

# **Berkshire Old and New**

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# **Berkshire Local History Association**

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## *Cover illustrations*

Front: Salt Hill Recreation Ground, Slough. Photo: Slough History Online.

Back: Windsor's witches. Photo: Bodleian Library.

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# A Case of Witchcraft in Elizabethan Windsor

## Elias Kupfermann

I recently came across a fascinating account in the British Library printed in 1579 of four women hanged at Abingdon (the County town then) for witchcraft. These ‘witches’ had originally come from Windsor, where it was claimed they had brought about the deaths of prominent members of the local community by witchcraft during the early 1570s.

In this case we see a number of ‘stereotypical’ witches accused of both murder and affecting townsfolk of all social classes. Witchcraft in Elizabethan England provoked fear and anger in the population and there was a need to find scapegoats to offer a so-called rational explanation. This frenzy of fear meant that any excuse was good enough for someone to be accused of witchcraft. Most of those who were blamed were elderly women who lived on their own, often with pets, which they saw as company, but were regarded by many as ‘familiaris’ disguised as evil spirits. These somewhat deranged women had no family to vouch for them and were deemed as both outcasts and a burden to society. This was the backdrop to what was to become one of the defining cases of witchcraft in early modern England.

My first impression was that the account of the Windsor Witches was nothing more than fiction. There was no record of any witchcraft trial in Windsor in any book published about the town or indeed the county. Further research, however, using the parish records of New Windsor, showed that a number of characters and places found within the narrative actually existed and this account seemed to chronicle a true event.

There are two accounts of the trial; one in the British Library and the other in the Bodleian. These pamphlets record the crimes of the witches which took place in 1574, and were published in 1579. The British Library pamphlet was published in London by Edward White with the title *A rehearsal both straung and true of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Style, Alias Rockingham, Mother Dutten, Mother Devell, Mother Margaret, Fower notorious witches, apprehended at Winsore in the Countie of Barks, and at Abington arraigned, condemned and executed on the 28th daye of February laste, Anno.1579.*<sup>1</sup> It can be found in the Stationer’s Register of March 1579.

A second and different account can be found in the Bodleian pamphlet.<sup>2</sup> This pamphlet has lost its title page but it is found registered to John Alde in May 1579 and titled *A brief treatyse conteyninge the most strange and horrible crueltie of Elizabeth Sule[sic] alias Bockingham[sic] and hir confederates executed at Abington upon Richard Galis.* This account of events was written from another perspective, appearing to be a contemporary account of the afflictions caused to Richard Galis but written by his son Richard Junior from



*One of the Windsor Witches feeding her familiars. Woodcut from the British Library pamphlet (1579) (© The British Library Board - c.27.a.11)*



*A witch releasing her familiar on a poor unsuspecting person – Woodcut from the frontispiece of the British Library pamphlet (1579) (© The British Library Board - c.27.a.11)*

his father's recollections. It tells how Galis Senior personally tried to bring the witches to justice in 1572. However the case was overturned by local magistrates due to lack of evidence.

Richard Galis Senior is very well documented. He was born around 1517 to James and Joan Galis of New Windsor and was educated at Eton, after which in 1533 he went to Kings College, Cambridge, where he studied law. He was

elected Mayor of Windsor three times; in 1561, 1566 and 1570. From 1563 to 1567 Galis was MP for Windsor. He was a controversial figure, calling for the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1572. Galis is buried in the south aisle of the old parish church. Ashmole in his *Antiquities of Berkshire* of 1719 describes Galis's memorial as a brass depicting a man in a gown and a woman in the 'habit of the tymes veiled' with an inscription beneath. Under the inscription are figures of his ten sons and two daughters engraved on brass plates. This memorial no longer exists but a painted memorial hatchment bearing the coat of arms of Galis and his wife hangs in the present-day church.

His eldest son Richard (the author of the Bodleian pamphlet) was landlord of the Garter Inn in Windsor which is a setting of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. It is possible that Shakespeare may have known Galis Junior and that he was the inspiration for the landlord of the Garter Inn in that play. It is perhaps also possible to draw another parallel to Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* (believed to have been written between 1603 and 1607) where three witches are



*The four witches kneeling at the feet of Richard Galis (left) and Robert Handley. Master Henry Bust stands behind the women holding a cudgel – Woodcut from the Bodleian Library Pamphlet (1579) (The Bodleian Library University of Oxford - Gough Berks. I (1))*



*Richard Galis leading Elizabeth Style through the streets of Windsor to the lockup. Woodcut from the Bodleian Library Pamphlet (1579). (The Bodleian Library University of Oxford - Gough Berks. I (1))*

the plot. Is it possible that accounts of the trial were familiar to him and gave him inspiration for his 'Scottish' play?

Elizabeth Style was one of those on trial; she is described as 'alias Rockingham' and her name can be found in the extant parish records for New Windsor. They show that Rockingham was her maiden name and that on 1st September 1572 she was married to John Style. The other women were 'Mother

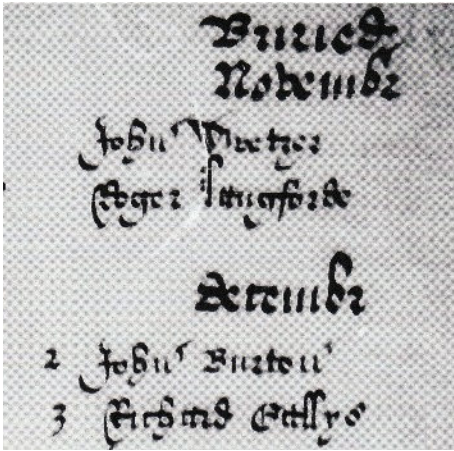
Devell' who lived near to the Pound, and Mother Margaret, a pauper who lived in the Windsor Almshouses. The leader of the group was believed to have been a Mother Seidre who also lived at the Windsor Almshouses but died before her trial. Finally there was Mother Dutton who lived in Clewer and is described as 'dwelling within one Hoskins in the adjoining parish of Clewer' in a house made of straw.

Each member of this group had exceptional 'magical' powers and possessed a pet or familiar which were seen by Elizabethan society as evil spirits who aided them in their 'witchcraft'. Mother Dutton it was claimed had psychic abilities and through telepathy could tell what a person wanted before consulting her. She also possessed a toad 'which lay in a border of green herbs within her garden' which she fed with her own blood. Mother Devell possessed 'a spirit in the shape of a black cat and calleth it Jill', which she fed with milk mixed with her own blood. Mother Margaret, who got around on crutches, had a kitten called Jenny which she fed with crumbs mingled with her own blood. Finally Elizabeth Style confessed that she kept a rat (described as a wicked spirit) which she called Philip and which she fed blood directly from her right hand.

All of these women were very poor and lived on charity and in slum dwellings. The places where they lived can be identified. The manorial pound was originally in Park Street, which in the 1650s was known as Pound Street. The almshouses are those which were founded in Sheet Street at Pucket's Gate in 1503 by William Paynall, chaplain to Thomas Ryder, Mayor of New Windsor. Unfortunately the parish records for Clewer date from 1653 and do not cover the period of interest. The name Hoskins cannot be found in the available historical records.

It was claimed that these women met to practise their arts in an area known as 'the pittes' at the back of a property owned by a Master Dodge. 'The pittes' can perhaps be identified with 'Pitts Field' which appears to have been adjacent to a field called 'Le Worth' later to become Bachelor's Acre (it is thought that these were 'marling' pits where marl or chalky subsoil was extracted and then mixed with animal dung to produce a kind of fertiliser).<sup>3</sup>

According to the Bodleian pamphlet the four witches had first come to attention of the magistrates as early as 1572; this pamphlet describes the illness which Richard Galis had suffered and how his brother James when fifteen years old had fallen out with Mother Dutton and shortly afterwards went mad. Supporting evidence is found in a document of 1603 amongst the Cecil family papers which describes James Galis as a lunatic.<sup>4</sup> The pamphlet next narrates how Richard Galis, when recovered from his illness, brought Mother Dutton from Clewer to Windsor, dragging her by her arm to 'the hall a prison in Windsor'. He tried to get the jailor to imprison the woman until she could be seen by the magistrates, but the jailor refused as he had not had instructions from the Mayor or a justice to do so. She was later brought before the Mayor of the town, Richard Redford, but on seeing the old lady he ordered her to be released immediately.



*Entry from the Burial Register of the Parish Church of New Windsor recording the deaths of Roger Langford and Richard Galis (1574) (Berkshire Record Office)*

Richard had further contact with the witches when he brought them before a close friend Master Robert Handley who had been 'bewitched in his limmes' and was unable to walk. It was believed his ailment had been brought about through witchcraft. He thought that the witches could confirm that this was the case. Also during this meeting Master Henry Bust, a student in medicine, was present and was 'charged with holding a good cudgel over their backs' in case they tried to carry out some form of magic. The four women told him that they were unable to tell him what the problem was or to offer him any relief.

Some six years later the women again came to the attention of the authorities. In 1578 three female images made of wax had been discovered on a London dung heap, with bristles stuck in the heart of each. From this time onwards Elizabethan society became very superstitious and it was believed that these images represented Queen Elizabeth I and two of her privy councillors. Similar wax images were found in possession of the Windsor witches.

The Privy Council asked Sir Henry Neville, a local justice of the peace and the Dean of Windsor, to try and ascertain whether these women were plotting to kill the Queen by magic. Sir Henry (of Billingbear Park in Waltham St Lawrence) was chosen to carry out this investigation as he had been a member of the Privy Chamber under Henry VIII and on five occasions a Knight of the Shire of Berkshire.

Richard Galis personally brought each of the women to Windsor Castle to ascertain their guilt or otherwise. Elizabeth Style was tied up with a rope and led along the High Street during Market day. Galis then went to Clewer to fetch Mother Dutton who had locked herself in a wooden chest. Also present were Dr William Wickham who was Chaplain to the Queen and a Canon of St George's Chapel, John Wullard, another Canon and a member of the Stafferton family. The women were examined on their religious education and were told to attend at the parish church the next morning to 'publikly in presence of all men be set under the pulpit during the time of the service.' After that they were sent to Reading to await trial.

Once locked up in Reading jail Elizabeth Style confessed in great detail to all the 'crimes' she had committed through witchcraft, including 'killing' a number of Windsor people. Her first victim was 'one Langford, a farmer dwelling in

Windsor by the Thameside' together with one of his maids. This was followed by 'Master Galis, who in times past had been Mayor of Windsor'. Finally she claimed to have murdered two butchers – one called Switcher<sup>5</sup> and the other Mastlin.<sup>6</sup>

Two of the Windsor victims appear in the entry for the year 1574 in the New Windsor burials register having died within just over a week of each other – could this really be indicative of the plague reaching the Windsor area? The plague was certainly rife in Berkshire at this time and in 1576 proclamations were made by the Windsor Corporation in an attempt to stop it spreading. Roger Langforde died in November of that year and his will of 24th November 1574 still exists. He owned a farm in the area near to Windsor Bridge known as the 'Farmyard'. His death was followed by that of Richard Galis, the ex-Mayor, who is recorded as being buried in the parish church on the 3rd December. It is believed that the Bodleian account was partially written by Richard Galis Senior reciting his dealings (and indeed his brother's) with the witches before his death in 1574. The tract was then continued by his son Richard to highlight the inefficiency of the local authorities in failing to bring the women to trial in 1572.

Elizabeth Style also claimed to have brought about the death of a man called Saddock who had not kept a promise to her.<sup>7</sup> This may have possibly been Robert Saddock who was Mayor of Windsor in 1550. Other acts of 'witchcraft' included killing a cow, and causing illness to a number of the inhabitants of Windsor and Eton. None of the other witches would speak about their crimes but Elizabeth Style's confession was enough to convict all four of the witches. When Sir Henry Neville had heard all the evidence the convicted women were sent to the Assizes at Abingdon for sentencing. After being found guilty of their crimes they went to their deaths by hanging on the 28th February 1579.

## References

1. British Library Ref: c.27.a.11.
2. Bodleian Library Ref: Gough Berks. I.
3. An Eton College lease of 1609 records three acres situated at Le Worth which abutted land lying on the south side 'upon the King's Pitts' (ECR 60/12/3/3). In 1629 another lease to John Fishbourne (for the same piece of land) records the rental of three acres in Le Worth adjoining at one side to pits called Batchelors Acre' (ECR 60/12/3/4).
4. G Dyfnallt Owen, ed., *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House: Volume 23, Addenda, 1562-1605* (1973).
5. This is probably a phonetic spelling for the surname 'Sweetzer' which is commonly found in Windsor at this time. Sylvester Sweetzer is listed as Mayor in 1604.
6. Richard Masleyne was Mayor in 1608.
7. There is a Saddock's Farm in Eton Wick. The farmhouse dates from c.1500.



# Windsor and the Contagious Diseases Acts

## Brigitte Mitchell

During the early nineteenth century most British regiments introduced regular medical inspections for venereal disease. These so-called willi-parades were highly unpopular. In 1845 two soldiers of the Coldstream Guards stationed in Windsor, who had refused to strip in front of their comrades, were court-martialled on the spot and received 100 lashes each. The whole proceeding including the court martial took only two and a half hours.<sup>1</sup> It not only highlighted the problem of venereal disease in the army, but also showed individuals' modesty about displaying their naked bodies in front of comrades. The case was consequently discussed in Parliament. Thomas Wakley, member for Finsbury, asked the Secretary at War, Sidney Herbert, why soldiers had to strip in front of a whole company, for the purpose of being examined by a surgeon.<sup>2</sup> William Williams, member for Coventry, added that 'nothing could be more indelicate or indecent or more repulsive to a proper and correct feeling, than to be placed under the necessity of undergoing such an examination naked in the presence of a large company of their comrades'.<sup>3</sup> Admiral Dundas, member for Greenwich, then said that 'from his experience it has never been customary for soldiers or sailors to strip together, in front of each other'.<sup>4</sup> This 'modesty' explains to some extent the ability of women to get away with serving in the forces disguised as men until well into the 1820s, when more stringent medical examinations were introduced.

Sidney Herbert<sup>5</sup> explained that many of the Guards in Windsor were affected with a certain disease, that many tried to conceal this fact, and that the authorities had ordered a rigid examination, as the result of which sixteen men were found to be infected.<sup>6</sup> Medical examinations remained controversial and unpopular with both soldiers and doctors. John Trotter, assistant surgeon of the Coldstream Guards was said to have examined 500-600 men in half an hour, which could not have been a thorough examination.<sup>7</sup> Eventually some commanding officers dispensed with them altogether. In 1858 Dr Logie, surgeon of the Royal Horse Guards, lamented the fact that the commanding officer had thought it necessary to do away with the weekly health inspection, 'as it excited such dissatisfaction'. Now the only means for detecting venereal disease was the inspection of prisoners, of soldiers in hospital and of men coming off furlough.<sup>8</sup> By 1859 compulsory inspections of troops were abolished.

Acton claimed that 'about one in three soldiers suffer from some sort of venereal complaint',<sup>9</sup> and Blanco stated that in 1859, 422 admissions to army hospital out of every 1,000 were due to venereal disease.<sup>10</sup> The Army Medical Department's returns for venereal admissions into hospital show a much higher rate of venereal disease in the Foot Guards and the infantry of the line than in

the Household Cavalry. This may be due to the fact that a much higher percentage of cavalry soldiers were married.

These figures clearly worried the authorities, and as soldiers would not be examined the alternative was to examine and treat the prostitutes in order to provide clean and healthy women for the troops.

The first attempt by Parliament to curb prostitution was the Seduction and Prostitution Bill, which was passed in 1847.<sup>11</sup> Mr Roebuck, member for Bath, commented 'The House in passing this Bill were travelling out of the real province of legislation into the province of simple morality, and they were attempting by legislative interference to bring about that which no mere law could ever effect'.<sup>12</sup> Lord Brougham objected to the Bill by pointing out that 'the vilest prostitute could get a man imprisoned for a long period'.<sup>13</sup> The Contagious Diseases Acts which were introduced in 1864 had a different aim, which was not so much to curb prostitution, as to make paid sex safer for the troops. However, they put the whole burden on the prostitutes. The Act of 1864 was applied in the naval and garrison towns of Portsmouth, Plymouth, Southampton, Chatham, Sheerness, Aldershot, Colchester, Woolwich, Cork and Queenstown. Under the Act, any woman identified as a prostitute by a constable could be forcibly examined, and if found diseased, taken to a government lock hospital, which specialized in the treatment of venereal disease, where she could remain for several months, and where the 'cure' for syphilis was mercury!

The Contagious Diseases Bill of 1866 was read for a second time in the House on 15 March, with a view to widening its application to include Windsor with Eton and Clewer. There was very little discussion of the Bill, and a Select Committee was appointed consisting of nineteen members with a quorum of five to discuss the Bill in private. Only two members expressed concern. Mr J. W. Henley, member for Oxfordshire, said that 'the measure was a very queer Bill upon a very queer subject'. Its object was to preserve the health of Her Majesty's troops, and its endeavour was to remove all the penalties, which a higher Power had imposed upon sin, and to give the opportunity of sin without the punishment. He asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he could 'expect any blessing upon their legislation if they took these unhappy women, freed them from disease, and then turned them loose to follow the same wretched course, without any attempt to reclaim them'.<sup>14</sup> Mr Ayrton, member for Tower Hamlets, who two years ago had opposed the Bill for just this reason, viz. it made no provision for reclaiming the unfortunate women, now wanted to know why Windsor was included in the Bill but not Westminster.<sup>15</sup> Sir George Grey, Secretary of State for the Home Department, replied that the Bill applied to places where either of the services constituted a considerable portion of the population to within a five-mile radius of this town.<sup>16</sup> The Bill was twice referred to in the House, in June and July, but there was no debate in Parliament, and on 29 July 1866 it received the Royal Assent.<sup>17</sup> The *Windsor and Eton Express* was equally reticent about this Bill, which was to affect the

town. It was never mentioned throughout its early existence and passage through Parliament, and not until February 1868, when the Act came into force in Windsor, did this article appear in the paper:

The Contagious Diseases Act. - It has been resolved by the military authorities to apply the provisions of the Contagious Diseases Act to Windsor, Colchester, Shorncliffe, Canterbury and the Curragh, the London Gazette on Tuesday published this notification dated from the War Office February 11th: "The Secretary of State for War has appointed E. Pearl, Esq., to be visiting surgeon for Windsor, under the Contagious Diseases Act 1866."<sup>18</sup>

The Act was overseen by the War Office and the Admiralty, but passed by Parliament; however, the newspaper put the onus for this legislation on the military, leading most unsuspecting readers to believe it was military legislation. There was no further discussion of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the paper; even prostitution was not reported on as it had been in the 1840s and 1850s. But there must have been some local debate about the Contagious Diseases Acts and their implications for Windsor. Claude Quétel quotes:

The new legislation, said the vicar of Windsor, treats fornication as a necessity, since its aim is to render the practice less dangerous, the result of this is that men can sin in greater physical security and abandon themselves unrestrainedly to their whims.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately he does not reveal his source. The vicar of Windsor, who must have been the Revd H. J. Ellison, clearly recognized that the Acts gave the military a false sense of security and conveniently released them from any responsibility of keeping soldiers free from venereal disease. There were also a number of soldiers who felt insulted by the Acts. Trustram quotes:

there is a section of the rank and file who would protest vehemently against the Acts as a libel on their character, and fully expose the Government who proclaim by these laws to our fathers, brothers, mothers and sisters that we have become so debased in an honourable profession as to require a certain number of working men's daughters to be sacrificed in perpetuity, by special legislation to preserve our health.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that the 1866 Contagious Diseases Act had been invoked in Windsor is clear indication that prostitution and venereal disease were major problems, but this was no longer discussed openly. It is also much more difficult to identify prostitutes who came before the magistrate. The women who appeared before the Windsor magistrate charged with drunk and disorderly behaviour, using obscene language or loitering were not described as prostitutes, as they had been in the past.

Neither was there any mention of the government lock hospital which every garrison town that came under the Contagious Diseases Acts was obliged to set up to accommodate diseased prostitutes. No records have survived, and the memory of this hospital seems to have been lost in Windsor. Only one mention of the government lock hospital can be found in the unpublished autobiography of a cavalry soldier who wrote: "There had also been, in Alma Road, a lock

hospital, made over to the Imperial Services College, though not for the same purpose'.<sup>21</sup> This at least gives us an indication where the hospital was.

Before a lock hospital was built the workhouse infirmary took patients with venereal disease. Few records for the Windsor workhouse have survived, but a report of 1867 on the workhouse infirmary published in the newspaper states that there were two small separate buildings at the back of the infirmary for venereal patients. The women's ward was described as uncomfortably full, and the men's ward was even worse. There was a foul stench even though doors and windows were wide open. 'The children's ward is near that of fallen women and they have to pass through it to get to their own'.<sup>22</sup>

The only surviving facts concerning the Contagious Diseases Acts as applied to Windsor are contained in the report of the Royal Commission upon the Administration and Observation of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1871, which tried to justify the Acts and prove their success by showing a decrease in prostitutes, brothels and public houses (table below). Each town also took in a five-mile radius, therefore figures for Windsor not only included Eton and Clewer but also Datchet and Old Windsor.

	<u>Windsor</u>			<u>Aldershot</u>			<u>Portsmouth</u>		
	1868	1869	1870	1868	1869	1870	1868	1869	1870
Pubs	86	88	70	232	237	242	416	415	337
Beer Houses	106	96	93	141	148	130	656	695	608
Brothels	15	7	0	48	46	35	204	293	295
Known Common Women	54	60	30	292	315	129	739	730	590

*Source Royal Commission upon the Administration & Observation of the Contagious Diseases Act 1871, [c.408, 409-1] XIX.*

In 1869 the Ladies National Association was established to fight, among other injustices to women, against the Contagious Diseases Acts. It was spearheaded by Josephine Butler who was able to disprove the above figures; she was also able to prove that prostitution and venereal disease had not declined. A manifesto the Ladies National Association took to Parliament included the sentence: 'it is unjust to punish the sex who are the victim of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause'.

The campaign was successful. The Contagious Diseases Acts were repealed in 1886, and willi-parades were reintroduced in the army.

## References

1 *Windsor and Eton Express* [WEE] 19 July 1845.

2 *Hansard*, LXXXII, 18 July 1845, c.674-677.

3 *Ibid.*, c.676.

4 *Ibid.*, c.677.

- 5 The Right Hon. S. Herbert, 1810-1861, MP for Wiltshire South, Secretary at War 1845-6, 1852-4 and Secretary of State for War 1859-61.
- 6 *Hansard*, LXXXII, 18 July 1845, c.676.
- 7 Myna Trustram, 'Marriage and the Victorian Army at Home; The Regulation of Soldiers' Relationships with Women and the Treatment of Soldiers' Wives' (University of Bristol. PhD thesis 1981) p. 144.
- 8 Royal Horse Guards, Medical Officers' Correspondence, Annual Report of the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards from 1 April 1857 to 31 March 1858 at Windsor.
- 9 William Acton, *Prostitution* (1968) p. 78.
- 10 R. L. Blanco, 'The Attempted Control of Venereal Disease in the Army of Mid Victorian England', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, v. 45 (1967) p. 236.
- 11 *Hansard*, XCIV, 23 June 1847, c.811.
- 12 *Ibid*.
- 13 *Ibid*. 13 July 1847, c.215.
- 14 *Hansard*, CLXXXII, 22 March 1866, c.815.
- 15 *Ibid*, 22 April 1866, c.2177.
- 16 *Ibid*.
- 17 27 & 28 Vict. c. 85.
- 18 WEE, 15 February 1868.
- 19 C. Quérel, *History of Syphilis* (1990) p. 235.
- 20 Trustram *Women*, p. 132, from *National League Journal*, 1 September 1875, p. 13.
- 21 R. J. T. Hill, *Horse Foot and Guns*, unpublished and unclassified manuscript, Household Cavalry Museum Archives, p. 162.
- 22 WEE, 5 October 1867 and 2 November 1867.

# **County *versus* Town: the Abingdon Gaol and the campaign for its closure, c1840-1868**

**Manfred Brod**

In our time, the closure of a prison and the transfer of its inmates to a different establishment is likely to be seen as a simple administrative measure, to be described in terms of financial saving or of changes in penal policy. However, the closure of Abingdon Gaol in 1868 and the move of its prisoners to Reading was much more than this. It was the culmination of some 25 years of campaigning by activists among the Berkshire magistrates meeting in Quarter Sessions, and it was seen in Abingdon as a totally unjustified breach of agreements that had been entered into in good faith many years earlier. Perhaps incidentally, it represented the definitive victory of Reading over Abingdon for the status of chief or county town of Berkshire, a status that had been controversial for at least two hundred and fifty years. The purpose of this essay is to explore the background to the closure, the motives of those who were responsible for it, and the reasons for the failure of those who sought to prevent it. It may stand also as a case study in how county politics were conducted in the decades before the establishment of county councils as the centres of county administration in 1889.

The period between the late eighteenth and the end of the nineteenth centuries was one of a gradual transition between an ‘ancien régime’ administration of the English localities, using traditional authority structures and strongly localist, and a much more centralized and professional system. The change was a gradual and hesitant one, sometimes leaving traditional bodies reluctantly taking on tasks for which they were ill-prepared, or nominally reformed organizations continuing in time-honoured ways.

At the beginning of the period, and until almost its end, counties were administered by their resident magistrates who might, if they wished, attend Quarter Sessions. Here, in addition to dealing with offenders, they debated and took decisions on matters of general interest. Magistrates were not elected, but were generally nominated by the lord lieutenant from among the principal property-owners of the vicinity. Their clerk, also a nominee of the lord lieutenant, was both a legal advisor and a chief executive giving effect to their decisions. Chartered towns had their own mayors and corporation for administration and their own magistrates to apply the law. Their sessions might be presided over by their recorder, always a senior barrister. County magistrates had no authority in the towns, and town magistrates did not attend county sessions. Counties and towns had to cooperate, but towns were

traditionally jealous of their chartered status, and relations might become strained. As will be seen, the reform of municipal government in 1835 and the institution of elected councils to replace self-renewing corporations might make little immediate difference to their operation.<sup>1</sup>

It was probably in the problems surrounding penal policy in the late eighteenth century that the reform process began. American independence had closed off a route to dispose of convicted prisoners, and religiously-motivated activists, such as the Quaker John Howard, brought the squalor of existing prisons to public notice. After legislation in 1779, the Berkshire magistrates organized inspections of the penal facilities in Reading and Abingdon, and found them wanting. A new gaol was quickly built in Reading, and another in Abingdon some years later.<sup>2</sup>

The Abingdon facility was the product of negotiation between the county magistrates and the Abingdon Corporation. Few details survive, but the central figure was probably Benjamin Morland, a prominent Abingdon lawyer who was also clerk to the Quarter Sessions. In a complex agreement of 1803, the town sold to the county the site of the old White Hart Inn at the entrance to Abingdon Bridge. The county had to buy out the lessees of whom Morland was one, but it was confirmed as owner of the old Abingdon bridewell which it could sell. It agreed to build the new gaol while widening and paving the street leading to the bridge. The town would contribute nothing towards the building, but would be able to commit its prisoners there without payment apart from their maintenance. Morland, in his executive role, organized the entire building project, choosing contractors and handling the finances.

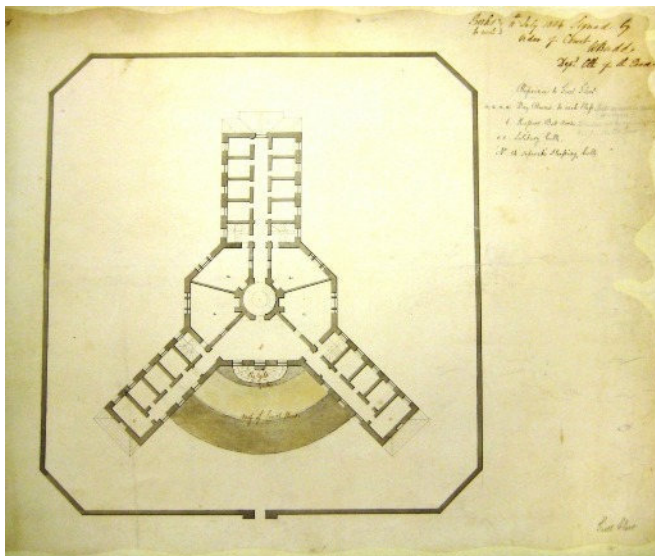
Plans for the gaol were drawn up, almost certainly by Daniel Harris, governor of the Oxford prison who was also an architect and contractor.<sup>3</sup> They were approved in 1804 and signed off by William Budd, Morland's deputy as county clerk.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the prison proper, they provided for an amply sized courtroom where assizes and sessions could be held. The gaol was ready to admit prisoners in 1812, although construction continued for several years after this.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, standards were changing. By 1824, it had to be embarrassingly admitted that the gaol did not meet the requirements of the latest legislation.<sup>6</sup> One current fear was that prisons would become schools of criminality, and it was seen as desirable that different categories of prisoners should be kept separated from each other. The Abingdon establishment could segregate only four classes of prisoners, whereas the new standard was six; some felons were still having to mix with those convicted only of misdemeanours.

It was a period of discussion and experimentation on penal policy and prison design. Model gaols were being built. By the late 1830s, opinion had come down firmly in favour of what was known as the separate system, and a prison that would embody this was being built at Pentonville in London. The separate system took the principle of segregation to its logical conclusion. Not only would there be no contact between different categories of prisoner, but



*The Abingdon Gaol from the east (architect's drawing of 1804). Berkshire Record Office Q/AG 2/1/1-5.*



*The Abingdon Gaol at first floor level showing the three-wing arrangement and sessions hall (architect's drawing, 1804). Berkshire Record Office Q/AG 2/1/1-5.*



there would be none between any prisoner and any other. The intention was to bring about the reformation of the offender by solitude and introspection. The prisoner would spend most of the day alone in his cell. When out of it, he would wear a special cap with a large downward-pointing peak so that his face was never seen by other prisoners. In the chapel, which doubled as a schoolroom, there were partitions between the seats so that the occupant could see only forwards and not to his sides. His only chance of conversation was with prison staff or with the chaplain, and it was the chaplain's duty to bring his charges individually to a proper understanding of the errors of their ways and a determination to start a new life.<sup>7</sup> Proponents of the system held remarkably optimistic opinions of its efficacy; prisoners subjected to it for an adequate time – six months or a year – were, it was claimed, virtually certain never to reoffend.

The greatest proponent of the separate system in Berkshire was William Merry. Born in 1793, Merry had joined the War Office as a junior clerk and worked his way up to become private secretary to Lord Palmerston.<sup>8</sup> By 1835, he was apparently retired and resident at Highlands, at Grazeley, near Reading. In 1838, he was made a JP, soon becoming a member of the three-man committee of visiting magistrates who supervised the Reading gaol. Normally, membership of this group was by a three-year rotation with the senior member acting as chairman, but once Merry became chairman he continued in that capacity for the remainder of his career.

Merry was a deeply religious man, author of several tracts in which he argued that salvation was available to anyone who believed in Jesus Christ and devoutly wished for it.<sup>9</sup> At about the same time as Merry entered the body of Berkshire JPs that constituted the Quarter Sessions, Reverend John Field became chaplain to the Reading gaol. Field was a committed believer in the separate system, the intentions of which fitted well with Merry's desire to bring about repentance and reform. 'It is a system,' Field said in 1855, 'in accordance with God's revealed will and upon which His blessing has been vouchsafed.'<sup>10</sup> He claimed that it was his criticism of the existing Reading gaol that had led to its replacement. Although once more detail is lacking, there can be little doubt that Merry was the prime mover in convincing the magistrates that they should undertake the building of the elaborate new facility in Forbury Road, designed by no less an architect than Sir George Gilbert Scott.

The cost was initially estimated at £20,000, but in fact reached £43,000 because of the additional requirements of the separate system. Cells, to which inmates would be confined for most of the day, had to be elaborately heated and ventilated, maintaining a temperature of 54 degrees Fahrenheit in the coldest winter weather. They had to be provided with water closets since there would not be a common privy where prisoners would be able to communicate with each other, but the closets could not have exposed pipes which might allow communication by tapping on them.<sup>11</sup>

The new gaol was built on a grand scale, with enough space for all anticipated needs within the county of Berkshire. This early aroused the anxiety of the Abingdon Corporation, and it was no secret that many of the magistrates,

especially those from the south and east of the county, would favour the closure of the Abingdon establishment.<sup>12</sup> Merry found a powerful ally in Major Henry Court of Castlemans at Wargrave. Court, whose rank seems to have been acquired in the service of the East India Company, was an avid numbers man, always seeking the utmost economy in county business and extreme parsimony in the payment of its employees. To him, the extra costs of the Abingdon gaol and their impact on the county rates were a standing irritation.

The first major onslaught came in the Michaelmas sessions in 1844, which were held in Reading where the gaol was newly open. Both sides had taken pains to ensure a good turnout of their supporters. The Abingdon Corporation had mobilized several magistrates from the 'lower end' of the county, notably Thomas Duffield of Marcham, until recently MP for Abingdon. No fewer than nine county JPs who had never previously participated in the sessions came to take their oaths of qualification; all these were from the Reading area.

Court didn't mince his words. The Abingdon gaol, he said, was very expensive. His supporters added that the government inspector of prisons, a Mr Russell, had commented adversely on its outward appearance and had confirmed that it wasn't fit for purpose. Court moved that all county prisoners, whether before trial or after conviction, should be sent to Reading and not to Abingdon. There was legislation pending to set up county lunatic asylums, and he suggested caustically that the Abingdon gaol could be converted to that use.

The discussion was heated. Thomas Duffield proposed setting up a committee to give the matter further consideration before the following Epiphany sessions where a final decision could be made. This was not supported, and Court's motion was carried by 27 votes to 11. Thomas Goodlake, a senior magistrate from Letcombe Regis and sole survivor of the negotiations of 1803, wrote to the chairman accusing Court of bad faith and a hidden agenda. There must have been considerable activity in the lobbies, and Duffield's committee was actually set up before the end of the session notwithstanding the earlier vote. Its fifteen members were chosen roughly equally from the north and south of the county. No one was nominated as chairman, and that role seems to have been effectively taken by Major Court.<sup>13</sup>

The special session at the end of November when the committee reported was a confused one. Court's intention was that the staff of the Abingdon gaol should be dismissed and the town left with a mere lock-up, similar to those in other Berkshire towns, where the occasional drunk could be left to sober up and more serious malefactors kept pending their appearance before the magistrate. No one would be held there for more than a week. This was effectively negated when Mr Mount of Wasing moved and carried that the time limit should be a month. Mount's motivation seems to have been opposition to applying the severe regime of the Reading gaol to minor offenders and those awaiting trial. The final recommendation was incoherent; short term prisoners would continue to be committed to Abingdon where there would in principle be no staff to look after them, while Reading would hold both short and long term

prisoners.<sup>14</sup> The following Epiphany sessions confirmed Mount's amendment and tacitly abandoned the intention of dismissing the Abingdon staff.<sup>15</sup>

The Abingdon council saw it as a great victory. They all trooped off to Marcham to thank Thomas Duffield at his residence, and sent fulsome messages of thanks to everyone else who had supported them in the debate.<sup>16</sup> But it was more of a truce than an armistice.

There was constant sniping, but nothing really serious developed for twelve years. It was at midsummer 1856, at Abingdon, that hostilities were reopened. Merry and Court, acting in concert, complained that under the 1803 agreement Abingdon was able to send prisoners to its gaol paying only the cost of their maintenance; Abingdon was profiting to the amount of over £80 a year at the expense of the rest of the county.<sup>17</sup> At Easter 1857, Court proposed that in future Abingdon prisoners should be admitted on the same terms as those for other boroughs in the county, such as Newbury or Windsor, based on the full costs of keeping them, including staff salaries. Merry pointed out that in 1803 the only salaried staff had been the Governor, but now there were chaplains, surgeons, schoolmasters and all sorts of other officials to be paid. The old agreement needed to be updated.<sup>18</sup>

The Abingdon Corporation reluctantly agreed to arbitration. This was entrusted to an eminent barrister, William Whateley QC. His award, in December 1857, reconfirmed the agreement of 1803 as it stood, with the exception that Abingdon was now liable to make a contribution to the costs of all the prison staff at the Abingdon gaol except that of the Governor who was always a nominee of the Quarter Sessions.<sup>19</sup> The Corporation seems to have taken this as a victory, presumably since there was no mention of the county being able to close the Abingdon gaol, although in fact this was no part of the case that had been put to Mr Whateley. They had the award made a Rule of Court, which meant it became legally binding – so far as it went.<sup>20</sup>

Merry now went on the offensive, attacking on several fronts. At the Easter sessions in 1858 he proposed that the county needed a new courthouse in Reading, replacing the inadequate rooms in the Reading Town Hall where assizes were normally held. The motion called for a committee to 'inquire as to sites, to obtain plans and estimates...'. It was clear to J. T. Norris, now the Abingdon MP, and to Thomas Bros, its recorder, that Merry's intention was to make the sessions hall at the Abingdon gaol as redundant as the gaol itself. This would be, if anything, even more serious, since it was only the fact that the assizes were held there in the summer and at Reading in the winter that enabled Abingdon to lay a questionable claim to the status of county town. Norris and Bros were outvoted, by 30 to 27.<sup>21</sup> No chairman had been named for the committee, but Merry lost no time in assuming the position and choosing colleagues to his satisfaction.<sup>22</sup> Norris had obtained that the committee should have no money to pay for its work, but Merry enlisted a local architect, J. B. Clacy, who was content to produce designs at his own expense. By the summer,

a site had been chosen, plans drawn up, and the commission given to Clacy.<sup>23</sup> The new courthouse, adjacent to the Reading gaol, would be ready in 1861.

At the Epiphany sessions in 1859, T. L. Goodlake, a magistrate from Faringdon and son of the Thomas Goodlake who had previously supported Abingdon, publicly broke with his local colleagues to assert, with statistics he admitted having obtained from Merry, that the gaol was a financial burden on the county. It took only a small proportion of the county prisoners. The average daily occupancy at Abingdon in the last three years had been 14 compared to 134 at Reading, and each prisoner at Abingdon cost 2s 6d per day, compared to 1s 6½d at Reading. The Reading gaol had accommodation for 224 prisoners. The Abingdon establishment was surplus to requirements and should be closed.<sup>24</sup>

The motion was carried by a large majority and a committee set up with Merry as chairman to make the arrangements. Merry was now stretching the authority he had been given to the utmost. Abingdon mayors began to receive letters from him as from an equal. At least one was grandiloquently datelined 'Visiting Justices Board Room, Reading Gaol'.<sup>25</sup> The letters were emollient in style, making offers on the conditions on which Abingdon prisoners could be transferred to Reading, and inviting negotiation. The Abingdon council, after debate, treated them with defiance, threatening legal action in support of their rights under the 1803 agreement as redefined by Whateley. In that case, said Merry, the County would backdate Whateley's change to 1805, leaving the town with a liability of several thousand pounds.<sup>26</sup> The MP, J. T. Norris, was sent to lobby the Home Secretary, Sir G. C. Lewis, and in particular to warn him not to accept William Merry as an authorized spokesman for the magistrates.<sup>27</sup>

At the Easter sessions, Merry complained of not having had suitable replies from Abingdon to his letters. Norris insisted that Merry had no remit to enter into negotiations, but was narrowly outvoted by 19 to 17. The clerk to the county, George Bowes Morland, son of the Benjamin Morland who had been largely responsible for building the Abingdon gaol, was instructed to issue three months' notice of dismissal to the staff, which he did.<sup>28</sup>

The Epiphany and Easter sessions had been at Reading, but at Trinity Abingdon's supporters were playing at home. The proceedings were enlivened by a large and vociferous attendance of 'ratepayers and inhabitants of the town'. J. S. Bowles from Milton Hill put in a petition from 424 jurymen who would be put to major expense and inconvenience if they had to travel as far as Reading to perform their functions. Bowles was also one of the Abingdon Visiting Justices who in their routine report formally took issue with the proposed closure, which was arguably outside their competence. Norris proposed that the closure decision should be rescinded, and the vote was tied, 17:17. The acting chairman was the Hon E. P. Bouverie, of the family of the Earls of Radnor resident at Coleshill. As would later become apparent, Bouverie was sympathetic to the Abingdon case, but at this time he had no alternative but to use his casting vote to maintain the status quo. However, the motion for accepting Merry's report was negatived by 13 votes to 20, which meant that no

further progress could be made and the deadline for dismissal of the Abingdon staff would be passed. The session was noteworthy for a dramatic altercation between Merry and the Abingdon recorder, Thomas Bros. Merry had somehow obtained a letter written by Bros, which he read out, claiming it proved that improper pressure had been brought to bear on Mr Whateley and the arbitration process two years earlier. Bros was incensed at this slur on his professional probity, and had to be repeatedly called to order by the chairman. Tempers were becoming distinctly frayed.<sup>29</sup>

It was at the Michaelmas 1859 session, again at Abingdon, that the affair reached its climax. Once more there was a very high turnout both of magistrates and of the general public as spectators. It was the Earl of Abingdon, speaking formally as lord lieutenant of the county and not as high steward of Abingdon, who now proposed rescinding the closure decision because of the dissention and hostility it was causing. By tradition, the lord lieutenant was the county's senior magistrate, responsible for nominating its justices of the peace and their clerk.<sup>30</sup> The intervention of such a worthy was an indication of the seriousness and sensitivity of the issue. But E. P. Bouverie, not now in the chair, suggested that a motion would be unnecessary, since closure would in fact be outside their legal powers. The relevant legislation allowed them to close a gaol only if they were selling it in order to build a new one, and this was not the situation. There was some incredulity, but he was enthusiastically supported by Bros and Sir George Bowyer MP, of Radley, just outside Abingdon, also a lawyer; the earl's motion was withdrawn. A personal spat developed between Bowyer and William Merry, whom Bowyer seems to have despised as being only a 'small' rate-payer. In the end Bouverie proposed that the matter should be referred to a committee of the chairmen of all the petty sessions – the strictly local courts – in the country. This was carried unanimously.

What Bouverie did then was somewhat at variance with his instructions. The committee of chairmen somehow spawned a subcommittee which obtained counsel's opinion on both the questions that were troubling the magistrates. Counsel agreed with Bouverie that the gaol could not be closed without the agreement of the Abingdon Corporation, and that it could not legally be closed at all without a special act of parliament. It was Bouverie who dominated the discussion at the sessions for Epiphany 1860, giving short shrift to the protests of Merry and Major Court. Merry had, at his own expense, requested an opinion from no less a legal authority than the attorney-general Sir Richard Bethell, but had not yet received it. Bouverie, supported by Thomas Bros, questioned the propriety of such an initiative on the part of a single member. The clerk, George Bowes Morland, was asked whether it was not against standing orders. He had to admit that there were no proper standing orders that were applicable and a committee including Bouverie and Bros was immediately set up to write some. The matter of gaol closure was, for the time being, laid to rest.<sup>31</sup>

William Merry had lost a battle, but the war continued. It was in 1863 that he reached the pinnacle of his career as a recognized authority in penal matters. A House of Lords committee under the Earl of Carnarvon sat with the aim of

drafting new prison legislation. Merry was a major witness. Opinion was shifting away from reformation and towards harsher punishment as an aim of policy, and Merry was given a hard time explaining why convicts at Reading spent most of their time in idleness and were not subject to hard labour even when this had been part of their sentence. But the principle of separation still held, and he was successful in convincing the noble lords that the Abingdon gaol, where separation of convicts could not be complete, should be closed. His views were strongly supported by the government's prison inspector for the South of England, John Perry, although they denied collusion.<sup>32</sup> Merry and Perry represented distinct hierarchies coming together, if at all, only at the level of the Secretary of State, and any direct contact between them would have been regarded as improper.

The immediate result was a Prisons Bill of which Clause 3 had a single item, that Abingdon Gaol should be closed.<sup>33</sup>

Once again, J. T. Norris went to see the Home Secretary, now Sir George Grey. Grey was sympathetic, and had received many objections to the bill. It would be withdrawn. Norris sent a jubilant letter to the Abingdon council. 'So there ends all our labors,' he wrote.<sup>34</sup> He was wrong. There were at least three MPs favourable to closure – Sir Francis Goldsmid, MP for Reading; Christopher Darby Griffith resident at Padworth; and John Walter of Wokingham who was an MP for the county of Berkshire, proprietor of *The Times*, and son-in-law of Major Henry Court. They were active in the debates and committees that prepared the new bill which was to become the Prisons Act of 1865.<sup>35</sup> This had no special mention of Abingdon, but the physical requirements for prison cells to be certified for use were such as could not possibly be met there. A year later the inspector John Perry once more recommended closure.<sup>36</sup> The Abingdon Corporation were told that the Home Secretary had decided to make the order. The game that had developed was moving into its final phase, but the Corporation found it hard to recognize the inevitable.

What they did was to apply to the court of Queen's Bench for a writ of mandamus.<sup>37</sup> Mandamus is a court order which essentially says to somebody 'you are not doing something you should be doing' and forces them to do it. The claim was that by the 1803 agreement the County magistrates had accepted that Abingdon could commit prisoners to Abingdon gaol. Since this could no longer be done because the gaol did not meet the new requirements, the County should be compelled to rebuild the gaol from the ground up if necessary to bring it to the latest standards. Considering that the Abingdon gaol had been surplus to County needs for at least 25 years, the case was hardly a promising one.

The main proponent of this uncertain course seems to have been the solicitor and clerk to the town JPs, Bromley Challenor. On 22 October 1866, at the end of the normal weekly Town Sessions, when the court room was still crowded and after making sure that a newspaper reporter was present, Challenor led the Abingdon magistrates in a remarkable and very undignified rant against William Merry, John Perry and everybody else on the County side. Merry had, without any obvious authority, written to Mr Judd, the governor of

the Abingdon gaol, purporting to dismiss him and promising a generous superannuation package. Perry had impugned the physical arrangements at the gaol, when in fact, said the magistrates, it was a perfectly healthy establishment and it was at Reading that prisoners were highly likely to emerge as invalids or lunatics. Challenor was vociferously seconded by Sir George Bowyer. The town magistrates insisted, quite unrealistically, that they would continue to commit wrongdoers to the Abingdon gaol whatever the circumstances. Challenor made it clear that he, at least, was determined to continue the fight.<sup>38</sup>

As time passed, the Abingdon council began to show splits, and votes were no longer unanimous. On 8 May 1867, the mayor, William Ballard, called a public meeting at the County Hall. This was attended by the local tradesmen who would lose out if Abingdon ceased to be an assize and sessions town, and who were also the electors for the town council. The meeting produced strong resolutions urging the council to 'uphold the interests of the town'. At a council meeting the next day, the voting was 8 to 6 to continue with the mandamus.<sup>39</sup>

The result came in on 22 June 1867. The court had heard Abingdon's arguments and granted a Rule Nisi. The Council were jubilant. Once again, they thought they had won, but they hadn't. In spite of the lawyers among them, they do not seem to have understood that a Rule Nisi simply meant that the court was willing to hear arguments from both sides and then come to a definite conclusion which would be a Rule Absolute. Also, the Council did not seem to have read what the Lord Chief Justice had actually said. In his opinion, Abingdon's case had little merit, but he was allowing it to go further because a formal clarification of the relevant law might be generally useful.<sup>40</sup> If the Council had been capable of rational thought, it would have withdrawn with what grace it could muster. Their London lawyers advised them emphatically to do this; their recorder Thomas Bros said the same; so did Daniel Godfrey, their Town Clerk. Godfrey and Bros agreed that Challenor was wrong in his reading of the relevant law.<sup>41</sup> But some members of the council seemed to prefer to fight the case and lose it rather than to give up. Honour was at stake. On 3 October the vote was still 7 to 6 to continue.<sup>42</sup>

It was pointless. The case was duly heard in Queen's Bench on 23 November 1867, and it was duly and inevitably lost. It was a minor relief that the Abingdon council wasn't made to pay the defendants' costs.<sup>43</sup> The gaol was finally closed, and in spite of an anguished appeal to the Privy Council in 1868, the assizes and Quarter Sessions were moved permanently to Reading.<sup>44</sup> Abingdon seems to have managed reasonably well without them.

The gaol's contents were sold and divided between town and county; Abingdon's share was £1285. The townsfolk did not take the opportunity to demolish what they must have recognized as a very inappropriate structure to greet the visitor as he entered the town.<sup>45</sup> It was used as a grain store, then as a social centre, and at the time of writing, safely listed, is being converted into flats.

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# Slough Booms: Slough between the wars

**Tony Pilmer**

As the 1950 Slough Advisory Plan observed, the ‘small cross roads town’ of 1920 was ‘hardly recognisable as the industrial Slough of 1950’. In this article I hope to show how Slough evolved between 1918 and 1939 and to highlight the forces that made Slough the fastest growing town in Britain between the wars, with an unemployment rate at a mere 1 per cent.

## **Industry booms**

The growth of new light industrial companies caused Slough to boom, although the town’s traditional industries continued to play a significant role throughout the period. Slough’s rich vein of brick earth continued to supply all the brick production in the Borough up to 1939. The holes left by the excavated brick dust were filled by vast quantities of horse manure and refuse from London.

In 1900 the eastern end of Slough High Street was dominated by the Royal Nurseries, which occupied 150 acres. The horticultural market was quickly changing: demand from country houses before World War I to provide conservatory plants declined and was being replaced with the increasing and much wider demands of the post-war general public. Unable to adapt with the change in the market, the Royal Nurseries closed its doors in 1921. The land occupied by the nursery was quickly developed into new shops and housing as agriculture was pushed to the outlying areas. Much of the outer areas of Langley and Cippenham continued to be farmed throughout the period whilst other parts of Langley were home to specialist fruit and orchid companies and Sutton’s Seeds, which used 50 acres to produce vegetable and flower seeds along with fruit trees and shrubs.

During the interwar years Slough was fortunate to have a number of large factories with their roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following the death of his father in 1870, James Elliman Jnr opened a factory producing his famous embrocation and by 1911 the firm was exporting to 42 countries. In 1905 Elliman’s was joined by G. D. Peters, who produced railway equipment at the Gotha Iron Works, and in 1908 by James Horlick, who bought a greenfield site to produce his malted milk products. Horlick’s production grew throughout the interwar period with its peak production being reached in the 1930s. Even with these developing pre-war companies, the backbone of Slough’s massive interwar industry was to be found to the north west of the town.

Late in the First World War the Government decided to recondition and sell surplus army vehicles instead of selling the wrecks as scrap. Choosing a site close to the Great Western Railway which contained a good supply of building gravel meant that work could begin on a 660-acre greenfield site in July 1918. Here the government constructed machine shops, foundries, an assembly

plant, a paint shop, offices, a power station, a gas plant, water mains, roads and twelve miles of railway track complete with sidings and a small railway station. By 1920 it had spent £2.55 million in capital costs, but although 600 vehicles a day were brought to the site no work was carried out on them. The prospect of such large-scale expenditure without reasonable returns became the focus of press and parliamentary attention and in July 1919 the joint Houses of Parliament Select Committee on National Expenditure said that it was a 'white elephant' and 'a lamentable waste of public money' and also pointed out that there was no housing for the estimated 3,000 people expected to work there. The Select Committee believed the key problem was that the depot had been built on a greenfield site without strict cost controls. However they envisaged that the entire project could be sold for a profit. Parliamentary advice was taken and the site was actually sold for £3.35 million with a further £3.65 million for the Government's stock of surplus army vehicles. This figure was subsequently reduced to £6 million. The buyers' consortium was headed by Sir Percival Perry, who as Lord Perry was chairman of Ford UK, and Noel Mobbs of Pytchley Autocar. These businessmen soon turned the 'white elephant' into a golden goose by successfully rebuilding 10,000 vehicles out of the 15,000 units shipped to the estate and by the end of 1920 over £5m had been earned. More importantly, as the repair business wound down and smaller buildings became redundant, they encouraged a number of manufacturing companies to take their place. These included significant companies such as the Gillette Razor Company, Johnson & Johnson (which then specialized in manufacturing surgical dressings) and the Hygienic Ice Company. Long before the last truck left, an embryo trading estate was being formed.

Though the government gave the Slough Trading Company, later known as Slough Estates, the infrastructure to become an excellent base for light-industrial companies, it was not the decisive factor. A 1935 survey on businesses that chose to locate to the Slough Trading Estate shows that businesses valued the ability to rent factory buildings. This was especially important given that land and buildings often accounted for more than half the cost of establishing a manufacturing business, and removing the need to provide this cost 'up front' had a major impact on the financial barriers facing new or expanding firms.

Slough's proximity to London and its transport links had always been a key to its economic success. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Slough profited from large numbers of people travelling along the London to Bath Road, and railway travellers stopping at Slough on their way to Windsor prompted the expansion of the town in the mid-nineteenth century. Peter Scott has shown that the town's geographical location was a key factor in its interwar success. He explained that Slough was one of a number of estate developments clustered in outer-London areas adjacent to new arterial roads. As a later Slough Estates advertising film points out, companies with London headquarters could use the fast railway connection or travel along uncongested roads to visit their modern, economical factories.

Scott also highlights that success breeds success, for where there is a large number of businesses located within around two miles of each other, profitable trading links between companies naturally occur. This process was aided by Slough Estates producing and circulating a directory of businesses on the estate. In Slough, companies opened units in the estate to service the needs of the estate such as printers, box manufacturers and cabinet makers; and businesses were further helped by full branches of the big four banks and of the Post Office being located on the estate.

Slough Estates encouraged their tenants to flourish in a large number of additional ways. This is nicely illustrated by a publicity film from around 1950. The film shows that Slough Estates' London Headquarters could be regarded by the companies on their estate as their own London branch. As well as hosting an exhibition that showed potential clients the products made on the estate, there was a sales team ready to take orders for the Estate's tenants. There were a number of board rooms and a conference hall where tenants could hold meetings and training sessions. Tenants could wine and dine their clients in private dining rooms or relax in the bar and restaurant of their 'London Club'. Tenants could also use the services of a market research team.

Slough Estates also gave their tenants flexibility by enabling them to expand production simply and easily, for example Citroen opened the largest factory under one roof in Britain in 1926. In that factory Citroen began by producing 70 cars per day, but the company had a big enough building to produce 200 per day and they had the option to extend on to a 60-acre adjacent plot without having to invest money in the bricks and mortar. After 1927 smaller companies could quickly and easily obtain space after Slough Estates began to build 'off the peg' units, with a type A unit of 4,000 square feet and a type B unit double that size.



*Citroen Works on Slough Trading Estate about 1925. Source: [www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk](http://www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk)*

Citroen was joined by larger firms such as St Helen's Cable and Rubber Company, who brought their workforce from Warrington. Amongst the smaller companies attracted to Slough Trading Estate was an American firm with only £5,000 in capital and four employees. They began to produce chocolate bars with second-hand equipment in a small kitchen with its owners living in a one-room flat behind the 'factory'. Within a few short years their Mars bars became synonymous with Slough.

Throughout the interwar period the number of factories on the estate went from strength to strength:

Year	Companies on Trading Estate
1924	37
1927	65
1930	123
1933	150

By 1930 there were 10,000 workers and by 1939 this had more than doubled to 23,000. As time went on business continued to diversify. In 1929 there were 58 different types of industry represented and by 1939 there were 90.

The 1929 stock market crash and subsequent depression had an inevitable effect on Slough with a drop in demand for its consumer goods. Citroen employed 1,100 people in 1927; by 1931 this figure had dropped to 240, while Black and Decker's workforce halved from 620 to 300. Once again Slough Estates' pro-active approach helped with the implementation of a scheme under which tenants could arrange loans of up to £3,000 to help them survive. By 1934 the local unemployment rate had dropped to only 2 per cent with a dramatically increasing population.

In fact, Slough Trading Estate was not the only area of Slough where industry flourished. During the war the American Army constructed a number of buildings, together with a railway siding, as a storage depot for the US Army Engineers. In 1920 the site was taken over by Naylor's, an oil and varnish factory from Southall, with the cost of the move off-set by the sale of equipment left behind by the Americans. Initially a lack of heating led to ink freezing and, as there was no electricity, varnish had to be cooked over coke fires, and paints were mixed by hand. By 1926 Naylor's had become well known for making paint and, after a merger with Nobel Chemical Industries, the company became ICI Paints.

Pasold's, the company that was known by its brand name, Ladybird, and which became synonymous with clothing from Woolworths, moved into the town almost by accident. Eric Pasold visited a number of potential sites, and while he was trying to find a possible site in Uxbridge, he took a wrong turn and ended up at an almost square meadow south of Langley Station which was to be developed into housing. Pasold believed that he had found the location of his dreams and, by his own admission, fell in love with the sleepy village. After persuading the developers that they could build their houses elsewhere and

fighting through strong local opposition, by June 1932 his new factory was complete.

## The human side of industrial expansion

Mr André Citroen, speaking to the *Slough Observer* in February 1926, pointed out that his big problem was recruiting manpower. He could employ 2000 growing to 5000 but 'they all come from London and they are naturally not very glad to spend 45 minutes on the train. If Slough would provide the houses it would be a fine thing for us, and also, it would be a fine thing for Slough. We could make Slough a much bigger town.'

However, it was not just shortage of manpower but a shortage of workers with the right skills. In a speech made by the publicity manager of the O-Cedar Mop Company, it was claimed that the youth of Slough needed to be a boy or girl with ambition, willing to be taught and with a good work ethic. The cinema was blamed as a bad influence!

This lack of manpower produced a sellers' market and wages spiralled. In 1920 those working for Slough Trading Estate's new owners received a 25 per cent Christmas bonus and Saturday morning shifts were stopped. Surprisingly this cut in workers' hours was made without any loss in efficiency.

It also opened up job opportunities to women with the right skills. By 1929 39 of the 58 industries on the Slough Trading Estate employed females and by 1947 women were employed in heavy industry such as brass and copper works as well as toy, cardboard box and hosiery manufacturing.

The demand for people with the right skills led to people from across the country coming to fill job vacancies. Between 1921 and 1939 there was a 123 per cent increase in the population, 105 per cent of which was from migration.

Year	Population	Increase %	Natural growth %	Migration %
1891	5427			
1901	11453	111		
1911	14982	31		
1921	20200	35		
1931	33490	66	8	58
1939	52590	57	10	47
1947	63660	21	10	11

Some of these workers were brought to the area by the Ministry of Labour's Training Centre, some followed family members who had found work, and others just heard about it on the grapevine. When, for instance, St Helen's Cable and Rubber moved from Warrington to Slough, many workers moved with them.

Slough mainly attracted labour from South Wales, London, the north east and the north west. As with the rest of the country, there was also transfer of people from rural to town settings with Slough attracting those from North Buckinghamshire, Wiltshire and the south west.

Understandably, the new migrants who came to Slough liked to live together with others who came from their part of the country:

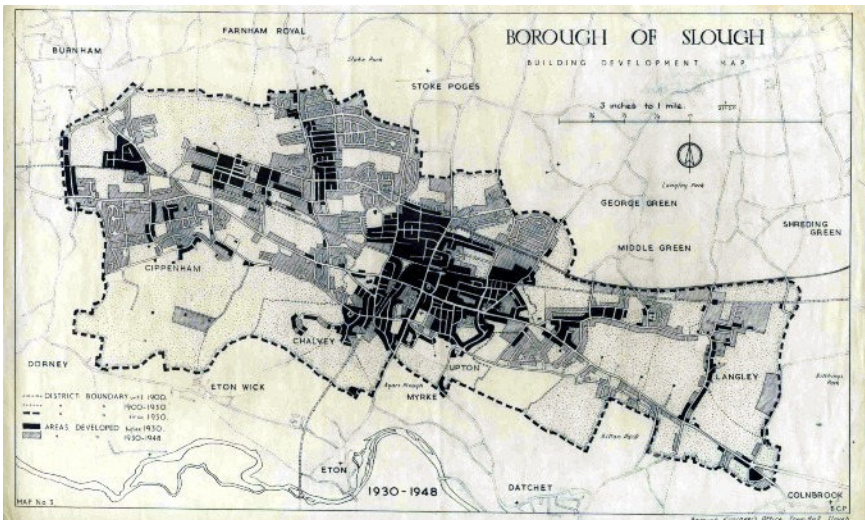
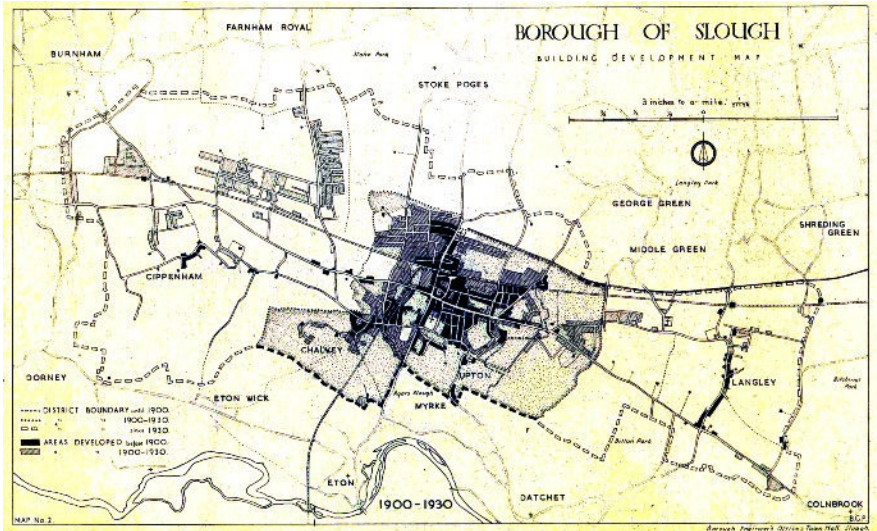
	Percentage of residents on housing estate
South Wales	Manor Park 47.5 Baylis Court 33 Cippenham Council Estate 23
London	Ditton Park 43.5 South Burnham 56 Huntercombe 9
North-Eastern England	Cippenham Council Estate 23 Upton Lea 18
North Western England	Ditton Park 10 Manor Park 7

Social tensions arose between those with roots in different parts of the UK, though they were not uniform. These included tensions between the Welsh and those from Slough and the north, and additional tensions between workers from the north west and those from the north east.

As Mr Citroen pointed out, this placed a heavy burden on Slough's housing stock. In a letter preserved in Slough Library's cuttings collection, Norah Eveleigh recalled that 'lodgings then meant four or more men to a room and as men came off one shift, last shift men got into the recently left beds. The men in the house provided their own food and the landlady cooked it, Saturday's was always sausage and mash.' Other people found accommodation in 'Timbertown', a collection of old War Office wooden huts on the site now occupied by Herschel Grammar School.

Fortunately, moves towards better housing were quickly started by Slough Urban District Council. In 1919 the council started the Stoke Poges Lane Housing Scheme which constructed over 200 houses at a cost considerably lower than houses being built elsewhere. The Slough Official guides said they were planned on Garden City lines and made a 'most favourable impression on visitors'. Though Stoke Poges Lane was only a small development, Slough Urban District Council worked with private industry to build estates containing both private and council-owned housing so that by 1938 2,000 working class dwellings were owned by the council. This approach was not shared by the neighbouring Burnham Parish Council, where, for example, the 1937 plans for 60 additional council houses only provided 20 new houses with the remaining 40 reserved for those who lived in sub-standard housing.

The historian Judith Hunter believed that the 1930s spurt of council house building was prompted by the extension of the Slough Urban District in 1930-31 which brought Cippenham and the parts of Langley Marish to the south of the Grand Union Canal under the enlarged local authority's control. In June 1930 the enlarged authority agreed terms with Messrs P. Ellis and Co. to build Manor Park, which was a mixture of private and council-owned housing. Council housing at Manor Park was followed by council housing at the Meadfield and Upton Lea estates and other developments in Chalvey, Cippenham and Baylis



*Maps of 1930 and 1948 showing the growth in the urban area of Slough.  
Source: [www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk](http://www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk)*



Court. By 1938 the council owned over 2,000 working class dwellings. In addition companies such as Mars helped by buying houses for their workers, and Slough Trading Estate put aside land for 2,000 houses.

## **Meeting the needs of a booming town**

Most of Slough's water was taken from boreholes that were sunk into the chalk, which soaked up water in wet periods and which could then be pumped out at will. A new borehole was made in 1925, which went down 225 feet and could pump 50,000 gallons per hour, followed by a 36-inch hole in 1929 powered by electricity with a duplicate steam-powered pump in case of electrical failure.

The New Dorney sewage works were finished in 1926 but it was not until December 1930 that Slough's Health Committee could consider stopping emptying cesspits. Ever growing demand on the system led to the construction of the Chalvey Sewage Works between 1936 and 1940. By 1937 the smoke was coming out of the council's rubbish destructor in Chalvey, perhaps one of the earliest such facilities in the country.

The population growth led to a greater demand for burial space. At the beginning of the period Central Slough's cemetery surrounded St. Mary's Church. However by July 1929 £6,000 were set aside to create a new cemetery. Though the preliminary layout for a new cemetery was completed by November 1929, the first burial was not performed until 1932.

Throughout most of the period Slough residents living outside the old workhouse would need to visit the Edward VII Hospital in Windsor if they required hospital treatment. Though there was an isolation hospital in Cippenham and numerous private nursing and convalescent homes in the Borough, it was not until July 1939 that land around Stoke Road was purchased for a hospital and it was a year later before the town had a centre that could deal with medical emergencies.

The school system also required rapid expansion. According to C. L. Smyth, the new schools were regarded as exceptionally well planned, with those built to meet the needs of the new Manor Park Estate being regarded as a model of a well-built school at a very low cost.

Churches did not see a comparable expansion, perhaps owing to the previous generation's extension of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches within the district. Even so the Salvation Army, Quakers and Christian Spiritualists opened their doors for the first time between the wars, the Methodists laid the foundation stone of their Central Hall in 1932 and what was planned as a temporary Anglican church was built to serve the residents of Timbertown.

Between 1930 and 1931 the area within Slough Urban District Council's boundaries increased from 1,684 to 6,202 acres. Though mainly farm land, it also included the trading estate, Langley and Cippenham: areas which would be rapidly changed from green fields to housing over the following 30 years. Slough's Surveyor, Alan Bromly, soon identified areas in the newer part of the town that needed extra investment; these new projects joined others from the

older parts of the town so that between 1930 and 1938 the *Slough Observer* reported that his department had been very busy and that he had signed off over £1,000,000 of contracts alone.

Slough Urban District Council was not the only organization that was charged with developing local infrastructure. An Act of Parliament of 1925 gave Slough Trading Estate powers to build roads, and lay power cables, water and stream mains and drains. Once again, Slough Estates was investing money to ensure that its tenants could prosper.

## Entertaining a growing population

In Victorian times Slough had already established a number of clubs and societies to keep the town's people entertained during their free periods. These included the Leopold Institute and Public Hall which provided a library, lecture space and a hall for music and drama. The Chalvey Club offered a meeting place for the men of that area of town and there were sports facilities in Chalvey and Salt Hill Park and at the Dolphin Grounds.

Notwithstanding, Alan Bromly, who was the Town Surveyor for all but a few of the interwar years, lobbied vigorously to ensure that parkland and playing fields were developed. He started by extending Salt Hill Playing Fields and from 1921-22 a boggy meadow at Salt Hill was transformed by unemployed labourers into the Salt Hill Pleasure Ground. This opened in around July 1925 and a putting green was set out in the 1930s. In 1934 the Montem Pleasure grounds were opened complete with a spring-fed open air swimming pool, though his plans to build quite an important sports centre on part of the Montem Pleasure Ground would not come to fruition until the current sports centre was opened in 1975.



*Salt Hill Recreation Ground around 1920.*  
*Source: [www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk](http://www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk)*

Bromly was also keen that green spaces were developed alongside new housing. In what is now the Central Ward, Councillor Bowyer donated playing fields bearing his name on 30 April 1930, while Lascelles Playing Fields and Upton Court Park were laid out in the early 1930s. A failed attempt by the council to buy a part of the Baylis House Grounds in the late 1920s was successfully reprised in 1939. In addition to parks and playing fields, the council purchased Stoke Road allotments in July 1925 and land for Upton allotments in January 1926.

Village and club libraries had operated before the First World War, although it was not until 1918 that Buckinghamshire County Council started to deliver boxes of books to different places in the county. On 23 September 1924 the YMCA's Oakley House began to house 1000 public library books and by 1934 high levels of demand led the County Council to convert an old chapel into the first dedicated and fully equipped public library room in Buckinghamshire. This move was supported by Slough Council who agreed to charge a 'differential rate' to cover the cost of rent and maintenance. As well as a central library, satellite libraries were opened in Cippenham and on the Farnham Road. At this time all of Slough's libraries were staffed by volunteers and, at its peak, around 50 of Slough's citizens were rotated to help issue books, organize stock and run the service. In response to public demand for a larger and better service Slough's first purpose-built and professionally run library was opened on 8 December 1939, though the population had to wait until after the end of the war before a dedicated children's library was fully opened. Once again this was supported by the local council who gave the site of the new library to the County Council, though with the understanding that once again the county met the full cost of running the library.

Slough's first cinema opened on 1 August 1910 when Herbert George Wilson started showing films in a hall at the back of the Crown Hotel in Windsor Road. This was one of the first cinemas in south east England. It became very popular and Mr Wilson hired a larger room at the town's public hall, although it was not until 1921 that central Slough had its first purpose-built cinema in the shape of the Palace Cinema.



*Inside the Palace Cinema about 1936.*

*Courtesy of the Reg Harrison Collection*

*[www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk](http://www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk)*

Nine years later it was joined by the Adelphi Cinema, the first of the town's super cinemas with 2,014 seats, a dance hall with sprung floor, a stage for live shows and wrestling and a free car park at its front. In 1936 came the Ambassador Cinema on the Farnham Road, followed by The Granada with '2001 armchairs' on 25 March 1938 and the Commodore Cinema at Cippenham on 30 November 1938.

Residents found additional entertainment for themselves. Judith Hunter pointed out that one of the most successful centres of entertainment was an unoccupied hut in Timbertown which was used for a large variety of activities including meetings, dances and fetes and led to further demands for a small community centre in the new Manor Park Estate.

Once again Slough Estates and their tenants played a significant role. Soon after they moved to Slough Trading Estate Aspro's opened a separate canteen building and sports fields, while their theatre club was famous for their annual pantomimes. By the late 1920s, with the growing number of companies on the trading estate, inter-company sports increased with cricket matches, football matches, bowls and hockey being regularly played.

Workers were also able to use one of the most famous innovations relating to the trading estate: the Slough Community Centre on Farnham Road. In a story retold by Michael Cassel in his book *Long Lease*, the centre was prompted by a local rector who admonished Sir Noel Mobbs, chairman of Slough Estates, by wagging his finger and saying that 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself: you have all these people walking about in the streets in the evenings and committing crimes and it is all because you don't make any provision for their spare time.' Costing £45,000, half of which was paid for by Slough Estates and Sir Noel's own pocket, it offered a hall which could accommodate 800 people, an Olympic-sized swimming pool and provided a home for more than 150 local clubs, including the local branches of the Citizens Advice Bureau, the St John Ambulance and civil defence. It was officially opened in April 1937 by Queen Mary, and was visited in December that year by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, who famously played a game of darts there – greatly increasing the popularity of the sport nationwide. The centre was the first of its kind in the world and prompted visits by industrialists from the United States and elsewhere. The local rector was proved to be correct: levels of youth crime were also reduced.

## Proud to be Slough

When the expanding council outgrew its office accommodation consideration was given to buying a new home befitting the town's growing importance. The council proposed purchasing one of the most striking buildings in Slough: the Licensed Victuallers School. The proposal did not find favour at a rate payers' meeting in September 1930. This meeting declared that the council already had too much money from residents and they wanted the rates reduced 'to the lowest possible limit' whilst keeping housing as the first priority. Instead of purchasing and renovating the former school building the town erected a

modern Town Hall, which Pevsner's guide described as a Swedish style neoclassical building with a graceful bell turret and pretty framed centre windows.



*Slough Community Centre around 1937.  
Source: [www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk](http://www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk)*

The sense of pride in Slough came to the fore in 1938 when it was granted a town charter and Borough status. As well as a day of events including parades, speeches, a great lunch, music fairs and dances, some of which was relayed by the BBC, the town was granted a new coat of arms. The town's pride in its past was expressed through references to William Herschel, brickmaking and agriculture, but the coat of arms is dominated by the forces that dominated interwar Slough: Mercury, the God of Commerce, and Vulcan, the God of Industry. The confident mood of the time was captured by its Latin motto which can be translated as 'by confidence and strength.'



*Arms of the Borough of Slough  
Source: [www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk](http://www.SloughHistoryOnline.org.uk)*

The new arms were not the only ones designed in the 1930s. At Chalvey's 1935 Stabmonk Carnival, Mr J. H. Pusey dedicated a crest of his own design to the people of Chalvey. The crest, divided into four quarters, illustrates how one man saw his part of town: brush and soap for Chalvey's washerwomen, a large perambulator filled with squalling babies representing Chalvey's traditional large families, tankards of beer for Chalvey's beer drinkers and smoking chimneys for the council's rubbish destructor.

## **Making Slough Happy?**

Alan Bromly, Slough's outstanding Borough Surveyor, wrote in his 1938 resignation letter that it was:

with some satisfaction that I look back on the past 19 years during which I have been privileged to assist in the transformation of a small urban area, with waterbound roads, bad lighting, poor water supply, inadequate drainage into a large Borough with efficient public services.

The trends behind this transformation can be detected before the interwar period. Slough's location at the Windsor junction for a major route from the capital to the west has always been its greatest strength, but it needed the Government's decision to erect a vehicle depot near Slough to ignite a boom. During the 1830s a similar boom in Slough's population was promoted when Eton College blocked the Great Western Railway going through Windsor as they were concerned that easy access to the capital would prove to be too great a lure for their pupils. As a result the railway was placed through Slough and this provided the impetus for Slough to become the biggest town in south Buckinghamshire and prompted the development of the infrastructure required to support a larger population.

The success of industry after the Second World War has continued to pull in immigrants. Post-war planners were confident that Slough businesses could find employment for Londoners who were housed on purpose-built estates and in the following decades these were joined by waves of people from, most notably, the Commonwealth and Eastern Europe.

The interwar local government not only ensured that the basic infrastructure required to run a modern town was put in place, but excelled by establishing excellent facilities such as parks and schools which would serve Slough's ever evolving population well into the next century.

The overriding advantage that the interwar expansion had over its nineteenth-century predecessors was in its industrialists. Slough Trading Estate made full use of its former depot and was proactive in nurturing its tenants, whether by giving them flexibility to expand their factories or defer rents during tough economic conditions. Just as James Elliman Jnr gave pre-war Slough a park, drill hall and fire station, Slough Trading Estate strove to improve the lives of the workers by building leisure facilities and encouraging house building. As with James Elliman, they succeeded in making a success of their investment. By the early 1950s each of the original shareholders had quadrupled their original investment.

Though great strides were made to make Slough's infrastructure meet the needs of its expanded population, with ever greater expansion there was still work to be done. In 1946 Slough & District Civic Society ran a survey called *The Slough that I want*. Results showed that there was a clear demand for more planning to deliver 'arterial traffic routes... [preventing] Slough, already too big, from endless ribbon development and swallowing up satellite villages', a cultural centre, neighbourhood units with cinemas and schools, ample open spaces and swimming pools, social centres, arts theatre, music and up-to-date schools; in fact, building on much of the work that had been undertaken during the interwar period. However, the suggestion that councillors should pass tests before being allowed to join the council was not adopted. The survey also showed that the housing stock remained a problem, with demands that all new houses should have bathrooms and heating equipment and that the borough should supply slipper baths as not everybody had a bathroom. It was considered that these post-war housing pressures would only increase with every growing demand for workers from Slough Trading Estate and elsewhere.

Fundamentally, the acid test for any such survey should be whether the people of Slough were happy in their new urban area. An interwar report on social cohesion suggested that the answer was yes, with just 25 per cent of those living in Manor Park wanting to go back to their home towns, while the vast majority of men did not wish to go back and those from the north would only go back home if they had a job and house, and there is no reason to think that the following generations of Slough men and women would disagree.

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## Ann Smith and Katie Amos

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