CHAPTER ONE

THE NAME OF THE PARISH

Upton appears first in 1086 in Domesday Book as Opetone (1).   When the manor was granted to the Prior of Merton in 1156 it was spelled Hupeton (2), and in 1217 it was spelled Hupton (3), but from 1218 onwards it was usually spelled Upton (4) or Uptone.(5)

The name is self-explanatory, 'Upper' referring to its situation in relation to the low-lying land to the south (6), although Lipscombe suggests it was from 'Up teme', upon or near the Tame or Thames (7).

Chalvey appears first in 1217, when it was spelled Chaueia (8).   The name seems to have presented special difficulties to earlier scribes, who wrote it as Chalfheye (1227) (9); Chalfeye (1237-40); Chalveye (1242); Chauuaye (1247); Chelefaye, Chalueye and Chalfey (1262) (10); Challvey (1524) (11); Chosway (12) and Chalvy (13) (1635-8).

'Chalv' is from the Old English 'cealf', and the name means 'calf-island'.(14)

THE NAME OF SLOUGH

The first recorded mention of Slough was in 1196, when it was spelled Slo (15).   In 1336 it was spelled Sloo, but this may have been a slip of the scribe's pen (16).   In 1437 it appears as Le Slowe (17), or Slowe (18).   It was first spelled Slough or le Slough in 1443-1444 (19).   It was usually written as le Slowe, Slowe, or Slow (20) in the 15th and 16th centuries, and these variations continue to a late date.   Maps of Buckinghamshire in my possession show 'Slow' in the 18th century, although it appears to have become stabilized as Slough in the first half of the 19th century.

Various theories have been advanced to account for the origin of the name.   Phipps (21) attributes it to a corruption of the word Slow, which was the name of the open land in that part of the parish called in old documents 'The Slow Field' to distinguish it from the Upton Field.   Burne (22) supports the theory that it was derived from a slough or morass.   He quotes Miss Major, whose relative, Mrs. Major of Langley (who was born in 1794) stated that the name was given to a wet, miry place which used to exist between the Crown Hotel and Salt Hill.   Another local inhabitant told him that when the foundations for the shop on part of the site now (1972) occupied by Sainsbury (No. 208, High Street), were laid about 1883, a slough of black mire about 10 or 12 feet deep was discovered, and had to be dug out before the building could be erected.   There is also a good deal of evidence that there was a morass on the boundary between the parishes of Upton-cum-Chalvey and Eton (23). That there was a very bad slough there, well-known to fame, at the beginning of the 17th century, is suggested by Shakespeare making Bardolph say of the cozeners 'as soon as I came beyond Eton they threw me off ... in a slough of mire'.   (Merry Wives of Windsor, Act IV Sc.5)

W.S. Shears (24) advanced a theory that the name was derived from the sloe-fields formerly to be found in the neighbourhood, but when I wrote to him, could give no documentary proof of this derivation, which was due to a statement made to him by a local inhabitant.   W.H. Fussell (25) informed me that this theory had no real foundation, apart from the abundance of sloe-bushes then to be found in the neighbourhood.

There are other places named Slough in Monmouthshire, Herefordshire and Radnorshire, although they are too small to be marked on any but the largest scale maps, but in view of the fact that wherever the name of Slough occurs, it refers to a place on or near a morass, it seems reasonably certain that the origin of the name of this town is due to the existence of a morass in former times, and is derived from the O.E. 'Sloh', meaning a slough or mire.(26)

There was a strong agitation towards the end of the 19th century in favour of changing the name of Slough to Upton Royal (27).   Richard Halliday (28) told me that in 1882, placards were displayed in the town, purporting to announce that its name had been changed to Upton Royal, but a resolution was passed by the Slough Urban Sanitary authority on 9 March, 1882, deprecating such change, and the idea was abandoned.

GEOLOGY

The geology of Slough (29) has played a great part in the settlement, land-use and economy of the district. The town is built on the Taplow Terrace, one of the several river terraces in the Thames Valley which show the varying levels of the flood plain during the last million years. The underlying solid foundation of chalk is covered by some 18 ft. of gravel, above which there is from 3 to 9 ft. of brick-earth.

The fertile top soil, with its excellent drainage, is highly productive. It was utilized for agricultural pursuits in earlier centuries, and led to Slough's development as a horticultural centre in the 18th and 19th centuries. The underlying chalk provided fertilizer, and the Lower Greensand a plentiful water supply.

The alluvial deposits of brick-earth have been utilized for brick-making for over 500 years, and the gravel, sand and shingle, more recently, for the manufacture of ready-mixed concrete.

Since the first half of the 20th century, the level, well-drained surface of the Taplow Terrace has proved ideal for the development of the town, with the gravel and brick-earth providing material for building and road-making.

The gravels of the Slough area, which were washed down by the Thames during the Pleistocene period, when the river was continually shifting its course, consist of flints with pebbles of quartz and quartzite. Stone implements are found in the Terrace gravels, and animal bones in the Flood Plain gravels. Mammoth tusks have been found at Cippenham, Ditton Park and Taplow.

The chalk beneath Slough is of great thickness. Much information about the solid strata has become available from deep well borings, particularly those carried out in 1909 at Horlicks' Malted Milk Factory, and in 1920, at the Slough Motor Transport Depot (now the Slough Trading Estate). The well at Horlicks was the first to be bored to a depth of over 1,000 feet, and aroused widespread interest. It was reported in the national, as well as the local press. There was also a long report on it in The Engineer on 5 November, 1909, which was reprinted in the Slough Observer on 13 November, 1909. By the kind permission of Mr. Graham West (30), I give below a table showing the thickness of the formations encountered:-

	Horlicks		*Motor Depot*	
Formation	*Thickness*	*Depth*	*Thickness*	*Depth*
	Ft.	*Ft.*	*Ft.*	*Ft.*
Soil and drift deposits	24½	24½	23½	23½
Reading Beds	54	78½	5½	29
Upper Chalk	463¼	541¾	276	305
Middle Chalk	154¾	696½	225	530
Lower Chalk	139½	856	192	722
Upper Greensand	19¼	855¼	28	750
Gault	166¼	1,021½	249½	999½
Lower Greensand	13	1,034½	131	1,130½

The height of the area within the present Slough boundaries varies only from about 60 to 140 feet above sea level, the lowest part being in the south, and the highest towards the north.

It is to its geological features, which give excellent drainage, and a plentiful supply of pure, although hard, water that Slough owes its enviable reputation for the good health and longevity of its inhabitants. The ages of those buried were not recorded in the parish registers until 1807, but since then there has been a number of centenarians, one of whom reached the age of 106, and many who have attained the age of 90 and over.

PREHISTORY

Although many interesting prehistoric sites and relics have been found in the district surrounding Slough, little has been found within the area of the Borough itself.

In the Paleolithic period, the Thames was a very much larger body of water than at present, and probably covered the greater part of the district. The removal of great quantities of surface material in medieval times for brick-making, and the growth of the town, also make the possibility of further discoveries very remote, but keen archaeologists can find ample compensation in the immediate neighbourhood, with evidence of occupation in Paleolithic and Mesolithic times in the Colne Valley at Iver; of the Bronze Age in the Colne Valley and Taplow; and of the Iron Age in the great camp in Bulstrode Park, Gerrards Cross; and at Taplow.

Roman villas and other sites have been excavated at Bray, Maidenhead and Staines; coins . everywhere, including one in Milton Road, Slough, and another in Herschel Park. There is also a known Roman road from London to Silchester crossing the Thames at Staines, and the possibility of tracing others. The line of a road from Rickmansworth through Middle Green, Langley, to Staines (31) is especially promising.

Further afield, there are many other sites, and a comprehensive review, gazetteer and bibliography of finds made in the Middle Thames area up to 1966 is given in The Middle Thames in Antiquity. (32)

Much additional information has been obtained since the formation of the Middle Thames Archaeological and Historical Society in 1954. Members watch closely all the excavations necessitated by the building of roads and other modern developments. They have also undertaken excavations and surveys, which are described in the Society's News Bulletin.

The dating of these prehistoric periods has been revolutionized since 1950 by the use of the radio-carbon (C14) method of dating, which suggested that the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods began at least 800 years earlier than had been thought previously. Now a second radio-carbon revolution is taking place, which will affect the dating of the Bronze Age (33). Until the new techniques have been developed fully, it is no longer possible to be so positive in the dating of the various periods of prehistory, but the general picture remains the same.(34)

SAXON UPTON

The Anglo-Saxons appear to have invaded Buckinghamshire from the east coast area of the Wash, along the Icknield Way, and first occupied the Vale of Aylesbury and the north of the county, but the Upton-cum-Chalvey area, with its marshy land, was less immediately attractive for agricultural settlements. The earlier settlements were on higher ground, as at Taplow (35), where a pagan Saxon chieftain was buried (A.D. 610-620) with magnificent gold ornaments, drinking horns, cups, glass and bronze vessels (36), all of which can be seen now in the British Museum.

All present day Buckinghamshire fell within the area of the West Saxons, and remained part of the Kingdom of Wessex until the end of the 8th century, when King Offa of Mercia (d. 796) extended his kingdom, and it became a part of Mercia, after the battle of Bensington in 777 or 779. It remained in Mercian hands until the revival of Wessex under Egbert, 50 years later, and the consolidation of the English kingdom.(37)

The West Saxons were Christianized by missionaries sent from Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, by its first bishop, St.Birinius 'The Apostle of the West Saxons' (d. 650) (38). There is a tradition that the Saxons of this district were converted by St.Birinius himself, and that he christened the converts in Bapsey Pool, in the grounds of the present-day Taplow Court (39). They remained in the See of Dorchester during the whole of the Saxon period, apart from 105 years (659-764) in the Diocese of Winchester.

The majority of the places in this neighbourhood are of Saxon origin, and easily traceable to that time by the terminology of their names. 'Stoke' denotes a Saxon settlement defended by a ring fence or stockade (e.g., Stoke Poges); 'eye' is a corruption of the Saxon 'ea' or 'eyot' meaning an island or islet (Chalvey, Boveney, Dorney); 'ham' refers to a homestead or meadow (Burnham, Farnham, Denham, Cippenham, and also Iver, the name of which was given in Domesday Survey as Eurcham); 'ton' has a similar meaning, but may denote a village of rather later date (Upton, Eton, Horton); and 'bury' signifies a fortified manor-house or town (Wraysbury).

A Saxon church may have stood on the site of Upton church, but it was most probably built of wood, and all trace has been lost. In fact, nothing whatever is known of Upton before the time of Edward the Confessor, yet so much is known of Saxon England as a whole that an approximate reconstruction of life there can be made, although there are still some details which are not quite clear.

Every Saxon household owned a definite number of acres of ground, in accordance with the status of its head, and each household paid tribute to the lord of the manor, such tribute usually taking the form of a definite proportion of produce, or work performed on the lord's demesne.

During the Saxon period, the agrarian community was stabilized by a 'careful allotment of arable and meadow and the regulated use of common and forest' (40). This 'curious blend of corporate endeavour and private ownership' (41) came to its full fruition in the later years of Saxon rule during which it is fairly certain the parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey originated.

The land round the village was divided into open fields, and each field was marked out in strips, in order to ensure a fair distribution of good and indifferent land being made, the strips allotted to each family being scattered over the whole area. One field was left to lie fallow each year, and wheat, rye, oats and barley were grown on the other field, of which barley was especially important, as it provided both food and drink. (42)

The privately owned strips of land were worked jointly under the direction of the Reeve, or headman of the village, with the aid of communal ploughs. Sheep, pigs, cows and horses were allowed to graze on the waste outside the open fields, or on the fallow field, and were tended by one or two villagers on behalf of the others — probably by those not strong enough to work in the fields. The village also had a mill to grind the corn, and fisheries to be attended to, where the parish of those days ran down to the bank of the Thames. Every parish in the neighbourhood which could possibly manage to do so, had eel fisheries in the Thames, which accounts for the curiously elongated shape of some of the neighbouring parishes in earlier centuries.

It is almost certain the Upton men had their eel traps somewhere near the present day 'Black Potts' and Datchet railway bridge.

Each parish also had a woodland area to supply firewood and an opportunity for pigs to graze on the beech-mast. This is possibly the explanation for Upton Wood becoming a detached portion of the parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey.

Once a month four men of the village had to walk up to Stoke to attend the Hundred Court and give evidence in any law suits and complaints affecting the village. In the course of time a track was made from Upton to Datchet as the men went down to the eel-traps, creating the line followed by the road from Slough to Datchet which existed until the new Datchet road was built in 1961-2. Another track was worn northward to Stoke, probably by way of the present Wexham Road from Upton, and by Stoke Poges Lane from the Chalvey area. The Bath Road may also have originated in the Saxon era, as the bridge across the Thames at Windsor was constructed to link the Norman Castle with the road through Eton to 'the road from London to Henley'. (43)

In addition to their work on the demesne land, the men of the village owed military service to the lord of the manor, when called upon to perform this duty, and in the case of Upton, there can be no doubt at all that the last phase under Saxon rule was the calling up of every able-bodied man of the village to aid King Harold, who was lord of the manor of Upton, in his last fight for his crown. Even if Upton men did not help to win the great victory against Harald Hardraada at Stamford Bridge, they must have joined the king in London during the six days he spent in the capital mustering men, and so they surely went on at least part of the marvellous forced march to the Battle of Senlac. (44)

NOTES

1. V.C.H. Vol. I, p. 232
2. Heales, p. 18
3. E.T.R. p. 115
4. LincolnG, quoted by Mawrer, p. 243; and LincolnP., Vol. II, p. 50.
5. LincolnP., Vol. I, p. 198
6. Mawrer, p. 243
7. Lipscombe, Vol. II, p. 271, Note 1
8. E.T.R., p. 115
9. C.R.J.E., p. 37, No. 418
10. Mawrer, p. 234 (Note: This is given incorrectly in Mawrer's index)
11. S.R.B., p. 26-7
12. S.M.P. p. 71
13. Ibid. p. 95
14. Mawrer, p. 234 and the Oxford Dictionary
15. C.P.P. 42-44/vii0/51. p. 109
16. Burne, p. 42
17. T. & D., Vol. I, p. 341 (ff.)
18. V.C.H., Vol. IV, p. 301; Mawrer, p. 243
19. Accounts of the Clerk of the Works, Eton College
20. V.C.H., Vol. III, p. 301
21. Phipps, p. 9
22. Burne, p. 42-43
23. Slough Observer leading article, 11 August, 1923
24. W.S. Shears, This England (1936) p. 371
25. William H. Fussell (1861-1944)
26. Mawrer, p. 243; and Oxford Dictionary
27. Bentley, Notes, p. 13
28. Richard Halliday (1871-1964)
29. Fuller details of the geology of Slough and its neighbourhood can be found in V.C.H. Vol. I, pp. 1-23; M.T.A. pp. 11-13; and Bentley, Notes, p. 9-12
30. Mr. Graham West, The Geology of Slough and District, N.B.M.T., Vol. II, No. 11, p.12
31. Mr. E.V. Parrott has begun to trace the line of a Roman Road which has been given the number 163B.   It runs southwards from Chorleywood.   For his report on this road, and details of other roads from Verulamium (St.Albans), see: Roman Roads in the South-east Midlands, compiled by a group of people calling themselves 'The Viatores', of whom Mr. Parrott is one.
32. The Middle Thames in Antiquity, edited by R.F. Denington and S. Morgan, in collaboration with H.W. Catling, published by the Slough and Eton Branch of the W.E.A., (1966).
33. Current Archaeology, Vol. II, No. 7, 18 January, 1970, pp. 177; 180-184
34. A good general background picture is given in a readable but authoritative form by Gordon J. Copley, An Archaeology of South-east England, a Study in Continuity (Phoenix House, Ltd., 1955)
35. M.T.A., p. 33
36. V.C.H., Vol. II, pp. 199-204
37. ibid. p. 196 and 205
38. ibid, Vol. I, p. 279
39. On the west side of the public footpath from Old Taplow churchyard to Mill Lane
40. Loyn, p. 155
41. ibid.
42. The Saxons were extremely fond of their mead, and it was considered an insult to the host of any gathering if the guests were still 'above table' when the meal ended.
43. T. & D., Vol. I, p. 106
44. The Saxon background is based chiefly on Loyn, which has a very comprehensive bibliography. Chief among other works consulted were:- V.C.H. Vols. I and II; M.T.A., p. 33-34.   For the general background of Anglo-Saxon England, the classic work is still F.R. Maitland's Domesday Book and Beyond (1897), reprinted in a Fontana edition, 1960.   Among a wide range of other standard works are:- R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myers, The English Settlements (1956); Sir Frank Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England (1936); R.H. Hodgkin, A History of the Anglo-Saxons (first published, 1935; 2nd edition, 1939); P. Hunter Blair, An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England (1959); The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Everyman Edition).