The Hankins and Wall families and their successors at Soley’s Ochard.

In 1734 Ebenezer Hankins died. Soley’s Orchard together with considerable other estates including The Pool House had been settled on Ebenezer and his wife Mary Avenant by William Hankins in 1722. By Ebenezer’s will these estates were passed to Mary, who married Dr George Legh, Vicar of Halifax, in 1735. She died in 1749. Ebenezer and Mary Hankins had three children D'Avenant, the eldest, Elizabeth and William. D’Avenant had been a pupil of Philip Doddridge at Northampton and had then settled in Tewkesbury: it was to him that the estates now passed. His sister, Elizabeth married John Humphreys, a Tewkesbury lawyer, in 1750, but after their daughter Mary was born in 1751, Elizabeth died in 1752. In 1757 D’Avenant married John Humphreys’ sister, also called Elizabeth. To complete the gathering at Tewkesbury Mercy Doddridge moved there after Philip Doddridge’s death in 1752 and their daughter, Mary, married John Humphreys, as his second wife, in 1759.

In 1779 Mary Humphreys, the daughter of John and Elizabeth Humphreys and hence the niece of Davenant Hankins married Dr Martin Wall of Oxford. He was the son of Dr John Wall the eminent Worcester physician who had been involved in the founding of the Infirmary, in the founding of Worcester Porcelain Company and the promotion of Malvern as a spa. John Wall’s wife, Catherine, was the daughter of Martin Sandys, town clerk of Worcester and cousin of the first Lord Sandys of Ombersley. When Davenant Hankins died in 1782 he left his considerable estate to his wife and then to his niece. As well as Soley’s Orchard, sometimes confusingly referred to as Scilly’s Orchard in documents, there was the Pool House Estate and property in Shelsey, Eastham, Stockton and King’s Norton: the last four of these coming from the Avenant side of the family. Elizabeth Hankins died in September 1805 in Hanley Castle so all the property went to Mary Wall. Elizabeth Hankins also left other legacies to Mary Wall and to her children. Meanwhile in 1804 the property in King’s Norton had been sold to the Birmingham and Worcester Canal Company and the proceeds had been used to purchase Burley’s Farm and hence consolidate the Pool House Estate.

Dr Martin Wall died in 1824 in Oxford after a distinguished medical and academic career: he was Professor of Clinical Medicine, a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and a Fellow of the Royal Society. “An obituary records his capacity for exhilarating conversation and his hilarity of temper, lively anecdotes, and urbanity as well as his free treatment of poor patients.” (Norman Moore, “Wall, Martin (bap.1747, d. 1824)” rev. Jean Loudon, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004) Mary Wall survived until 1841 when she died in Oxford aged ninety. Martin and Mary Wall had a son and three daughters. The son The Rev’d. Martin Sandys Wall had been a naval chaplain, chaplain to the Prince Regent and to the British Embassy in Vienna. The three daughters all married Anglican clergymen, one of them later Archdeacon of Winchester. Mary left various legacies to her grandchildren but the bulk of her property was held in trust. This trust sold the property in the 1860s. Pool House and the Burley Estate was sold to Sir Edmund Lechmere, properties in Eastham to E. V. Wheeler of Kyrewood House, property in Stockton and Shelsey to William Hyde Cooke of Stockton. and, in 1864, Soley’s Orchard and some other property in Upton and Hanley Castle was sold to Samuel Martin Beale for £2,300/14/11. Samuel Martin Beale was a Worcester solicitor and the grandson of Samuel Beale, a prominent Upton solicitor in the early years of the nineteenth century and the builder and owner of The Eades. Samuel Martin Beale died on December 24th, 1884, leaving £15,249/15/11, but no will. By then he appears to have disposed of the house and land to an old friend Thomas Holland, once a solicitor in Upton, married to an Uptonian, Blanche May
Bird in 1839, and later living with her and their daughter, at Fern Lodge in Malvern Link. Samuel Martin Beale had been staying with the Hollands at the time of the 1871 census, Holland was named alongside the relations at Beales’s funeral and, in 1908, the Beale daughters attended his funeral.

Ebenezer Hankins was the last of the owners of the freehold of Soley’s Orchard to live there until the twentieth century. About the tenants little is known, except by chance, until trade directories, the Tithe Map of 1841, and the censuses begin to appear. An “appraisalment” of the effects of the late Mr Benjamin Hudson at “Scilly’s Orchard” in 1814 reveals the number of rooms at the time and values their contents at £438/19/6d. A directory of 1820 shows John Worrond at “Sollys Orchard”. The Tithe Map’s apportionment shows that Susanah Warren was the tenant in 1841 (this also revealed Mary Wall as the owner), and the 1841 census shows that she was aged 72 and was living there with Susan Cowley aged 17, Charles Cowley aged 16, and a male and a female servant. As well as being Mrs Wall’s tenant, Susanah Warren owned property in Upton. In 1851 and 1861 the tenant was Robert Dufty, a gardener, employing 3 labourers and working 18 acres – all the land around the house and over 5 acres on the other side of Rectory Road. By 1871 he had retired to Old Street with his wife Emily. By then a retired farmer from Ashchurch was the tenant. At Ashchurch William H, Trinder had farmed over three hundred acres and had employed 12 men and 4 boys. He had clearly prospered since he was only 49 in 1871, when he was reported as the tenant at Soley’s Orchard. In the 1896 trade directory he is listed amongst the Upton gentry. In 1901 Soley’s Orchard was empty: Mr Trinder had died in 1898 and Mrs Trinder had moved to live with her son and daughter-in-law off the Hallow Road in Worcester, she died in 1912. In 1904 Daniel Jones, dairyman and cowkeeper was the tenant and in 1908 Lionel Firkins, similarly described, was at Soley’s Orchard.

In 1908, after Thomas Holland’s death Soley’s Orchard was on the market. It was offered for sale by auction at the White Lion by Messrs Moore and Sons on 25th September. It was described:
“Soley’s Orchard Estate: 10a. 36r 36p, close to the Railway Station with Half Timbered Residence, Buildings, Pasture Orchard and Garden Land let to Mr L. Firkins at £25 p.a. Vacant possession Lady Day next.”
The lot was withdrawn with the bidding at £600.

In a conveyance in 1909 Blanche Ann Holland, Thomas Holland’s spinster daughter who had inherited the bulk of his considerable estate (over £74,000), sold Soley’s Orchard to
Reuben Nicholas. The owner once more lived and worked at Soley’s Orchard. ” G. R. Clarke’s engraving of “Soley’s Orchard in 1860” in both Mrs Lawson’s books shows a much bigger house than that in the coloured photograph of the house which Mr Nicholas purchased. The directories describe Nicholas as a dairyman. He was a bachelor who married Beatrice Nash, the daughter of Upton’s former stationmaster: she was living opposite Soley’s Orchard at Ferndale. At the time of the 1919 wedding Reuben was 57 and Beatrice was 32. Reuben Nicholas died in August 1935 - described in the register as of “Sollers Orchard” – and Mrs Nicholas continued to live there and farm the land until she died in 1968. At that stage, she was 81, she had already decided to sell the bulk of the land to the County Council. This was completed after her death, whilst the house was inherited by the Rev’d. J. St Nicholas. He sold it …….and the rest is very recent history!