

Iron Making in Bursledon

The site of Woodland Park lies within the dried up stream valley that in the 18th Century was a hive of industrial activity. The Gringo family, who were leading ironfounders in southern Hampshire, established an ironworks at Hungerford. The same family ran the Funtley, Sowley and Wickham ironworks.

The break in the two Lowford ponds was left as the ford in School Road. At the lower end of the third pond was the footpath that survives to this day as the link between Hungerford and Pilands Wood. The stories that barges were once able to sail up the Hamble River and right through to Lowford are probably distorted legends with these lakes as their root.

The Bursledon ironmaking industry existed as long as there was a plentiful supply of local timber and a flourishing shipbuilding industry which required iron fittings.

The land at the rear of the Fox & Hounds contained one of the large lakes that powered the water wheels, which in turn drove the bellows and trip hammer. A map dating from 1725 clearly shows the two channels from which the force of the water that had backed up in the lakes was directed.

The ironworks itself lay just above the tidal limit of Badnam Creek, a watercourse that was no doubt dramatically affected by the later construction of the railway embankment. Barges could bring iron ore up the Solent and Hamble River and take away the finished products to the shipyards.

A furnace and forge both existed at Hungerford and were principally run by Mr John Gringo, a wealthy gentleman and Justice of the Peace. He died in 1773 and it is unclear at what time the ironworks fell out of use. It may have been with the depression in local shipbuilding following the Napoleonic wars. It appeared on maps as late as 1802.

In 1977 the area was investigated by archaeologists who discovered ore, slag, sandstone and charcoal, which were clearly associated with the furnace, but the presence of dumping in the area interfered with their readings. The pond banks and leat were located, but not the furnace. It was recognised that the existence of an early ironworks in Hampshire was rare and worthy of investigation, particularly as the associated works at Funtley were to play a key part in the industrial revolution. In the woodland there are mounds of iron slag measuring 70 by 40 metres and 4-5 metres high, which are the archaeological remains of the ironworking, and may point to an earlier phase in the site's history.

The preservation of the earthworks from housing development is therefore very desirable and the mounds can be recognised as a hidden remnant of a forgotten industry. In its day it must have played an important part in the lives of local people.