, by the Upper Ouse Navigation Company.<sup>148</sup>

Increasing coach travel in the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the town with substantial provision for guest beds (99) and stabling (245) at its inns recorded in a survey of 1686. Only East Grinstead and Horsham (key towns for travellers crossing the difficult Wealden clays) had more provision for stabling, and only East Grinstead had marginally more beds.<sup>149</sup> The Star (now the location of the town hall) and the White Hart were the principal coaching inns of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The latter was built c.1717 in response to increasing coach traffic, but the former had been owned by the priory.<sup>150</sup> In addition to an important crossing-point of the River Ouse and the ancient Downland east-west route, turnpike roads gave Lewes a still greater role in overland travel. Rival roads from the north end of Malling Street to Wych Cross (through Uckfield and through Offham) thence London were improved

in 1752, and also to the Broyle in same year. The Broyle to Heathfield road was turnpiked in 1767-8, and, of particular importance, in 1770 the road to Brighton was turnpiked.<sup>151</sup>

The town was central to the exchange of agricultural and rural craft production from the Downs and Weald. A medieval daily provision market had lapsed by 1789, though the general market on Saturdays was still in existence. A new market was to be held daily (except Sundays), and a new site was established in 1792. A twice-monthly livestock street market began at the same time. A separate corn market existed by 1630 and continued throughout the period.<sup>152</sup> A fish market (possibly in Fisher Street) was in existence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>153</sup> A wool fair (26 July) was established in 1786, providing a more consistent sale price for the numerous flock-masters.<sup>154</sup>

Less institutionally based was the role that Lewes played in the export of Wealden ordnance and wrought iron, with Lewes merchants such as John Harman involved in the export to English and continental ports. The trade was short lived, however, as the Wealden iron industry flourished in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and faded from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>155</sup>

Although the marketing of agricultural produce dominated the post-medieval economy of Lewes, a wide range of minor manufacturing and trades played a role in the economy of the town. Lighter industries clustered together in the town centre: for example, clothiers were concentrated on the north side of the High Street in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other trades required more space and a supply of water supply: a tannery was established in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century by the river north-east of St John-sub-Castro; and Southover saw a concentration of malsters and brewers, and, by 1654, a tannery had replaced the mill there.<sup>156</sup>

### 3.4.2 Church and religion

This period began with Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, and its impact on Lewes was considerable. The surrender of the Cluniac priory in November 1537 was the first of a major monastic house. The priory and its estates were granted to Thomas Cromwell, with his son Gregory converting part of it into a residence (the Lord's Place).<sup>157</sup> The Grey Friars followed in 1538, a large house being built within it by John Kyme, purchaser of the site in 1544.<sup>158</sup> The hospitals of St James and St Nicholas had relied upon the support of the priory and, consequently, gradually disappeared, the latter continuing its irregular work as an almshouse.

Sherman's chantry in St Peter Westout was confiscated in 1547.<sup>159</sup> In Cliffe, the Brotherhood of St Thomas the Martyr (recorded in 1514) was suppressed as doubtless was the more obscure Brotherhood of Colyn in Southover (recorded in 1521).<sup>160</sup>

The impoverished state of the churches of Lewes noted in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (section 3.3.2) was as evident in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the parishes of St John-sub-Castro, St Mary-in-Foro combined in 1538; the parishes of St Peter Westout and St Mary Westout in 1539; and St Andrew's and St Michael's in 1545.<sup>161</sup> In each case the superfluous church (usually in disrepair) was given up, so that the remaining churches in the borough from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century comprised those of St John-sub-Castro, St Mary Westout (also known as St Anne's by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and officially so by 1669), St Michael, All Saints, together with the churches of Southover (St John the Baptist) and Cliffe (St Thomas).

Roman Catholic recusants were few in Lewes. Bishop Compton's religious census of 1676 records 687 conformists, no papists, and 173 nonconformists,<sup>162</sup> reflecting an unusually high level of dissent that flourished in eastern Sussex in the renewed conformism of the Restoration (1660) and, especially, the Act of Uniformity (1662) with its Revised Book of Common Prayer.<sup>163</sup> Quakerism in the town followed a visit by George Fox (founder of the Quakers in 1647) in 1655. A meeting house on the west side of Friars Walk was acquired in 1675 (replaced in 1784 by the present premises, c.100m to the south) and a burial ground in operation in 1697.<sup>164</sup> Independents and Presbyterians were more numerous, however, and, following the Toleration Act (1689), respective premises are recorded in School Hill and, possibly, at the former Music School in Watergate Lane. A smaller Baptist congregation registered a meeting house in Eastport Lane in 1697 (and built a new meeting house and burial ground there in 1741). A large Presbyterian meeting house opened at Westgate in 1700. In 1775 the Countess of Huntingdon's Methodist chapel opened at East Street (thereafter, Chapel Hill), Cliffe.<sup>165</sup>

### 3.4.3 Urban institutions

Lewes's free grammar school was founded in 1512 by Agnes Morley. The school was located near the priory in Southover, on the west side of modern Garden Street. In 1714 new premises were acquired on St Annes Hill.<sup>166</sup>

A market house was built in 1564 opposite Castlegate, and rebuilt in 1649. This was demolished in 1791, as a result of the relocation of the market, and a new market house, or tower, was built in 1792.<sup>167</sup>



Fig. 8. Market Tower, Market Street (1792).

Whatever the pre-1564 arrangements, it is clear that thereafter the market house was distinct from the sessions house. This was new-built in 1565, and was used for (occasional) assizes, the county court (alternating between Chichester and Lewes), quarter sessions for the eastern half of the county, and as a town hall.<sup>168</sup> The sessions house was rebuilt in 1761.<sup>169</sup>

A house of correction was built at Cliffe in 1610 to serve the Rapes of Lewes and Pevensy.<sup>170</sup> The gaol at Cliffe was replaced in 1793 by a more modern building with 32 cells, on the corner of North Street and Lancaster Street.<sup>171</sup>

The building of the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century gaol at Cliffe could suggest that the gaol within the castle at Lewes had lapsed in the later 16<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the new county gaol at Horsham (opened by 1541) and, presumably, the continuing decline of the castle. Certainly, the castle was ruinous by 1635, and was being used as a source of building materials by 1620-1. The Gun Garden was the subject of grants in 1559 and 1574, probably relating to the White Horse (on the corner of High Street and Castlegate), and indicative of earlier defensive



redundancy for this allowed tenements to expand as far as the outer walls. Similar grants between 1614 and 1634 relate to Castle Ditch Lane. Such was the decline of the castle that by 1639, and possibly by 1620, the bowling green occupied part of Castleyard. While gardens, then houses, came to occupy the castle in the later 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, some residual military use did persist as late as the 1750s-80s in the form of cavalry stables on the west side of Castleyard.<sup>172</sup>

A poor house for the parish of St John-sub-Castro was built at Castle Banks in 1633.<sup>173</sup> A borough pest house was established in 1742, as result of smallpox, the severity of an outbreak in St Mary's Lane leading to general inoculation being carried out in 1794.<sup>174</sup> A workhouse, or almshouse, was built for All Saints in 1730 (now 31 High Street).<sup>175</sup>

Lewes races, perhaps starting in the reign of Queen Anne, were flourishing by 1714.<sup>176</sup> Cricket was played in the area from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and a Lewes team played on Spital Hill in 1763. Most remarkably, we have seen (above) that the present bowling green within the castle bailey was in existence by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. From 1753 this was more formally organized by the new Lewes Bowling Green Society.<sup>177</sup> Theatre came to Lewes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, using the sessions house in 1752, a former 'academy' in Fish Street in 1770, and purpose-built theatres in Castleyard in 1775 and in West Street in 1789.<sup>178</sup>

### 3.5 Expansion: c.1800-2005

#### 3.5.1 Economic history

Lewes borough retained its two members of parliament at the first electoral Reform Act (1832), but this was reduced to one by the Representation of the People Act (1867) and, from 1885, the town shared one MP with other rural and urban areas.<sup>179</sup> To some degree this reflects the more rapid expansion of other, and especially coastal, towns, led by the startling growth of Brighton in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>180</sup> It also reflected the faltering economy of Lewes itself in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The rural market basis of much of the town's economy made it vulnerable to the agricultural depression that marked the period from 1815-30. This was compounded by the loss to peace of the barracks (built in support of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in 1796 at Haredean, then moved in 1803 to the site of the present prison, and demolished 1814<sup>181</sup>), and growing success of the ports at Shoreham and

Newhaven (the latter becoming increasingly independent of Lewes). However, the picture of stagnation from c.1815-60 followed by 'four decades of High Victorian vigour' is questionable.<sup>182</sup> Population figures indicate a slightly different economic history, for growth was sustained at a high level until the 1830s (rising from c.5,200 in 1801 to c.8,900 in 1831<sup>183</sup>), at which point expansion became minimal and stayed so until the Second World War (rising only to 9,199 in 1841 and, remarkably, only to 10,784 in 1941<sup>184</sup>). Population growth at Lewes since 1945 has been significant (15,988 in 2001<sup>185</sup>), but well below coastal towns and even below that of nearby inland towns (e.g. Burgess Hill and Uckfield have both more than tripled their populations since 1951<sup>186</sup>).



Fig. 9. Law Courts, High Street.

Despite the decline in size relative to other Sussex towns, however, Lewes has maintained its status as the main administrative centre for the eastern half of the county. The formal creation of East Sussex and West Sussex by the Local Government Act 1888 reinforced this position, as indeed has the creation of a unitary authority for Brighton and Hove (1997), and Lewes remains home to county hall, county courts, and police headquarters.<sup>187</sup>

Markets and fairs continued to thrive during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A

horse fair was added in 1832, and the weekly cattle market was moved from the open streets to dedicated premises near the railway station c.1880 (closed 1992 and demolished 1994-5).<sup>188</sup>



Fig. 10. Harveys brewery, Cliffe.

An ironworks on the riverside was producing ordnance during Napoleonic Wars and thereafter (later, the Phoenix ironworks).<sup>189</sup> A foundry opened south of Cliffe High Street in 1808, also near the river, and in 1835 was expanded by its then owner, Ebenezer Morris.<sup>190</sup> The numerous breweries of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Lewes were consolidated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the main ones comprised two of the earlier breweries (Verrall's Southover brewery and Beard's brewery, Fisher Street), and two new ones, both opening in 1838 (the South Down brewery, Thomas Street, Cliffe, and Harvey's brewery).<sup>191</sup> Remarkably, the latter is still working, on its original site on Bridge Wharf, just north of Cliffe High Street. Brickyards were few in number at Lewes, with one on the corner of Lancaster Street and North Street c.1800, and one between North Street and the River Ouse between 1823 and 1844.<sup>192</sup> The tanneries north of St John-sub-Castro and at Southover continued to work into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the former closing shortly after 1820,<sup>193</sup> and the latter being succeeded by the cattle market c.1880 (above).

Communications remained central to the trading economy of Lewes. By 1812 the Upper Ouse Navigation Company completed its canalization of the river from Lewes to Upper Ryelands Bridge (2.5km south-east of Balcombe) that had begun in 1790.<sup>194</sup> Wharves, warehouses, and

the heavier industries clustered along both banks of the river and the town developed a small ship-building industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first sea-going vessel was made there in 1839.<sup>195</sup> Road improvements continued to be made with the turnpiking of the Offham to Ditchling road in 1812,<sup>196</sup> and in 1819-20 the new direct road to Eastbourne.<sup>197</sup> Thereafter, roads to Lewes remained largely unchanged until the opening of the Cullfail tunnel on the east of the town in 1979,<sup>198</sup> together with the associated bypass to the south by the A27 and the creation of a second bridge (and Phoenix Causeway) bypassing Cliffe High Street. This had the effect of turning Little East Street and Eastgate Street into busy one-way traffic lanes, but stopped well short of creating an inner ring road. The opening of the London Brighton & South Coast Railway (LBSCR) lines from Lewes connected the town to Brighton and the coast line (1846), London (via Brighton, 1846; direct, 1847), Eastbourne (1849), Hastings (1851); and Tunbridge Wells (1868).<sup>199</sup> Despite such rail connections, the immediate impact was less than might be expected, not least since the flourishing port of Newhaven was able to bypass Lewes with both its freight and new London-Paris passenger traffic.<sup>200</sup>

There is only limited economic zoning in Lewes. The riverside commercial and industrial zone is maintained only by Harveys brewery and by the Phoenix industrial estate (on the site of the foundry). Other industrial estates are located north and south-east of the EUS study area (at Malling Brook and South Road, Cliffe). Although Lewes has acquired a superstore at the edge of the town (Malling Brook industrial estate) and has had no major town-centre re-planning to attract retail trade (e.g. shopping centres, multi-storey car parks, or inner ring road), it is noteworthy that the retail focus of the town has remained within the historic centre, along High Street and Cliffe High Street.

### 3.5.2 Church and religion

The medieval and post-medieval decline of the parish churches in Lewes (sections 3.3.2 and 3.4.2), was followed by 19<sup>th</sup>-century revival. This is seen the flurry of church school building (section 3.5.3) and in the major rebuilding of All Saints in 1806, the complete replacement of St John-sub-Castro in 1839, and the addition of the Warrenne chapel at St John the Baptist (Southover) in 1847.<sup>201</sup> Decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, is seen by the closure of All Saints church in 1975 (now a community centre).<sup>202</sup>





Fig. 11. Jireh Strict Baptist chapel, Malling Street (1805).

Nonconformism continued to flourish in Lewes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, again followed by 20<sup>th</sup>-century decline. Early chapels continued in use: Westgate Chapel; the Countess of Huntingdon's Methodist chapel at Cliffe (closed c.1880); the Baptist meeting house in Eastport Lane (possibly closed 1825-6, but used in the later 1820s by Arminian Bible Christians<sup>203</sup>); and the Friends Meeting House in Friars Walk.

New nonconformist places of worship, often created by secession from earlier chapels, include: Jireh Strict Baptist chapel, Malling Street (1805-26); Tabernacle Congregational church, High Street (1816; demolished 1955); Bethesda Calvinist chapel, St John Street (1827; a school house from 1813, closed 1929 and demolished 1973); Baptist chapel, Eastgate Street (1843: church established 1818); Providence Baptist chapel, Lancaster Street (c.1860; closed 1932); Methodist church, Station Street (1867; closed 1973<sup>204</sup>); Gospel Temperance Mission Hall, Little East Street (1906, then became Providence Baptist Chapel 1924-c.1980); and the Presbyterian church, Market Street (c.1870; closed c.1945).<sup>205</sup>

A Roman Catholic chapel of The Sacred Heart and St Pancras was built in 1870, in the High Street opposite St Anne's church (demolished 1939 and replaced by the present church).<sup>206</sup>

The famous and exuberant annual Guy Fawkes Night celebrations in Lewes make considerable display of continuing Protestant Dissent (at least in their current organized form, which dates back to the 1850s). However, it has been argued that the event is principally underpinned by the social (and territorial) identity of the bonfire societies that represent different neighbourhoods of the town.<sup>207</sup>

### 3.5.3 Urban institutions

Lewes Grammar School was found to be in poor shape in 1864, but unlike other ancient free grammar schools in the county (Hastings, Horsham, Midhurst, Rye and Steyning) it was not revitalized. Instead, its endowments were made transferable as exhibitions to other schools in 1885, ending the grammar school (the present use of the building by Lewes Old Grammar School – an independent school – is mildly confusing as it suggests survival of the earlier school).<sup>208</sup>

The demise of the grammar school was countered by the rise of other free or subsidised education. The British School in Lancaster Street was built in 1809 and provided for boys and girls. A National School opened in 1840 at the corner of St Mary's Lane (Station Street) and Southover Road, again catering for boys and girls, with an infants school adjacent. Other schools followed: a school at Malling Street, Cliffe, in 1848; a National School (St John the Baptist's parish) off Southover High Street in 1871; a National School (St John-sub-Castro) at St John's Street in 1871; a National School (St Anne's parish) at De Montfort Road in 1872; a Roman Catholic school adjoining the earlier chapel (of 1870<sup>209</sup>); and a voluntary school, now The Pells Primary School, in Pelham Terrace (1897). An art school opened in Albion Street in 1868 and closed in 1932. Although Lewes did not set up a board following the Education Act 1870, the borough became responsible for elementary education under Balfour's Education Act 1902 and an Education Committee for Lewes was formed in 1903. St Anne's mixed school in Western Road (1914) and St Pancras Primary School (De Montfort Road) formed part of the ensuing reorganization and expansion of education. The county council was responsible for secondary education, with the County Grammar School for Girls opening in 1913 at Southover, and Lewes County Secondary School for Boys in 1930: the two have subsequently amalgamated (becoming Priory School) on the site of the boys' school on Mountfield Road. Adjacent to this is Lewes Tertiary College, part of Sussex Downs College since 2001. Post-war reorganization of primary

education has seen closure of the schools in St John's Street, Station Street, De Montfort Road (now used for tertiary education), and Western Road. Within the EUS study area new primary schools have opened in Southover (Southover C of E School, on the site of the girls' grammar school), and at Rotten Row (St Anne's School).<sup>210</sup>



Fig. 12. Fitzroy House, High Street: the former library.

Lewes Library Society was established just before the beginning of this period (1785), and was handed over to the Corporation in 1897 to become a public library. From 1862 this was located in Fitzroy House, and then was replaced by the Albion Street library in 1956.<sup>211</sup> A new library in Friar's Walk opened in 2005.

A new sessions house, or County Hall, was built in 1808-12 (now the county court), and a new town hall in 1893. The latter followed the incorporation of Lewes, Cliffe and Southover as a borough in 1881.<sup>212</sup>

The house of correction in North Street was extended in 1817 and 1834, and provided the county gaol for eastern division of Sussex after the closure of Horsham (1845<sup>213</sup>). It was too small, however, so a new (the present) prison built and first used in 1853. The old prison was utilized for Crimean prisoners of war (1854-6), and then became a naval prison. It was used again for prisoners of war in the First World War and the Second World War, and demolished in 1963.<sup>214</sup>

A police house was built in Lancaster Street in 1842, followed by new headquarters and divisional station on the corner of West Street and John Street (1884). Although the latter is still used by the police, in 1948 the East Sussex police force moved to Malling House, Church Lane, this then becoming the headquarters of the Sussex police in 1968.<sup>215</sup>

The old poor house of St John's on Castle Banks ceased in 1835, but others continued in use as no new workhouse immediately followed the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. Eventually, in 1867-8, a new union workhouse was built north of De Montfort Road to the design of Henry Currey. It was demolished in 1960 and the site is now occupied by the houses of Ousedale Close and Shelley Close.<sup>216</sup> The Victoria Hospital opened as a cottage hospital in 1909, and a nurses' hostel was added in 1935.<sup>217</sup>

Sporting provision increased with the Dripping Pan, Convent Garden and adjacent land given to the borough in 1895 for recreational use, though this was already the home of Lewes Priory Cricket Club.<sup>218</sup> By 1920 this was also used for football, tennis and croquet, and by the late 1930s had a bowling green. More recent expansion of facilities here to the south-west of the priory ruins comprises a club house, tennis courts and an artificial hockey pitch.<sup>219</sup> On the north side of the town the Pells swimming baths date back to pre-1875, and by c.1900 the adjacent recreation ground had been created. In Cliffe, wharves at the south end of South Street have given way, since 1945, to a recreational boat club.<sup>220</sup> Although early 19<sup>th</sup>-century decline in the Lewes races (largely due to the more fashionable new rival of Goodwood) was followed by something of a revival in the 1850s,<sup>221</sup> the racecourse eventually closed in 1964.<sup>222</sup>