

Not the first battle for independence

NOT since the French raided in the 13th century has the quiet town of Winchelsea seen so much turmoil

A proposal for the town to break away from Icklesham Parish Council and form its own council caused more controversy than anyone could have expected.

Emotions have been running high, reflected in a flurry of letters to the Observer Mailbag with accusation and counter-accusation.

Notices and hand-outs were circulated in the town and throughout the parish. Those in favour of a split were accused of rocking the boat while they in turn hit

back at a group calling itself The Silent Majority, for hiding behind the title and refusing to name its members.

Events came to a head in a poll this week which saw a 569 majority in favour of the council staying intact.

Some people accused Winchelsea resident Richard Comotto of causing unnecessary expense by calling for the referendum.

But Mr Comotto said he was just exercising his democratic rights commenting: "The review process of Rother's household survey seems very murky. A survey analysed behind closed doors by unelected officials is exposed to the risk of

being fudged to produce the result desired by a few influential people, whereas a referendum is an exact measure of the popular will. It is vital that people have confidence in the review and confidence requires transparency. A referendum will provide an objective reference point for the review."

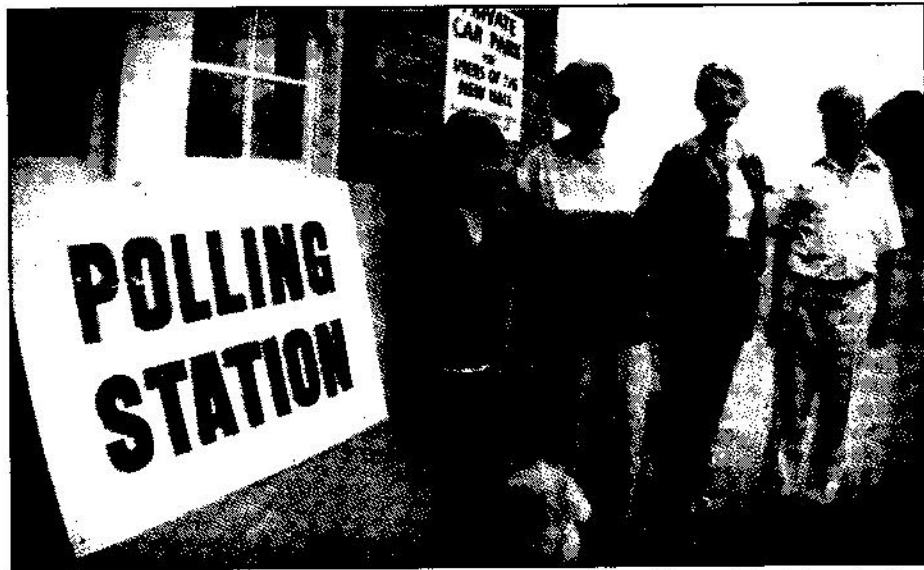
The week before the poll Mr Comotto joked: "I seem to be getting a reputation as the Prince of Darkness but I genuinely believe that having its own council would be in the interest of people living here. The parish is too large and our needs are very different from say those at Rye Harbour."

He went on to say: "The idea there is some sort of uncivil war in Winchelsea is ridiculous.

"Winchelsea is a polite place and we are all mature enough to separate political from personal opinion."

Winchelsea seeking to be independent is nothing new. It was one of the first Cinque Ports and before the Norman Conquest the town had its own mint and was of importance in the wine trade.

Before the original town was destroyed by floods and a storm, Winchelsea had more than 700 houses and 50 inns and taverns.



PAM Ridler, Patricia Dawes, Tony Moore and young Joanne Fitzpatrick pictured outside a polling station at New Hall, Winchelsea last Thursday. H31004