

Hamble River Valley Railways

8th September 2022 - Hamble Memorial Hall

Jeff Martin gave an interesting and fascinating talk about the story of how the railways came to our area and developed over the years.

Jeff started by saying that a mainline from London to Southampton opened in 1840 due to the town's potential as a port and this was within 10 years of the opening of George Stephenson's famous Liverpool and Manchester line. Subsequently branch lines were developed to serve the Hamble River Valley area. The first were railway lines from Eastleigh to Gosport via Botley and a branch line from Botley to Bishops Waltham. At this time, it was the only railway connection to Portsmouth.

For a railway line to be built it needed an Act of Parliament and there were many proposals but few achieved parliamentary ascent. Jeff explained about many of proposals that were made that did not get implemented which could have affected the river valley, particularly the river. Three main bridging points of the river were proposed at Bursledon, Satchell (present-day Port Hamble Marina) and Hamble Point. If a bridge crossed the river at Hamble the river would not be renowned for yachting today.

The first part of our present-day railway opened in 1866 and just went to a terminus at Netley, as there was not sufficient finance to go to Fareham as originally hoped. This railway enabled local industries such as the shellfish trade and strawberry growing to significantly develop to serve a much wider market.

Many other local railways were proposed such as a line along the west side of the river joining Hamble, Bursledon & Botley and from Hillhead to Netley that crossed the river just south of Warsash to Hamble Point by an opening bridge.

In the 1880s there were sufficient funds to extend the existing line to Fareham by a bridge at Bursledon although there were problems in the construction of the embankments that slid into the river. Strangely there was no proposal for a station to be built at Bursledon but following strong local protest one was included. The line opened in 1889 and changed the whole Bursledon waterside scene. It was single track with provision to be made double track that was achieved in 1911.

Jeff then went on to describe other small local railway lines such as to Netley Hospital, Hamble Oil Terminal and a narrow-gauge line at the training ship TS Mercury. The Netley Hospital branch line opened in 1900 and the TS Mercury narrow-gauge railway operated in the last decade of the 1800s and the first in the 1900s. During the First World War a seaplane base was being built at Hamble and a railway line known as 'Hamble Road Sidings' was constructed from the mainline. Due to the end of the war, in early 1919 the building of the seaplane base was abandoned and in 1923 an oil company bought it including the railway line.

Brief mention was made of sidings to local industrial sites such as the loam pits at Badnam and to the brickworks at Swanwick.

Finally, Jeff explained how after many years of requesting a station for Hamble, Hamble Halt was built in the Second World War to enable the war workers to get to the aircraft factories. It was opened in 1942 and a bus garage was built next to it to transport the workers to their workplace. He concluded by telling of the closure of the smaller lines and the improvements of diesel taking over from steam engines in the 1960s and the electrification in 1990 that provided a third rail for electric multiple units to travel from Southampton to Portsmouth.

As always, Jeff gave a well prepared and illustrated talk that was very well received by those who attended.