

# BUCKSLOW AT SWANBOURNE AND OTHER SAXON MOUND NAMES IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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*It is suggested that the furlong name Buckslow, Swanbourne, may indicate the former presence of a burial mound. Other recorded Buckinghamshire names containing the Old English hlæw element are listed and briefly discussed in the context of whether they may indicate a burial mound of Saxon or earlier date, a hill, or a mound or hill used as a hundredal mound.*

Buxlow is the name of a farm at the southern end of Swanbourne parish. The open fields of Swanbourne were enclosed in 1763 (Tate 1946) and a map in the County Record Office, thought to indicate the immediate post-inclosure situation, shows no buildings where the farm now stands (BRO IR/119.A). However, a deed dated August of the same year which clearly relates to this piece of land, refers to 'All that new erected Messuage or Tenement' (BRO D/FR/9). Jefferys' county map of 1787, more of a sketch and on a much smaller scale, indicates a cluster of buildings in the area, with the name Mount Pleasant associated. In 1823 unnamed buildings are shown on the site of the farm on a plan of proposed alterations to the Wendover-Buckingham turnpike (BRO T3/70). These buildings are named as 'Buckslow Farm' on Bryant's county map of 1825 (Fig. 1) and also on a more detailed plan of 1828 (BRO D/FR/10/2). Bryant indicates also the proposed turnpike modification, which by 1828 had been constructed. The new road is followed by the present A413, leaving the old road, in part, as a greenway.

Jefferys' siting of the Mount Pleasant 'settlement' appears to lie in what were at the time cultivated open fields, and might be an error. Buckslow, from which the farm took its name was, however, a name of some antiquity since it appears in a glebe terrier of 1639:

The tillage of the South feild .... a lande at Buckslow John Addams lying on both sides

(Reed 1997, 198)

In 1639 Buckslow was, therefore, a furlong name. Given such a distinctive name there seems no reason to doubt that the farm name reflects the approximate location of the earlier furlong. The transcription by Professor Reed of this group of terriers, which includes numerous early field names, is certainly most welcome.

It is with some trepidation that one who is not a place name specialist draws attention to an apparently significant name, but it is probably uncontroversial to suggest that the second element of Buckslow is likely to be the Old English word *hlæw*. This word is commonly used to describe an artificial mound and occasionally a hill. The use of *hlæw* in the former sense is particularly common in the southern half of England, and the matter is fully discussed by Gelling (1988, 134–8).

Mawer and Stenton (1925) did not include Buckslow in their pioneering study of Buckinghamshire place names, but do note eleven instances of the element *hlæw*, to which list further examples can now be added.

Buckslow Farm is sited on one of a number of gently elevated plateaux in Swanbourne and Hoggston parishes lying at around 400' (122 metres). There is nothing particularly notable about the location, although from the highest point in its fields there are views for about a mile around. Its gentle gradient and lack of prominence make it superficially unlikely that it would be considered a



Fig. 1: Extract from Bryant's map of Buckinghamshire showing Buckslow Farm and the road diversion

'hill'. However, a little surprisingly, the name South Mead Hill is attached to one field to the west of the farm (BRO D/FR/10/2). Some distance east of Buckslow lies Hoggeston village and to the west runs the Oakham Gutter (possibly originally the Swan or Swain Bourne; Baines 1980, 5), which ultimately drains into Claydon Brook. The farm lies close to the parish boundary between Swanbourne and Hoggeston.

The land around the farm is currently part pasture and part arable. In several fields there are the remains of ridge and furrow indicating medieval cultivation and the former presence of open field furlongs. The most prominent area is now divided in two by the modern road diversion. To the east the ridge and furrow has been heavily ploughed; to the west it is still visible and includes the outline of one distinct furlong defined by traces of an NE-SW headland with its corner near the highest point.

This general area seems a topographically suitable location for a *hlæw* site.

In his studies of Buckinghamshire charters Dr Baines observes that the *hlæw* element can mean either a hill or a mound (Baines 1972, 172). Two of the examples he discusses are prefixed by *rugan* 'rough', namely those in Over Winchendon (Baines 1972, 169), and in Rowley in Chetwode/Hillesden (Baines 1972, 172 and 1982, 26-27). In these instances the suffix might refer to something on the scale of a hill rather than to an artificial mound, as may also be the case with Wantlow in Gawcott (Harman 1934, 115, reference kindly supplied by Dr Baines). However, other *hlæw* names in charters, including *Hildes hlæw*, Olney (Baines 1979, 157), Winslow *Wineshlauue* (Baines 1980, 2), which are prefixed by personal elements, together with Shucklow - *Scuccanhlau* 'devil's mound', Little Horwood (Baines 1980, 14), seem

more likely to refer to artificial mounds. A recently rediscovered survey relating to the same general area, transcribed by Dr Baines, adds *wealdes hlāw* – wood hill/mound, and *dyddes hlāw* Dudslow. Although the former could refer to a hill, the latter is again more likely to be among those incorporating a personal name (Bull and Hunt 1996, 91, 100).

The Linslade Charter includes *seofan hlawan*, the *midlestan hlaw* and *anum hlawe* (Reed 1979, 173–6; Baines 1983, 119). The absence of any naming prefix leaves little room for interpretation, although Reed accepts the mounds as burial mounds without demur. It may be noted that the undoubted barrow group on Dunstable Down (pre-historic, but reused later), just over the border into Bedfordshire, are known as the Seven Knolls, so Reed may well be correct. Dr Bailey has also kindly drawn my attention to references in the Luffield Cartulary to *hedeneslowe*, *hedeneslawe* and *le lowen* in Thornborough, which probably refer to the two well-known Roman barrows, and also to *le lowfurlong* in Wolverton (Elvey 1968 & 1975) which is specific enough to suggest another certain barrow site rather than a hill. Wolverton parish contains both a number of archaeologically excavated ring ditches – the ploughed down remains of barrows, and two extant mounds.

Several Buckinghamshire *hlāw* names are the names of hundreds – the late Saxon administrative divisions of the County and undoubtedly the sites of their meetings, namely: Seckloe, Moulsoe, Cottesloe, and probably Rowley or Rowlow (noted above, Baines 1982, 22–23, 28–29). However, the hundredal pattern was not constant (for example in Oxfordshire; Blair, 1994, 108). Hundreds could be amalgamated and earlier meeting places which may have been mounds, consequently cease to have any significance.

Clearly any mound, whether thrown up in pre-historic times or freshly constructed or reused in the early Saxon period, could have been subsequently utilised as a hundredal meeting place. Many certainly were. Hooke, writing of the situation in the West Midlands (Hooke, 1985, 99–101), notes a number of instances where hundredal mounds were demonstrably also burial mounds. In Buckinghamshire, Adkins and Petchey (1984), describing the excavation of the hundredal Secklow

mound, showed that hundredal mounds are not necessarily burial mounds, since Secklow lacked any evidence for a burial. They argue that some hundredal mounds at least were specially created for this purpose. Dr Baines (*in litt.*) notes that this was certainly the case with Oswaldslow, created in 964 for a new hundred named after Bishop Oswald (Birch 1885–93, no 1135).

Further Buckinghamshire *hlāw* names that are neither recorded in charters nor as hundredal names, include Taplow, Creslow, Bledlow, Couseslow (Hartwell), Hawkeslowe (Wing, Young 1959), and Grimlowe, Water Stratford. The latter, like Buckslow, appears as a furlong name in a terrier of 1639 lying in West Field, Water Stratford (Reed 1997, 222) and has not apparently been recorded previously. Reed notes the significance of the *grimr* element indicating perhaps ghost mound (Reed 1997, xxiii), or possibly Woden's mound as in Grims Ditch (Gelling 1988, 140), but passes no comment on the *hlāw* element. Marlow has not been included since here the second element is thought to have other origins (Ekwall 1960, 315). There are undoubtedly other place and field names containing the element of which the writer is unaware.

The clearest evidence of an early Saxon date for a *hlāw* in Buckinghamshire is of course Taplow with its rich seventh-century burial; Bledlow is probably another instance (Farley 1992), and a possible third is Couselow, Hartwell, presuming that Couselow equates with the known Saxon burials of Cursley nearby. It is likely that mounds with probable Old English personal names attached e.g. 'Hild's *hlāw*' or *Wineshlauwe* may likewise be burial mounds either of Saxon construction or re-use. However to name a mound *Scuccan* (ghost or demon mound) or *Grimlowe* (perhaps Woden's mound) implies that its primary purpose had been lost sight of and that it had acquired pagan associations. This is likely to be particularly the case with mounds of prehistoric date or the rarer Roman mounds, such as the possible instance at Thornborough. It may be noted, however, that one of the few *hlāw* completely excavated in relatively recent times, Hawkeslow, near Wing, like Secklow, contained no trace of a burial (Young 1959).

To return to the particular case of Buckslow, however, A furlong is a small and clearly defined piece of land in a common field and its name frequently can be demonstrated to relate to a very local feature, e.g the commonly occurring 'Windmill furlong'. In discussing the township of Grendon in Northants, David Hall notes a fairly clear association there between a furlong name, Longlow, and known barrows recently destroyed (Hall 1995, 274). The Buckslow furlong name similarly seems likely to refer to a feature of limited extent, very probably a barrow sited near the crest of South Mead Hill. More controversially, one might ponder on whether the 'Buce' element could be a personal name – perhaps the same as that included in Buckinghamshire (Baines 1985, 53). Clearly this would make the existence of such a mound rather more significant for the County's history!

Personalities apart, if there was a Saxon burial mound at Buckslow, it adds one further small element to the relatively sparse archaeological evidence for early Saxon occupation in Aylesbury Vale north of the Stone/Aylesbury ridge. It also again draws attention to the considerable historical benefit from making available field names, as Professor Reed has done in this instance.

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