

**We are grateful to Professor Michael Hunter for the following article:**

### **When 'Hastings' was 'Hasting'**

It is a little-known fact that for centuries, up until around 1800, the normal local spelling of the name of our town was 'Hasting' -- without the final 's'. This usage followed the norm for place-names derived from an Anglo-Saxon root with the ending '-ingas': think of Lancing, Steyning, Goring or Ditchling. (The only exception is Poynings, and it is possibly significant that, as with Hastings, there was an aristocratic family with the same name.)

But the national usage was always 'Hastings' with an 's': from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the 1066 Battle is invariably referred to in history books as the Battle of Hastings, and 'Hastings' is also how the name appears in London-made maps. Yet the local usage remained doggedly 'Hasting': this is how it appears in parish registers from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (see figs. 1-2), or, for instance, in Samuel Cant's map of the town, made in 1746. In the first guidebook to the town, by James Stell, published in 1794, the name is always spelled 'Hasting', even in the 'Battle of Hasting', though on the title-page an apostrophe is apologetically added: *The Hasting's Guide*.

In the 2nd edition of the guide, published in 1797, however, the name has throughout been changed to 'Hastings' with an 's', and the same change starts to come into the parish registers around 1800. In the Borough records, the town is consistently referred to as 'Hasting' up until 1833, but then the modern usage with an 's' suddenly starts to be deployed (though not without a bit of nostalgia by one clerk in 1834: see fig. 3).

Why was this? The reason must surely be that in around 1800 Hastings was more 'on the map' than hitherto: in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the town enjoyed increasing popularity as a seaside resort. Clearly, the discrepancy over how its name was spelled needed to be sorted out, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it was the national usage that ousted the local one. But this longstanding anomaly deserves to be better known.

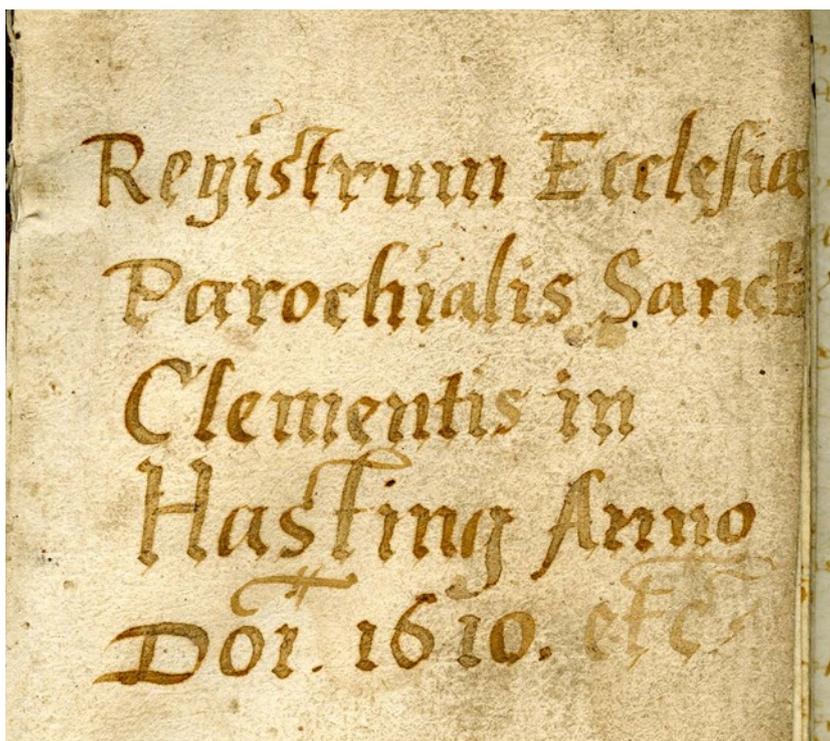


Fig. 1: a typical example of the traditional usage of 'Hasting': the parish register of St Clement's, 1610. (East Sussex Record Office, PAR 367/1/1/2)