

# Cricket Camp

## 12th September 2013 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

Members of the Society were joined by visitors from neighbouring villages and history societies to make a capacity audience to hear Mike Rogerson give an illustrated talk about the Cricket Camp. The Cricket Camp was situated where today the Upper Hamble Country Park is located.

HMS Cricket started during the Second World War when it was a Combined Operations base, which played an important part in the D-Day landings. The site was chosen because it had good location and access to the sea. It was constructed in 1943 as a training camp, mainly Commandos, supported by Wrens and other Administration Staff based at Brixedone House, Bursledon.

The troops lived in 110 Nissan huts, each holding up to 24 men and there were other associated support buildings. Including the "canvas villages" there were up to 4000 men attached to HMS Cricket in the weeks leading up to D-Day. There were sporting activities for when the men were off duty, plus a cinema and concert parties where George Formby once performed.

Prior to D-Day the Hamble River was full of landing craft and some of HMS Cricket's craft came from Sicily after action there had been completed. These and its other craft had to be made good by its maintenance staff or local boat yards such as Deacons.

D-Day came and Cricket Camp's men embarked for the Normandy beaches, many not returning. This included 606 Flotilla and other supporting flotillas. Mike showed some names that had been put on a workshop wall prior to the invasion and he had traced what had happened to them, one died on D-Day itself and another the next day.

After the invasion HMS Cricket was used as a repair base and a regrouping base for Combined Operations personnel who had lost their craft and those reforming for further action. Five weeks after D-Day a stray Doodlebug fell at the camp killing two people.

HMS Cricket was decommissioned in 1946 and the camp was used as emergency housing for local residents, including some from Southampton who were displaced by the wartime bombing. At its peak there were more than 200 people living at the Cricket Camp. Each hut comprised a large lounge, kitchen and most had two bedrooms. The lounge had an open fireplace and a large old-type copper was used to heat water for bathing. The rent was 13s 4d. The camp had its own shop and the cinema remained for its residents.

It was used for this purpose until 1953 when its need was no longer required. Mike recounted memories of troops and families who stayed there. Some of the bases of the Cricket Camp buildings can still be seen today if you look carefully.

A surprising number of the audience had lived at the Cricket Camp, some being born or moving there as babies and had attended the meeting to find out more about their early lives, which they could not remember.