

Hamble Oil Terminal - Brief History

At the end of The Great War the Admiralty abandoned its plans to build a seaplane acceptance depot at Hamble and sold the land to the aircraft manufacturers AV Roe and Company Ltd. AV Roe subsequently sold part of their site to the Anglo Mexican Petroleum Co. which later became Shell-Mex Ltd. The sale was completed on the 22nd June 1923, however construction work started in 1921. It took 900 men over 2 years to dismantle the unwanted Admiralty seaplane storage sheds, and construct a few hand riveted tanks, boiler house, jetty, offices, pump house and workshops. The Terminal started operating around 1924.

Oil companies were keen on this area as the Admiralty was converting its fleet from coal to oil, and Hamble was close to the busy ports of Portsmouth and Southampton.

On the 6th June 1922 the Anglo Persian Oil Company (BP) ship the British Maple arrived in Southampton Water near Hamble Common. It bore the advertising slogan "BP - Anglo Persian Fuel Oil – BP" along its side. It remained working there as a bunkering ship distributing oil products until it was scrapped in 1932.

In 1932 Shell-Mex and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (BP) formed a joint marketing and distribution venture in the UK called Shell-Mex & BP Ltd. This joint venture continued until it was finally dissolved in 1976; at this time BP Oil UK Ltd. took full control of the Hamble site.

With war imminent in the late 1930's some Hamble storage tanks were built underground, as this presumably offered camouflage and some protection. Some other tanks were temporarily bricked up to protect against bombs. During the war 3 high explosives, 1 oil bomb and 4 timer delayed mines were dropped on the terminal, and it was also subject to 3 daylight machine gun raids. It is believed that no serious injuries or damage was suffered during these raids.

The Government Pipeline and Storage System (GPSS) was started in the 1930's when the Government realised that their military aviation fuel storage capacity was inadequate. At that time the RAF had just 8,000 tons of storage, which was just one day's fuel consumption during the Battle of Britain. So, the Government embarked on building a pipeline to supply the airfields in the East from the ports in the West, South and North. Satchell Lane storage was built as a part of these military aviation developments, it was connected to the GPSS and to the Shell-Mex & BP Ltd. Terminal in Hamble.

In October 1941 Churchill asked Mountbatten to develop an invasion strategy for occupied Europe. A part of these plans was the 'Pipe Line Under The Ocean' (PLUTO). By mid-1943 the newly built GPSS network was operating from Mersey and Avonmouth on the West coast via Aldermaston to Walton, and on to the East coast airfields and to the Isle of Grain terminal. It also ran to the South coast from Aldermaston to Hamble, and then to Lepe and on to some storage tanks at Thorness Bay on the IOW; from there pumping stations at Shanklin and Sandown could be used

to pipe fuel along the temporary PLUTO to Cherbourg. The 60 mile distance to Cherbourg was at the limits of the pumping capabilities at that time. Other temporary pipeline links were added from Walton and the Isle of Grain to Dungeness from where fuel could be piped to Boulogne. All the PLUTO pipes, storage and pumps were installed covertly, and they were camouflaged using bombed-out and existing buildings and local materials to hide it all from enemy surveillance.

After the end of WW2 Shell-Mex & BP Ltd. were contracted by the Government to operate and maintain its pipeline and storage facilities. In addition to maintaining strategic stock and continued military use, the pipeline system started to be used commercially, and new links were built to the expanding airports of Heathrow and Gatwick. In 2015 the Government Pipeline and Storage System was sold to a Spanish company Compañía Logística de Hidrocarburos (CLH).

Much of the following rail information originates from Tony Sedgwick's study of the local railway. The railway into Hamble was installed to link the rail network to the Admiralty seaplane acceptance depot which was being built on the banks of Southampton Water in 1917. This is where Coopervision, Ensign Park and the Oil Terminal now stand. There was also a system of narrow-gauge lines laid during the building of the depot, and a siding was laid subsequently to assist in the construction of AV Roe's aircraft factory. At first Shell-Mex & BP Ltd leased various locomotives from Southern Railway, but in 1926 they bought their first locomotive which worked there until the 1950's. The rail fleet was expanded and in 1943 an additional line and floodlights were installed on the site to accommodate the rise in throughput and the increase in traffic.

During the 1950's the track was completely relayed to deal with the newer heavier engines and rail trucks. The rail line was last used in December 1985 following some test runs to bring crude oil from the well at Wytch Farm. It was then decided that pumping the oil via pipeline would be the best option. The last railway engine left Hamble in December 1986, and the buildings and the majority of the rails were subsequently removed. Whilst there are no plans to reopen the rail link, the route is protected to ensure that a line could be re-laid if commercial or national interests demanded it.

Crude oil is pumped over 50 miles via pipeline from Wytch Farm in Poole Harbour. The construction of the pipeline, storage tanks and the jetty improvements took 2 years. In June 1990 the 48,000 tonne Star Westminster was the first crude oil ship at BP Hamble. The inaugural operation took place over two days, which is much longer than normal for a ship of that size, as the equipment and loading processes were being commissioned and tested.

Ever since it first started operating the Hamble Terminal has evolved to store the products that are currently in demand. We have stored all manner of oil products from heavy heating oil, and fuel oil for shipping, to JP8 (the specialist US air force jet fuel), and we have even stored molasses! The terminal has supplied aviation fuel to the air industry, bitumen to the building industry, but we are currently focused on supplying crude oil to refineries, and road fuels to forecourts across the south of England.

Safety is the number one priority of every person at BP Hamble. We are responsible for our co-workers, the local residents and our environment. BP has been operating safely in Hamble since it first arrived aboard the British Maple ship in 1922. Since then we have developed alongside the local community and we are proud to be involved with all manner of Bursledon, Hamble and Netley community activities.

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