

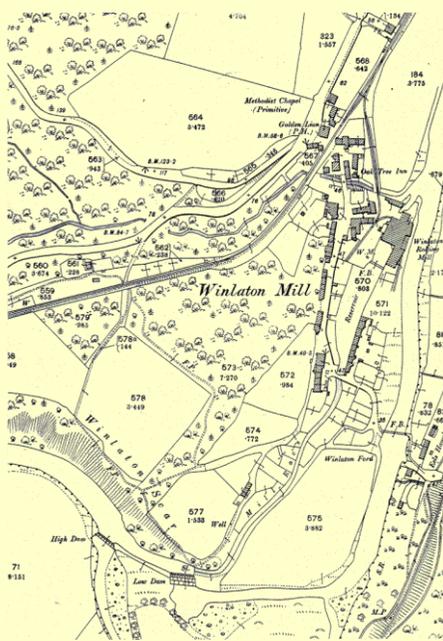
THE BUTTERFLY BRIDGE

CROSSING THE GENERATIONS

CROWLEY'S IRON WORKS & OLD WINLATON MILL

In the late 17th century one of the great manufacturing enterprises of the early Industrial Revolution, Ambrose Crowley's famous iron works, stood on this site by the banks of the River Derwent. These works processed cast iron harnessing the power of the river via nine water wheels to drive machinery that produced wrought iron in the form of rods, bars and plates from which ironware was hand forged in the 'cottage industry' workshops at Winlaton Mill.

Crowley, originally from Stourbridge, was a member of a Quaker family of forgers and blacksmiths. By the late 17th century he had established a number of forges in other parts of the country, including one at Sunderland. In 1690, in part due to persecution of some of his Catholic workers, he relocated to Winlaton, establishing workshops and his headquarters there. This was followed by a further move when in 1691 he established what was to become his most famous works here at Winlaton Mill. At the time, a mere hamlet of six or seven dwellings with a disused corn/fulling mill occupied the site, which later became dominated by the buildings housing machinery and the dams and sluices that delivered power from the river. The remains of some of these structures, particularly the High Dam, can still be seen a little way up river.



Winlaton Mill 1898

Acknowledgements for Images: David Best, Chris Hamilton, John Moore & Gateshead Central Library

Crowley himself laid out the plans for a 'model' village that was built to house families and the operators employed at the iron works. The houses and works would continue, in one form or another, for over two hundred years. The Crowley establishment, including works at Swalwell, the banks of the River Team, Gateshead, Winlaton and Winlaton Mill, became regarded, at the time, as the largest of its type in Europe. In 1915 manufacturing in Winlaton Mill ended and most of the workforce relocated to the new Delta Works at Derwenthaugh, leaving the old buildings vacant.

For his time, Crowley was an enlightened but strict employer. Decent wages were paid but from these compulsory deductions were made to fund innovative welfare provision for sick pay, a health service, pensions and a school for the children. Crowley was knighted in 1707, having in the previous sixteen years created what was probably the greatest industrial organisation of the period.

The picturesque 18th century village continued in occupation until 1937, it had been condemned *en masse* in 1933, but a few dwellings were occupied into the 1950s. The majority of inhabitants, many of them by then employed in the Derwenthaugh Coke Works, were relocated to the new village of Winlaton Mill, on the north side of the A694.



The Crowley Iron Works c.1900



Old Winlaton Mill (c.1900), the Crowley Iron Works to the right with an earlier Butterfly Bridge in the mid-foreground

The Butterfly Bridge – Crossing the Generations was a joint initiative between the five local history societies (in Sunnyside, Swalwell, Whickham, Winlaton and Winlaton Mill), located respectively on the east and west banks of the River Derwent, that collaborated to deliver this project. Building bridges between societies around the work of telling the story of the Butterfly Bridge.

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For more information: www.butterflybridge.co.uk