

Boats of the Hamble River

10th November 2022 - Memorial Hall

The Society's chairman, Ian Underdown, gave an informative and fascinating talk about 'Boats of the Hamble River' and launched a new booklet of the same title that was very well received. The talk was about the important boats that have used the river over the years.

Ian started by talking about the first known boat of the river, Hamble Log Boat, that was discovered when building a boathouse at Fairthorne Manor in 1888. It was originally thought to be Roman due to the extensive Roman remains in the area but recent investigations have found it to be Saxon, AD 668-704.

He then gave details of two of Hamble's nationally significant naval ships, the 'Grace Dieu' and 'HMS Elephant'. The 'Grace Dieu' was Henry V's great ship that was the largest ship ever built in England at that time. She was a larger and older ship than the 'Mary Rose' and her wreck lies in the river today being a nationally protected wreck. 'HMS Elephant' was built at Bursledon in 1786 and her place in history is due to her being Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Copenhagen, where he put a telescope to his blind eye and said "I see no signal" when ordered to retreat.

The remarkable history of the river's training ships of TS Mercury at Hamble and the School of Navigation at Warsash were given, including 'Moyana' winning the first Tall Ships race. Another interesting boat on the river was 'Bridgewater House'. It was a converted floating bridge used by Captain Mansfield Smith-Cumming, the first Director of the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), as his living accommodation when in command of the First World War Boom Defence boats based off Badnam Creek.

Local designed boats such as the Hamble One Design yacht and the Hamble Star sailing dinghy were of interest to many in the audience, particularly the Hamble Star in which many local people learnt to sail including Ian himself.

The highlight of the evening for most people present was the J Class yachts 'Endeavour' and 'Velsheda', plus Big Class 'Lulworth' that lay in mudberths in the river for many years which saved them to be the world-renowned superyachts today. The magnificent pictures of them and the story of Hamble's George Williams being skipper of 'Endeavour' were much enjoyed. George's father was a fishing boat skipper of the crabber 'Ceres' and her history was also told, as well as another fishing boat the 'Sorella' that is believed to be the oldest yacht still racing today.

The well-known racing power boats of the river such as the 'Christina' that won the first Cowes - Torquay powerboat race, Fairey 'Huntsman' and Port Hamble's 'Pacemaker' were illustrated, plus the 'Virgin Atlantic Challenger' that attempted to break the trans-Atlantic record. Ian explained about the 12 metre yachts built at Hamble in the 1980s that challenged for the America's Cup and Tracy Edward's 'Maiden' with her all-female crew that was successful in the 1989 Round the World race.

If you have walked along the riverside path at Swanwick by Brooklands house in the last 70 years you would have seen a wreck in the mud and may

have wondered about her previous life. Ian explained it was the 'Norseman' and he gave her interesting history including her being remembered as a 'place of ill repute', a brothel used by servicemen during the Second World War.

Details about present-day boats that use the river such as the 'Jolly Brise' Hamble Lifeboat, 'Claire' the Hamble-Warsash Ferry and the Harbour Master's patrol boats concluded Ian's presentation. Of particular interest was how 'Claire' the pink Ferry had changed over the years.

Another very successful talk from Ian that was extremely well-illustrated and at the end people asked about the magnificent pictures include in the presentation.

As mentioned at the beginning a new booklet in the popular Hamble local history series entitled 'Boats of the Hamble River' was launched at this meeting and for more details see the 'Publications' section.