

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - May 1998

The Making of Slough

Judith Hunter was the speaker at the Wargrave Local History Society's May meeting, when she spoke about *The Making of Slough*.

Judith began with the history of the parishes in which Slough developed. Younger than Wargrave, the settlement is almost as old as Windsor. Most of the modern borough is in the parish of Upton cum Chalvey. The earliest record, in the Domesday Survey of 1086, refers to Upton, and a wood for 200 pigs, worth £15. Upton, with its Norman Church, was situated at the top of the slope from the river terrace - the various levels in the area having been formed in the Ice-Age. Chalvey was a village on an island in the marshy flood plain.

In 1196, one Henry de Slough is mentioned in a Pipe Roll - the earliest documentary reference found to Slough. 'Slough' means a muddy area, and was on the road from Windsor Castle (built in 1070) to Berkhamsted (the next castle in the ring around London). Near here, it crossed the King's Highway to Bristol, which developed in the 12th Century (our present A4). The record of the 14th Century Upton Court mentions two cottages at Slough - development had begun. Nearby, at Cippenham, a moat contained a manor house. Richard of Cornwall - King John's youngest son - had his honeymoon there, and later created a deer park. By 1575, however, Saxton's map shows the parks at Windsor and Langley, but not Cippenham. The only places named in the area that were not parishes are Maidenhead and Colnbrook - important to travellers - but not Slough. By 1618, however, Mompesson's Account of places licensed as inns includes the Crown and the Reindeer - both given as 'in Slough in Upton'. By the time of a map drawn in 1773, the hamlet had grown to about 30 houses, with a watermill at Farnham.

The 18th Century was the coaching era, a stage coach having begun to Bath and Bristol from London in the 1650's, although it is not recorded as stopping at Slough. By 1711 a Thomas Baldwin was running a service to the Crown at Slough, and this became a daily operation by 1718. Carrying 4 or 6 passengers inside and maybe 4 or 5 on top, the journey time was noticeably faster in summer than in winter. By the end of the coaching era, 33 coaches per day went through Slough. One service, for example, left London at 5.15 am and arrived at Slough at 7.45 for a 20 minute breakfast stop - Slough had become an important stage on the route - although less so than Colnbrook or Reading.

William Herschel - the astronomer - built his great 49 inch reflecting telescope in Slough in 1789.

Following the Enclosure Act of 1810 for Upton cum Chalvey, Slough began to grow quickly - a larger Church was needed, and a workhouse built. More importantly, the railway arrived. At first there was no station, as Eton College had insisted that none be built within 3 miles. The trains stopped at Slough anyway, as a convenient terminus for Windsor. Eventually, the College relented, and a station with waiting rooms for Royalty was erected. Between 1838 and 1851

Slough had changed from a village to a town. It began to attract businesses and people seeking jobs, and so further housing was built. The population expanded rapidly in the mid 19th Century, and Slough with Upton became an Urban District in 1894.

During World War I, an area was needed to repair War Department vehicles, and Cippenham Court Farm, which stretched north of the Bath Road was established as a motor depot. It proved to be rather a 'white elephant', known as 'The Dump'. Seven business men acquired it, and turned it into the world's first trading estate - initially to sell the war surplus vehicles. Factories, and its own power station, were then built for lease to firms - none being owned by their occupiers. This again led to a growth in population, the town 'bursting at the seams', even during the recession (with just 1% unemployment). Slough also built the first Community Centre and the first Health Centre in the world, and became a borough in 1938.
