

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SPORTS, AMUSEMENTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Apart from pony races at Chalvey in the 18th century, and Meets of the Royal Buckhounds and the Berkeley Hunt, there is no mention of any kind of sport in Slough before the middle of the 19th century. It cannot be doubted that the people of the parish, like all other villagers, indulged in village sports, but in earlier days they were wholly dependent upon Windsor for other sporting amusements, as they still are for racing and polo.

Bare-fist contests were held in Windsor Great Park, attracting spectators from far and near, in the days when such matches were still illegal. On at least one occasion they were broken up by Bow Street Runners, who arrested the pugilists and any of the spectators they could catch. (1)

The Slough Cricket and Bowls Club has almost certainly had the longest continuous existence of any sports club in Slough. It has played on its ground in Chalvey Road East since 1899, and prior to that at the Dolphin Ground. An annual match between Slough and Colnbrook was reported in the Windsor Express in 1860, and it is believed the Club was in existence at least ten years earlier. (2)

Football on organized lines dates back to the formation of the Football Association in 1863, and this district became a pioneer centre of the game, although it is not known exactly when the first Slough team, The Swifts, began playing. The Swifts won the Berks and Bucks Trophy outright in 1882, and continued playing at the Dolphin Ground until the late 1880's. (3)

The Slough Town A.F.C. (The Rebels) was formed in 1890, and has played on the Dolphin Ground ever since, but will move to a new ground in Wexham Road when it is completed. (4)

League competitions were introduced to football at the end of the 19th century, and before the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, all the local clubs competed in the Great Western Railway Suburban League, formed of towns having stations on the G.W.R. — a convenient arrangement before motor-coaches became general. (5)

No Rugby football was played by Slough schools until after the 1914-18 war. Then, with so many Welshmen settling in the area between 1918 and 1939, the Slough Rugby Club, which plays under Rugby Union rules, was founded in the 1928-29 season. After the 1939-45 war, the Club settled at Tamlyn Field, Upton Court Park, and built its own pavilion. (6)

The closing years of the 19th century, and the beginning of the 20th saw a great increase in spare-time activities in Slough. The No. 5 (Slough) Company of the South Bucks Rifle Volunteers (see p. 121) was formed, and also various Youth organizations.

The First Slough troop of Boy Scouts was formed on 6 June, 1908 by uniting two groups of Boy Scouts from St. Paul's Church Choir and a local school. The only earlier troop in Buckinghamshire was that at Wolverton. The old Slough District was split into four in 1951/52, and there are now 16 groups in the Borough, most of the groups consisting of a Cub Scout Pack, Scout Troop and Adventure Scout Unit. (7)

The 1st Slough Company of Girl Guides was formed in 1915 by Mrs. P.H. Eliot, wife of the Rector. There are now 22 Companies in the Borough. (8)

The Boys' Brigade was founded in Slough on 21 May, 1925, and now has six Companies in Slough, and others in the immediate neighbourhood. (9)

Sports Clubs included the Chalvey Harriers and the Slough Wheelers, who disbanded during the 1914-18 war, and re-formed in 1920 as the Slough Athletic Club. (10) Many other outdoor activities were encouraged by the increasing provision of Playing Fields.

Up to 1907, the only Playing Fields in the Urban District were those at Chalvey, but in March, 1907, James Elliman handed over 26 acres of land, complete with 'The Barn', a lodge, boundary

fences and trees. He insisted upon these Recreation Grounds being called 'The Salt Hill Playing Fields', and resisted all appeals to allow them to be named after him. The total cost of the contract for laying out the grounds and buildings was £21,750, and Mr. Elliman gave another £10,000 to create an endowment fund for the upkeep of the grounds.

To-day there are Playing Fields and open spaces in all parts of the Borough. (11)

There was no organized boxing in Slough, as far as is known, until Mr. George Bennett established a Training Camp at the Dolphin Hotel, Uxbridge Road in 1932. Before it closed towards the end of 1937, it was a training centre for such notable boxers as Tommy Farr, Ben Ford, Jack Doyle, Primo Carnera, Marcel Thil and Midget Wogan.

Mr. Bennett also opened a Greyhound Racing Track in the Dolphin Ground in 1928, which was taken over in 1936 by the present Company the New Clapton Stadium Co. Ltd., as the Slough Greyhound Stadium. (12)

Indoor amusements were mostly provided by amateur societies, which frequently reached a very high standard. Concerts were given to raise money for any special cause, such as the building of St. Mary's Church, or for popular entertainment.

A very fine Choral Society was formed in 1897. The Slough Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society gave its first dramatic performance in the same year, and its first Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Week in 1905. The Society had the benefit of male principals drawn from the Gentlemen of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and Eton College Chapel, and became one of the best Amateur Operatic Societies in the Kingdom.

The Royal Bohee Operatic Minstrels, with their motto 'Fun Without Vulgarity', also dated from this period, and the Ohio Minstrels who, about 1900, became known as the Slough and Chalvey Black Diamond Minstrels. 'The Madcaps' also gave concerts, and there were Twopenny Popular Concerts in the Public Hall every Saturday night. (13) Penny Readings were very popular. Several of these clubs and societies held annual dinners, and added very considerably to the pleasure of life in Slough before the 1914-18 war.

Fitch's Roller-skating Rink was opened in 1911, on the site now occupied by part of J. Isaacs (Slough Ltd.) Furnishers' showrooms 251, High Street. The rink flourished until the 1914-18 war, struggled on until 1915, but eventually closed. It was pulled down in 1929. (14)

CINEMAS

The first cinema was opened in 1910 by Herbert George Wilson, then landlord of The Crown Hotel. He formed a small private company, the Slough Picture Hall Co., of which he was the Managing Director, and gave shows in a hall at the back of the hotel. The film industry was then in its infancy, and the Company was a pioneer of moving pictures in the Southern Counties. The cinema proved so popular that the large hall of the Public Hall was subsequently hired for some years, until Mr. Wilson formed a new public company, the Slough Picture Theatre Co. Ltd., and built the Palace Cinema, on the site of Purser's double-fronted butcher's shop in the High Street. It was opened on 1 September, 1921, by Major-General C.W. Carteret Carey, representing H.R.H. Princess Alice of Athlone. Among the items shown at the opening performance were the tenth episode of the serial *Elmo the Fearless*, starring Elmo Lincoln; a film of Stanley Weyman's novel *A Gentleman of France*, starring Eille Norwood and Madge Stuart, and 'The Incomparable Nazimova' in *Billions*, 'A fascinating story of a woman who dared all for love'.

The Palace Cinema was re-named The Century Cinema in 1949, and was demolished to make way for the Waitrose Supermarket, which opened in September, 1959. (15)

Another Picture Hall was opened in July, 1911. This also closed during the war. It was disused until it was incorporated with Harris's Motor Garage in August, 1922. This site, later occupied by Bacon's Household Stores, and numbered 161, High Street, is now incorporated in Isaacs Furnishing Stores, 251, High Street. (16)

Chalvey had its own cinema in February, 1912. It was opened by Mr. George Bennett, of the Dolphin Hotel, Uxbridge Road. After a year, he sold it to a brother of Malcolm Scott, the comedian, and it remained open until after the outbreak of war. (17)

The Adelphi Cinema, built on the site of two early Victorian mansions 'Montem' and 'Montrose', grew from a suggestion of Councillor E.T. Bowyer and Frederick Iona Smith, who were among the nine directors. It was designed by Eric Norman Bailey of Maidenhead, and built by H.D. Bowyer & Sons. It was opened on 17 February, 1930, with 'News Magazines; a full-length film *On with the Show*, 100% All talking, singing, dancing and colour', which was 'reproduced by Western Electric Sound System'; and a stage show by Kingsley Lark and Elsie Griffen, from the London Coliseum. The Adelphi had a spacious stage for live shows, and a fine ball-room, in addition to its large auditorium. (18)

The Company, headed by F. Iona Smith, sold the Adelphi to the Granada Group in 1971, and at the time of writing (1973) it is closed for conversion into a Bingo Club. (19)

The Ambassador Cinema, Farnham Road, was opened on 17 February, 1936 by Glennis Lorrimer, who was then working on a film at Beaconsfield with Claude Hulbert.

The feature film was *China Seas*, starring Clark Gable, Jean Harlow and Wallace Beery, with a supporting film *The Girl Who Came Back*, featuring Shirley Grey. The second half of the week, *Bonnie Scotland*, starring Laurel and Hardy, was shown.

The opening ceremony was attended by Col. H.W. Burton, M.P., the Mayor and Mayoress of Windsor, and the Chairman and Councillors of the Slough Urban District Council. The admission charges were 6d., 9d., 1/- and 1/3d. for stalls, and 1/3d. and 1/6d. for the balcony. (20)

It became a Bingo Hall in 1967.

The Granada Cinema was opened in March, 1938, by Leslie Howard. It advertised the '2001 armchairs' and its 'Wurlitzer organ'. The films for the opening day were *It's Love I'm After*, starring Leslie Howard, Bette Davis, and Olivia de Havilland, and *Artists and Models*, featuring Jack Benny, Ida Lupino, Richard Arlen, Gail Patrick, and the Yacht Club Boys. Dudley Beavan was at the organ. (21)

At the time of writing (1973) it is proposed to transform the large auditorium and the restaurant into a 'Three in one' cinema. (22)

The Commodore at Cippenham was built by the Manor Park Construction Co. Ltd. The Managing Director of the Commodore Super Cinema (Slough) Ltd. was Sidney Jones, and the opening ceremony was performed on 30 November, 1938, by the Mayor of Slough (Alderman E.T. Bowyer), with Captain G. Garrow Jones, M.P., in the Chair. Valerie Hobson and other famous film stars made personal appearances, and the films included *Start Cheering*, with Jimmie Durante, Walter Connolly, Joan Perry and Charles Starrett, and *Deanna Durbin in Mad About Music*, with Herbert Marshall and Arthur Treacher. A special attraction was Andrew Conti, 'The World-famous Organist', at the Commodore 'Wonder Organ'. (23) The Commodore became the Essoldo Bingo Club about 1965. (24)

SOCIETIES, CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS

The longest-established Societies still in existence in Slough are the Salt Hill Society (mentioned earlier), and those connected with farming, and various Friendly Societies.

To-day the clubs, societies and associations of Slough cater for such a wide range of sporting interests, hobbies and cultural and social activities that it is impossible to list more than a few of them.

The Slough and District Civic Society, founded in 1937, does excellent work in helping to preserve features of historic importance, and local amenities, and to stimulate interest in Slough and its surroundings by arranging meetings, lectures, exhibitions, publications and visits to places in Slough and its neighbourhood. The Society is non-political, and non-profit making. The first *Slough Civic Gazette* was issued in March, 1938. (25)

The Slough Philharmonic Society came into being during the early years of the 1939-45 war, when a few musically-minded people met at the Slough Social Centre (now the Community Centre). The decision to form the Society was taken in 1941, with the intention of catering for local musicians, and those who were in the Forces, and stationed locally. Lt.-Col. George Miller, who had recently retired as Director of Music, Brigade of Guards, was the first Conductor, and the first concert was given at the Centre in 1942. As interest grew it was decided to form a Choral Section, and Choral and Orchestral concerts have been given regularly each year. After Col. Miller there were various conductors, including Dr. Sidney Watson, Precentor of Eton. (26) Guest conductors included (Sir) Basil Cameron and Richard Austin.

Among those who appeared as guest artists at its Celebrity concerts, shortly after the end of the war, were Heddle Nash, Frederick Grinke, Ivor Evans, Victoria Sladen, Trefor Jones, David Lloyd, George Pizzy, Elsie Suddaby and Angus Morrison, (27) More recently, Denis Matthews, Peter Katin, and other well-known musicians have appeared.

The orchestra now numbers between 40 and 50, and the chorus about 120. Four concerts a year are given, instead of the previous two or three annually. (28)

Among other groups providing classical music in Slough are the Broadheath Singers, who have joined with the Windsor Sinfonia to give concerts in St. Mary's, Slough. They specialise in rarely-performed and unrecorded works of such composers as Elgar, Schubert, Dvorak, Fauré, and others which have suffered undeserved neglect in this country.

The Middle Thames Archaeological and Historical Society was founded in 1954, and the News Bulletin, which has been invaluable in the compilation of this history, first appeared in Spring 1962. Lectures and excursions are arranged, and members have carried out a number of excavations in the area.

An excellent survey of archaeological sites and finds in the neighbourhood, *The Middle Thames in Antiquity*, was published in 1966, as the result of the collaboration between members of the Class in Archaeology, held at Slough by the Workers' Educational Association. The Local History Field Group of the Slough and Eton Branch of the W.E.A. has published a *Survey of South Bucks Villages in 1851*. A *Survey of Upton-cum-Chalvey in 1851* has been completed, and will be published later this year.

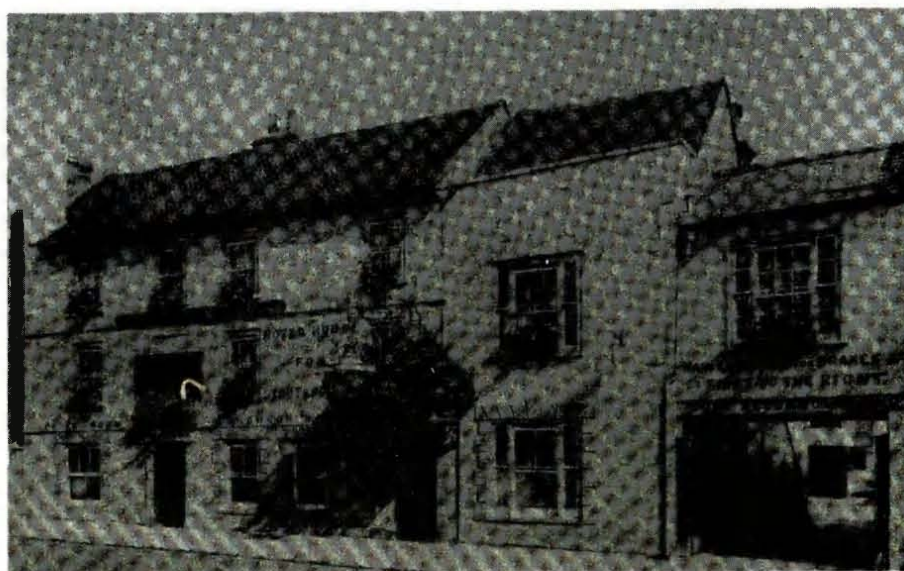
The Slough Art Society, founded in 1941, has been fortunate in having as its first Chairman the distinguished artist, Mr. Vincent Evans, A.R.C.A., (29) who is now President of the Society. Members of the Society have rendered a lasting service to the community by portraying picturesque old buildings of Slough and its neighbourhood before they were lost for ever by demolition. Exhibitions of paintings are held. (30)

The Slough Picture Collection Society, founded in 1950, besides holding exhibitions and lectures on Art, has a scheme for lending original paintings or good reproductions of Old Masters, suitably framed, to firms and individual subscribers. (31)

NOTES

1. Windsor Express, 150th Anniversary Supplement, August, 1969, p.26.
2. Mr. E.F. Smith, Hon. Secretary, Slough Cricket and Bowls Club, kindly gave me this information.
3. Windsor Express, op. cit. p.26.
4. I am indebted to the Slough Town Football Club for this information.
5. Windsor Express, op. cit. p.26.
6. I am indebted to the Slough Rugby Football Club for the date of foundation.
7. I am indebted to Mr. W. Paine, Acting County Commissioner of the Boy Scouts, for this information.
8. Personal information and the Slough Public Library.
9. I am indebted to Mr. S.A. Tyler for this information.
10. Councillor A.W. Pusey kindly supplied this information.
11. I am indebted to Mr. Norman Berry, Town Clerk of Slough, for this information.
12. I am obliged to Mr. George Bennett for this information.

13. Programmes of all these musical groups are in my possession, including a complete set of programmes of the Gilbert and Sullivan productions, and post-cards showing the casts of the various operas.
14. Information from my parents. My Mother was an accomplished skater, and won a prize for waltzing on roller-skates at Fitch's Rink.
15. Information from a Souvenir Description, and a Programme of the opening performance, in my possession. I am also indebted to Mr. George Wilson, son of H.G. Wilson, for some of the details. Mr. B. Rider, Head Office, Waitrose Supermarkets, Bracknell, kindly supplied the date of the opening of the Waitrose Supermarket at Slough.
A map of 1910 shows the first cinema, incorrectly, as on the site now occupied by the loading dock of Messrs. Woolworth's, instead of behind the Crown Hotel.
16. Information from my parents, and from personal knowledge.
17. I am indebted to Mr. George Bennett for this information.
18. Souvenir Programme of the opening, in my possession. It has a photograph of the two villas which formerly occupied the site.
19. Slough Express, 13 October, 1972.
20. Advertisement in the Slough Observer, 14 February, 1936. This advertisement claims the Ambassador Cinema was the 'first in the area to be equipped with the Western Electric Sound System', but this is misleading, to say the least. The Adelphi Cinema was equipped with the Western Electric Sound System when it opened in 1930.
21. Slough Observer, 25 March, 1938.
22. Slough Express, 13 October, 1972.
23. Souvenir Programme of the opening, in my possession.
24. Information from the Essoldo Bingo Club.
25. Information kindly supplied by Mr. S.G. Spelman, Hon. Secretary of the Slough and District Civic Society, and personal knowledge.
26. I am indebted to Mr. David Rose, Hon. Secretary, Slough Philharmonic Society, for this information.
27. Personal knowledge.
28. Information kindly supplied by Mr. D. Rose.
29. Mr. Vincent Evans, who was born in Wales in 1896, and studied at the Swansea Art School and the Royal College of Art, London, was Art Director of the Technical College at Wanganui, New Zealand from 1922 to 1933, before coming to Slough in 1941 as Art Master at the Slough Grammar School. He was Art Tutor at the Slough College from 1961 to 1968. He was Examiner in Art to the London University for 12 years, and Chief Examiner in Art to the Central Welsh Board for 30 years. He has exhibited in the Royal Academy, the Royal Water Colour Society, the Leicester Galleries and many others, and his paintings have been purchased by the War Artists' Exhibition, the National Gallery, the Glyn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, and the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. (See: Who's Who, and Who's Who in Art.)
30. Information kindly supplied by Miss Gladys M. Totman, Hon. Secretary of the Slough Art Society, and Mr. Vincent Evans, the President.
31. Personal knowledge.

42. *The Reindeer*, 1897