

A W GOWER & SONS, IRON FOUNDERS, HOOK

The former iron foundry in Hook run by the Gower family on the London Road, opposite the Old White Hart Inn started production in 1826 and has intermittently come within Odiham and Newnham parishes, but being located in the centre of the village it employed men and boys from Hook as well as Nately Scures and Newnham. Its origins were founded in East Anglia.

In the 19th century improvements were being made to agricultural seed drills with Norfolk and Suffolk leading the way. The coulter - the vertical cutting blades on a ploughshare and the part of the drill that makes the furrow for the seed - were traditionally set on a cross beam at a fixed distance apart. Two brothers, Jonathan and James Smyth of Peasenhall in Suffolk worked as wheelwrights repairing seed drills and through this work developed a machine where, by the use of levers, the coulters were independent of each other and could be spaced at different intervals. They went on to develop a swing steering mechanism to enable the operator to manoeuvre the coulters to right and left to keep the line of sowing straight. They also developed a manure box on the drill fitted with cups for simultaneously sowing manure with the grain.¹

Whilst being successful in their own area, the brothers looked to expand their business. They sent demonstrators of their machines to markets and as a promotion offered to carry out contract drilling for 6d. an acre. The firm prospered and new manufactories were established, one in Kingston on Thames,² but James' son in law Andrew Woodgate Gower (later referred to as AWG) was sent to Hook in 1825 where the site of a former road wagon station and repair yard was acquired for a house and foundry from the Webb family at a rent of £18 per annum.³

The order book of the Hook company in the early days listed spare parts and repairs to farm equipment, household furniture and painting livery on carts. The first of the coulter drills described as 12- and 15-lever cost £33 each. Customers ranged from local farmers and landowners in Herriard, Holt, Murrell Green and Rotherwick as well as others in Maidenhead, Henley and Buckinghamshire. Additional items listed for sale were turnip choppers and a cucumber frame.

By the late 1820s and early 1830s payment was being offered by instalment terms to purchasers with carriage by road and canal as an additional charge. One delivery to Wiltshire specified use of the Kennet and Avon canal and advised that the 'ploughs were to be sent to Reading wharf from thence by Clarke & Robinson to Honey Street wharf'.⁴

¹ http://www.culturalecology.info/ancillary/seed_machines_files/thesmythscontribution.htm (accessed 14 Nov. 2015).

² Messrs Priest & Woolnough.
http://www.culturalecology.info/ancillary/seed_machines_files/thesmythscontribution.htm (accessed 14 Nov. 2015)

³ <http://www.hook.gov.uk/scrapbook/goodolddays.php>; HRO 118A12/A1.

⁴ HRO 118A12/A1.

In 1841 AWG is listed in the census as a machine maker with wife Hannah and ten children. Two of his sons, Andrew (21) and Ezra (18) were also involved in the business, described as machine makers.⁵

In 1844 advertisements appeared in the Farmer's Almanac and Calendar where the company is described as a corn, seed and manure drill manufactory. Andrew stated that he had 35 years of experience, 17 in Peasenhall and 18 at Hook and that he was one of the principal inventors of his equipment and guaranteed that every branch of the business was under his immediate inspection. He claimed to have lists of referees of some hundreds of the leading agriculturalists in the kingdom. As with any successful invention replicas were made to benefit from the trade. AWG warned against 'purchasing drills of persons who have not been in constant practice of making them, as he has had several sent to him to alter, which have cost nearly as much as new ones, and they are generally made of very indifferent materials.'⁶

In the same year the company exhibited at the Royal Agricultural Society's Show in Southampton. They displayed a 14-row drill for corn and manure which had seven extra rows of large levers, drills and pipes for the manuring and sowing of turnip seeds available for £50. They also exhibited a smaller drill at £34 invented and manufactured by AWG and a 17-row corn drill designed in Peasenhall, improved by Andrew. This machine had the coulter set four to four and a half inches apart which was ideal for sowing barley.⁷

By 1851 another son, George (19) was employed in the business and two apprentices were living with the family which included seven children.⁸ The following year, a major fire damaged the premises, believed to have been started by local boys. An advertisement was placed in the Hampshire Advertiser stating that the company would 'feel doubly grateful for orders, having been at the expense of erecting new machinery'.⁹

Business must have picked up, as in 1861 Gower & Son won first prize in the Leeds Agricultural Show for the best ridge drill for turnips and mangolds. The announcement also declared many other prizes and awards since 1850 (Figs. 1 & 2).¹⁰ The 1861 census shows Hannah as head of the household but not as a widow, perhaps Andrew was away demonstrating his wares. His sons James (31), Benjamin (18) and Richard (17) are all listed as being agricultural machine manufacturers in Hook.¹¹ Ten years later Hannah is a widow and son Richard is running the business.¹²

The adjacent house and the foundry were put up for sale in 1878. Messrs Gower & Sons were said to be annual tenants at £29 per annum. The foundry was described as being of board and slate, having a spacious yard, workshops, stabling for two

⁵ Census 1841 HO 107/395/9.

⁶ C. W. Johnson, W. Shaw, *The Farmer's Almanac and Calendar*, 1 Jan. 1844, (J Ridgeway), 180.

⁷ *The Farmer's Magazine*, vol. 9, 1844, (London), 135.

⁸ Census 1851 HO 107/1680.

⁹ *Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian*, 10 Jan 1852.

¹⁰ www.digital.slv.vic.gov.au/dtl_publish/pdf/marc/48/678945.html (accessed 14 Nov. 2015).

¹¹ Census 1861 RG 9/706.

¹² Census 1871 RG 10/1229.

horses and a sawpit.¹³ A well stocked orchard stood behind the foundry at an additional yearly rent of £2. A billhead of 1881 showed the foundry address as Winchfield (Fig. 3).¹⁴ This was probably a marketing ploy as Winchfield was the nearest station for transportation of goods. Hook station was built in 1883.

Records are more scarce from 1881 but the Hazell family took over the business in 1912 but retained the Gower name. As well as making and repairing agricultural machinery the foundry also cast drain covers and gratings as well as some commemorative seats around Hook celebrating the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria.¹⁵ The final closing date of the foundry is uncertain but by the late 1970s the yard was used as a bottle collection, storage and distribution point.¹⁶

In 2004 the site was sold and 74 houses within a gated complex were constructed named Foundry Close. To remember Gower and Hook's industrial past, an old plough partly made by the company was rescued from Ashwell's Copse in Hook in 1983 and fully restored and painted. This lies in the middle of the village opposite the White Hart public house.¹⁷



Figure 1.

¹³ HRO, 10M57/SP527.

¹⁴ <https://en-gb.facebook.com/MemoriesofHookinHampshire/photos> (accessed 21 Apr. 2019).

¹⁵ N. Maslin, *Hook, a Village through the Ages* (2018), 231.

¹⁶ Pers. Comm. J. Butler.

¹⁷ <http://hook.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/The-Hook-Plough.pdf> (accessed 21 Apr. 2019).



AT LEEDS, 1861,
 THE
Royal Agricultural Society
 AWARDED
THE FIRST PRIZE
 TO
A. W. GOWER & SON,
 FOR THE
**BEST RIDGE DRILL for TURNIPS
 and MANGOLD;**
 BESIDES WHICH, THEY HAVE RECEIVED UPWARDS OF
TWENTY FIRST PRIZES,
 AND SEVERAL
SILVER MEDALS AND CUPS,
 FOR THEIR
IMPROVED DRILLS.
 SINCE 1850.

Figure 2.

Mr Ditcher
Deer Lane
 Hook Foundry,
 Wanchfield, Wants 1881
 D. to *A. W. Gower & Son.*
 INVENTORS AND MANUFACTURERS OF
 THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S
 Prize Corn, Seed and Manure Drills,
 AND GENERAL AGRICULTURAL MACHINISTS.
PRINTED BY HARTFORD BRIDGE
AGENTS TO ALL THE LEADING AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERS AND IMPLEMENT MAKERS IN THE KINGDOM
INTEREST AT THE RATE OF 5 PER CENT PER ANNUM CHARGED ON ALL OVERDUE ACCOUNTS

1881		
June 30	Less 3 Acres Ironwork, Gown	18 10
July 1	Hammer, Pick, & Screw-wormer	14 6
	3 Files 1 3/4 x 1/2 inches	2
Sept 22	Taken what for Drill	
		£ 19.6.6

Figure 3.