

## Sowley House and the Ironworks, 29 May 2015, by Catharina van der Vorm and Emma Page

Sowley

Catharina van der Vorm

First of all a warm welcome to you all. The committee of the Beaulieu History Society asked me to give an introduction to the lecture by Emma Page which will follow.

It was in August 1985, when we moved from the Netherlands to England, that we bought Sowley House. It seemed as if it had been waiting for us because when we stepped into the office of the estate agent in Lymington, Sowley House had only just come onto the market.

We moved in in October 1985. We found an empty house, a bunch of keys on the kitchen worktop – all the lamp bulbs removed and a thousand empty champagne bottles in the cellar.

With the help of a brilliant architect we tried to restore as much as we could in the original Georgian style. Of course we were intrigued by what we found. Slowly it dawned on us that Sowley was a place of great local historical interest of which the ironworks are perhaps most important. I have asked Emma to tell you about that and then I will tell you more about the house and the garden.

With the house came the stables, now called Sowley House Cottage, built in 1856, a derelict greenhouse in an empty walled garden.





A charming garden shed built after 1960, now converted into a studio, a swimming poolhouse, also most likely built after 1960, now converted into a studio.



Also a cute (if I may use that American word) little Privy with an outlet into the stream running from Sowley Pond, along Sowley House into the Solent, most likely 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Garden wise, there was not much of interest. A few hydrangeas, marigolds, some climbing roses over the beautiful old walls. Talking about these walls, why were they built? And what was their purpose? One was part of a big barn, all demolished. Were the others part of farm dwellings for the many agricultural labourers who used to live and work here? There are still many unanswered questions.



A few words about how we found the grounds and landscape and how it may have looked before. On this picture one can see the enormous change occurring in 30 years. The tide comes in, the tide goes out leaving the mudflats for the waders to graze.

We see a fence to keep the ponies out and to leave the dogs in.



We created a ha-ha which as a result one doesn't see the fence any more giving an uninterrupted view. To make the ha-ha was possible because the grounds are slowly sloping down to sea level. Before the sixties this was all one endikement until the sea broke in demolishing the sluice gate which was never repaired after the sixties.



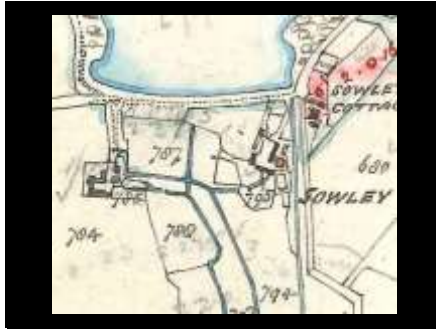
Looking at the landscape now we see this enormous lagoon created after the sea closed it off completely throwing up a shingle bank – five years ago. With the enormous amount of shingle the sea tends to close off the stream as well, working from Sowley Pond to the Solent. It means that as the Sowley Estate is responsible for the freeflow of the stream so it needs to bring in diggers to open it up.



The reed beds have increased dramatically.

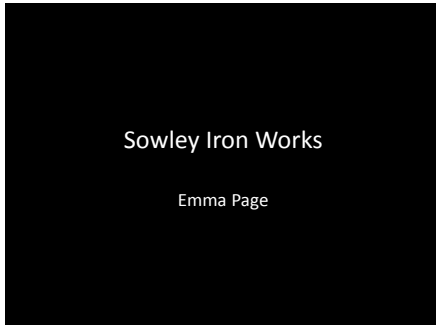


Sadly the hemlock has also increased, which means we don't see the fields of marsh orchids any more this time of year.



According to old maps, such as this one from 1867, channels had been dug out for drainage. One can also see that there were footpaths or causeways crossing the fields to the west and to Sowley Farm.

Now I will hand over to Emma Page.



Thank you, Catharina. I am now going to give you a brief summary of the history of the ironworks at Sowley. For this talk I have been spoilt by having so much excellent research already done on the subject, particularly by Jeremy Greenwood – A history of the ironworks at Sowley, 2005 and Alan Bartlett - The Ironworks at Sowley in the manor of Beaulieu 1600-1820, 1974 (unpublished). And of course I have to thank Susan Tomkins, the Beaulieu Archivist.



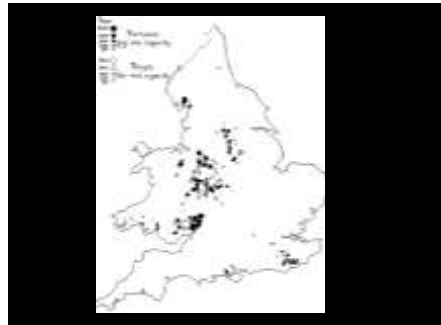
I'd like to start with a satellite view of Sowley courtesy of G Earth.



You can compare this to Sowley in 1820. This illustration shows the two together.



The 1820 map doesn't mark the iron works but the field to the south-east of Sowley Pond is called 'Great Furnace Close'.

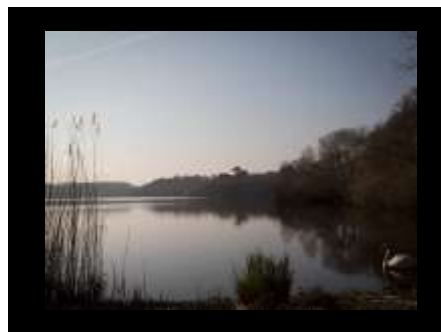


This is a map of the iron furnaces and forges in England and Wales in 1717. You will notice that one of each are shown at Sowley but most are either in the Weald, in Sussex or Kent, or in the north and west, close to coal fields. So the question I'd like to address today is:

Why was there iron-making at Sowley and why had it ceased by 1820?



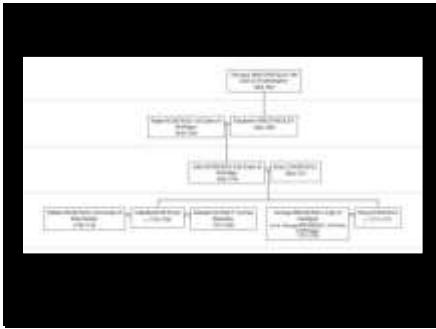
The Cistercian monks at Beaulieu Abbey set up their first iron works in 1270 but there is no evidence that it was at Sowley. Sowley was one of their farms and, like Otterwood, which the Society visited in 2014, had a grange. The Cistercians built a causeway to create the 'great pond' at Sowley, originally used for fishing.



The Cistercians built a causeway to create the 'great pond' at Sowley, originally used for fishing.



At the dissolution of the monasteries, Beaulieu Abbey was partially demolished and some of the stones were used to build Hurst Castle. This is one of the stones in Sowley grounds which is said to have fallen off the back of the wagon.

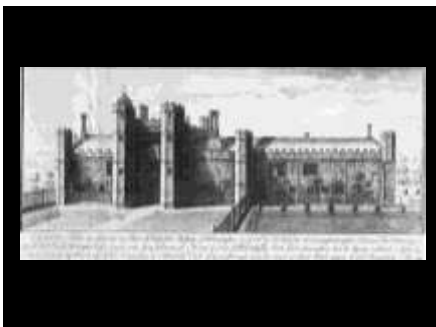


The Abbey was granted to Thomas Wriothesley, later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Southampton. The lands passed down the male line to Thomas, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Southampton but then went down the female line to John Montagu, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Montagu and then on down the generations from his daughter, Mary Montagu. She is Mary and Ralph Montagu's 5-times great-grandmother (and incidentally and my 6-times great-grandmother).



Why is this relevant to the Sowley iron works?

The 4<sup>th</sup> Earl's grandfather, Anthony Browne, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Montagu, had set up an ironworks in West Sussex by 1585. The Earls of Southampton's main seat was not Beaulieu but Titchfield, close to the iron industry in Sussex.



The first two mentions of iron works at Beaulieu were in the early seventeenth century:

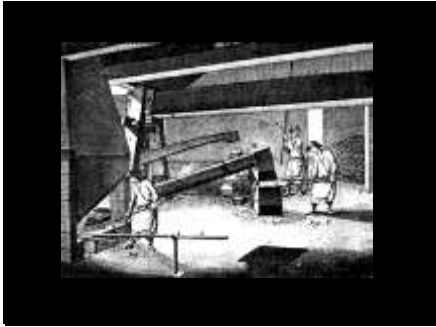
A reference in 1605 to 'the newly erected ironworks at Bewley and Titchfield' which were leading to a scarcity of wood.

A lease in 1625 of iron works at Bewley and Titchfield to Stephen March. He lived on the Isle of Wight but also had an estate at Battramsley.



What did iron works look like? By the sixteenth century, iron was made by the Walloon process.

The first stage was to the production of pig or cast iron in a Blast Furnace, such as the one shown here. This used iron ore, limestone and charcoal although later on, charcoal was replaced by coal.



The next stage in the Walloon process was to use hammers to beat the cast iron into bar iron.

So why was there iron making at Sowley?

There are five things you need to set up a successful iron works.



First is a supply of iron. This lump of haematite was found in the grounds at Sowley.



And you can see evidence of iron deposits – the iron coloured sheen - in the pools in the wild bits of the garden. There was also iron at Hordle cliffs and iron was also shipped in to local ports from Spain and Sweden.



Second, you need a reliable supply of water to drive the bellows of the furnace and power the forge hammer. Beaulieu, with its tidal pond, could not provide this. Sowley Pond, on the other hand, with its stream running down to the Solent could.



Third you needed fuel to heat the furnace and charcoal to make cast iron. That meant that you needed a forest which you could coppice. Beaulieu was unique because it was in the New Forest but exempt Forest law including the New Forest Act of 1698. This was designed to turn the forest from a hunting ground into a source of timber for the navy and banned coppicing.

### In summary you need

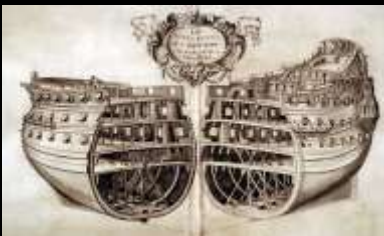
1. Iron
  2. Water
  3. Fuel – charcoal
- Also
4. Market for the end product
  5. Money

In summary you need:

- Iron
- Water
- Fuel in the form of charcoal or better still coal
- A market for the end product, and last but not least
- Money to keep the furnace and forge in working order.



The Dukes of Montagu provided both the market and the money. At the end of the seventeenth century, Ralph, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Montagu spent about £2,000 (equivalent to over £150,000 in 2005) building a new forge at Sowley and repairing the existing furnace. In 1700, he leased the iron works at Sowley, as well as several properties in Beaulieu to Henry Corbett. Corbett was a master blacksmith and ironfounder originally from the city of London.



Corbett had been commissioned by Edmund Dummer, the Surveyor of the Navy, to design and build the new iron gates for the dockyard at Portsmouth. Edmund Dummer was a skilled draughtsman and here is a drawing he did towards the end of the seventeenth century. Dummer also appears to have put his own money into developing the iron works at Sowley. However this was not a financial success.



However, Dummer's other business had run into difficulties. One of his ventures was to build packet boats for the navy and two of these were built in the Beaulieu River and tallowed on the beach at Lepe. He also operated a packet boat service, starting in 1702, from Falmouth to the West Indies. This was a risky business. Ten of his nineteen packets were captured by privateers and two were wrecked. In 1711, he was declared bankrupt and committed to the Fleet prison, where he died in 1713, leaving his wife and daughters destitute.





The ironworks at Sowley were taken on by his brother, Thomas, who operated the works until 1716 when he left in a hurry, leaving four years rent unpaid. This is a close up of the Beaulieu Estate map in 1718 showing Sowley just after Thomas Dummer had left it.



Edmund Dummer, the naval architect, is often confused with another Edmund Dummer. The second Edmund Dummer, probably a distant cousin, was a lawyer and also the Montagu's Steward at Beaulieu. He was rather more successful. When he died in 1724, a large marble memorial was erected in his memory at St Mary's Church, South Stoneham.



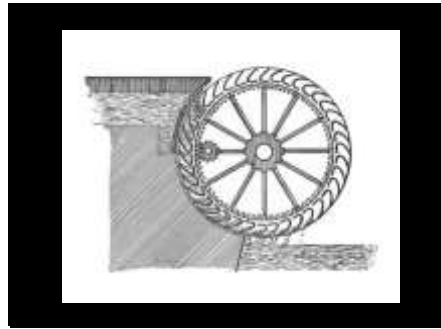
By now the Sowley Ironworks were owned by John, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Montagu. He had ambitions to develop his own 'Montagu Town' on the Beaulieu River. (For more on this see the excellent displays at the Bucklers Hard museum.



He intended it to be a free port for the import and export of sugar from the West Indies where he planned to develop colonies and sugar plantations. A prospectus was issued in the 1720s offering plots of land on a 99 year lease for 6s 8d. However, the Duke's colonising enterprises failed and by 1731 only seven houses had been built.



If you remember the map of English and Welsh iron works in 1717 shows that Sowley was in a very unusual location. John, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Montagu supported the ironworks partly because he thought they would be useful for Montagu Town.



But it was expensive to maintain. A new 'breast' water wheel had to be built in 1720 as well as a new wheel pit.



Getting orders for Sowley iron was not usually the problem. There was a constant demand from the navy, not only for making guns but also for ballast. The Kingston (like the ship in the illustration) carried 65 tons of pig iron in 1732. However, getting paid wasn't easy and payment in 'old guns', rather than cash, was not unusual.

#### Excuses, excuses in 1740

We have no coppice to cut

The water wheel is freezing

The moulds did not arrive on the coach

My ship has been seized by a Spanish privateer

The dry weather is causing a 'want of water in the pond'

My workers have smallpox

But the Navy was not always at fault. In 1740, the tenant at Sowley, Miles Troughton, gave numerous excuses for not fulfilling navy orders including:

- The furnace won't be in blast for another three years because 'we have no coppice to cut'
- 'Fires are needed each side of the wheel to prevent it freezing'
- The moulds did not arrive at the coach office at Southampton
- My ship has been taken off the Lizard by a Spanish privateer
- 'the long continuance of the dry weather makes me apprehensive of a want of water in the pond ... and if the rain do not fall in a month [we shall be] forced to stop up.'

Then in about 1745 there was an extensive outbreak of smallpox and some of the skilled iron founders became ill.



In 1755 one of the partners in the Sowley Ironworks, John Stephens, went bankrupt and his share was bought by Abel Walter for £1,200. Abel Walter already owned the Pylewell Estate (see illustration). He thought it was worth investing in because he owned Pitts Deep which was in effect the port for Sowley. In addition, war with France was imminent – and war meant more orders from the Navy.

#### Abel Walker 1755

- Gunfounder called 'Drunken Bets'
- New furnace and 'troff' needed
- Loans from Beaulieu
- Couldn't meet Navy demands
- Died 1767

But the war also caused a shortage of skilled labour. Abel Walter's gunfounder was known as 'Drunken Bets' and was said to have cost '£600-700 in government guns' – because the guns were refused proof. In 1758, further refurbishments, including a new air furnace and a new 'troff' to carry water from the pond to the forge, were required. In 1758 Walter wrote to the Board of Ordnance asking to be released from his contract for supplying guns. The works were only kept going by large loans from the Beaulieu Estate which wanted an outlet for the timber. But relations with the local inhabitants and the parish worsened – with disputes about who was responsible for maintaining roads.



Abel Walter died in 1767 and the estate sought a new tenant by advertising in the Salisbury Journal. The works were described as being 'in good repair ... with commodious houses for the undertaker his agents and workmen with or without a good farm at the option of the tenant.' In 1763, the farm was rented by William Ford for £96 pa and the ironworks for just £5. The farm lands were described in a survey of the estate in 1767 as 'cold and hungry'. The profit on the coppices was estimated at only 2s per acre. The wood was only usable for the ironworks because of the difficulty transporting it elsewhere for use as firewood.

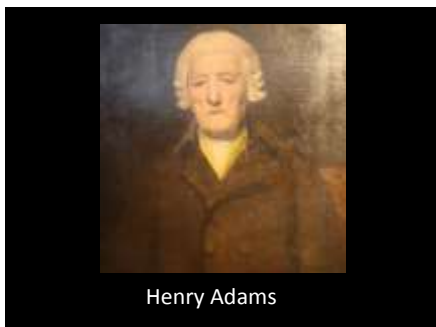


An iron forge in 1772

The iron works at Sowley continued but it was increasingly difficult to make a profit. In 1790 the ironworks were let to Charles Pocock, Gent, of Reading who had a manufactory in Reading. The bar iron was sent from Sowley to Reading and turned into iron nails which were used in shipbuilding at Bucklers Hard.



A scene in the Bucklers Hard museum shows landlord Joseph Wort standing at the bar, with Charles Pocock next to him talking business with Richard Smith, one of two blacksmiths at Buckler's Hard.



Henry Adams

In 1795, Charles Pocock of Reading's son, Charles Pocock of Sowley House, married Lucy, the daughter of Henry Adams the shipbuilder at Bucklers Hard. However, by 1817 the Pococks owed nearly £1,000 for rent and coppice wood. Charles Pocock entered into a bond to pay off the arrears at £50pa but was allowed £160 for building a new house at Sowley. The arrears were never paid and the tenancy was ended in 1822. The estate paid a bricklayer £4 12s 6d to take down 'the old buildings at Sowley late part of the forge'.



Taylor's map 1759

So where exactly were these ironworks? On Taylor's map of 1759, the word 'Furnace' appears to the east of the stream running from Sowley Pond to the Solent.



Milne's map of 1791 marks the Sowley Iron works as to the east of Sowley Lane. But the buildings are close to the road and lie to the east of the stream. There are also buildings to the west of the stream.



By 1820 there is no mention of the iron works on the map but Sowley House appears where it is today with outbuildings around a courtyard. There appears to be a house on the right of the stream and a shaded triangular area which could be related to the iron works. The field to the east of this group is called Furnace Close.



This is the ordnance survey map of 1855.



In this 1867 map there is no mention of Sowley Iron works and the houses to the east of the stream are labelled Sowley Cottages. If you have walked around the garden, you may have seen a walled mound running alongside the stream.



You may also have realised that there is a large dip to the right of the drive and the stream from the pond is at a much lower level than the drive. As you saw in the film at the start, when Catharina and her son, Chris, dug a hole in the drive very recently, they discovered a hidden chamber underneath the drive.

Life after the ironworks

When the ironworks closed, Sowley moved into a different phase. And we can track this by looking at the censuses which were taken every ten years. The problem is that the details are not always accurate and it is difficult to compare one year with another.



Household	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation
1	Henry Pocock	35	M	Yeoman
2	Charles Pocock	3	M	Servant
3	...	...	...	...

1841 Census

The 1841 census shows that Henry Pocock, Charles Pocock's son, 35, was living at Sowley with three servants. The census doesn't actually specify Sowley House but this was probably where he was living. He later moved to Curtle House in Beaulieu. He is described in the census as a yeoman, rather than a farmer or gentleman.



Ten years later there is the first mention of an innkeeper who was living in the 'Sowley Hammer'. In the 1861 census, there was an innkeeper living at (an unnamed) public house in Sowley Lane. In the 1871, 1881 and 1891 censuses there is no mention of an inn but Sowley Farm features. What is now Sowley House was often described as Sowley Farm before the eighteenth century. For example, Henry Wheable farmed about 225 acres with 9 men and 2 boys. Thanks to Susan Tomkins, I have a list of tenants of Sowley if anyone is interested.

Recent History Sowley House

Catharina van der Vorm

I will now hand over to Catharina to tell you a bit about the recent history of the house.



The 1901 census tells us that a person by the name of Charles H Braun, aged 33, lived here in Sowley House, on his own means, with seven servants including a butler and a footman. In the stables, now Sowley House Cottage, lived John White, aged 30, as the coachman.



Was this photo, taken of a picnic on a frozen Sowley Pond, of Charles Braun and his friends?



From 1909 to 1944 Lord Coke and his family lived here. He was a distant cousin of the Montagus. In 1986 Lisa Varley, Lord Montagu's older half-sister, introduced us to Lady Silvia Combe, daughter of Lord Coke.



She was extremely excited to see the house back after many years – seeing all the changes. In her time there were no bathrooms for instance and most rooms had log fires. For her living at Sowley were most happy years.



They loved Sowley and it came as a great shock when her grandfather died at a great age in 1941. As a consequence they had to move to Holkham Hall, one of Europe's greatest country houses because her father became Earl of Leicester. Holkham Hall was certainly not as cosy and intimate as Sowley.



Lisa was terribly attracted to the Cokes as a young girl. She found music and erudition here. Lady Silvia and her father were accomplished musicians and there was lots of chamber music here. One of their guests was Yehudi Menuhin and he played here accompanied by Lady Silvia. Yehudi was still a boy wearing short trousers according to Lisa.



During Lady Silvia's visits here in 1986 she asked us about the dog graves – Were they still here? With her help we discovered a headstone in an overgrown part of the garden, now called the woodland garden. One of the dog's graves had quite a remarkable text on the headstone. It says: Chu-Lu 1908-1921 gave his mistress Eva Trefusis the priceless gift of an unswerving not to be found in the highest human being.



Later I asked Lisa Varley who Eva Trefusis was. She was the sister of Lady Coke, living at Sowley. (She was also the granddaughter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Buccleuch, the ancestor of the Montagus.) She was one of five sisters and is in the centre in the back row in this photograph taken in 1889. And then the story becomes quite tragic. Because one morning she was found floating in her nightgown at Sowley Pond having committed suicide.

21 September 1942 - Western Morning News - Plymouth, Devon, England - Gamekeeper Finds Body In Pond. The body of Miss Eva Trefusis, 60, Sowley Cottage, Lymington, Hants, who had been missing for more than a week, was found by a gamekeeper on Saturday in Sowley Pond, New Forest beauty spot. Miss Trefusis was sister of the Countess Leicester



Also Anne, Lady Chichester loved to play here in those days telling me that the swimming pool used to be a sunken rose garden. A better idea I think than a swimming pool in our climate.

As Sowley was part of the Beaulieu Estate and as it was not requisitioned during the War, I asked Lisa Varley what happened to Sowley House during the War. Just storage she said and when she needed furniture for her flat in London, she was guided to Sowley House. One can read in



her autobiography and I quote:



It was a treasure trove crammed with furniture, paintings, china, valuable Persian rugs and one day when they were about to leave they found a pile of dusty pictures lying jumbled on the floor. They proved to be the work of Antonio Joli, a contemporary of Canaletto now rating the most important paintings hanging at Palace House.



In 1946, Sir Henry Spurrier, Chairman of Leyland Motors, lived here or used Sowley House as a hunting lodge. He installed bathrooms and a huge storeroom to keep his guns. Sowley House and Sowley Estate were purchased in May 1958 from the Beaulieu Estate by Leyland Motors, which set up an operating subsidiary, Sowley Estates Ltd. Sowley Estates Ltd. sold Sowley House to Sir Henry and Lady Spurrier in 1962 and repurchased it from them in 1964. In 1964, Leyland Motors sold Sowley House to W. F. Hammond, who lived here with his family until 1985. In 1985, he sold Sowley House to us. How lucky we were!

Any questions?

After the questions, Caterina van der Vorm was thanked warmly for her hospitality and the delicious nibbles and drink we she had provided while we walked around the garden before the talk.