

Hamble River - A glimpse of the Past

13th November 2014 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

It was another full house again when Ian Underdown, the Society's Chairman, gave a most interesting presentation on 'Hamble River - A glimpse of the Past' with members and visitors enjoying a pictorial view of the various aspects of the river in years gone by.

He started by explaining the early years including the formation of the river, its early settlers and details of the Roman period activities relating to the river. At the fork of the river near Fairthorne Manor a log boat was discovered in the late 1800s, which was originally believed to be Roman as it was found close to Roman remains, but it was subsequently found to be Saxon.

The river was very important in the medieval period when the King's ships were built, supplied or moored on it. Henry V's 'Grace Dieu', the largest ship ever built in England at that time, spent most of her life on the river and its remains lie in the river mud today and is a nationally protected wreck. Over fifty naval ships were built on the river over the centuries with Bursledon being the main centre but Hamble, Warsash and Swanwick also built them.

Fishing was another important trade of the river and it was renowned for supplying the metropolitan markets with shellfish, such as crabs, lobsters and oysters, with most being brought from the West Country, Ireland or abroad. Other river industries included supplying timber, salt making and brick making to name a few.

The river's boatbuilding history was summarised with Moody being the longest operating boatyard and Fairey Marine becoming Europe's biggest boat builder. Brief details of the people involved and the boats built were described, including the powerboat era. The development of marinas was also explained.

Information about the maritime training establishments on the river was given, i.e. the School of Navigation at Warsash and TS Mercury at Hamble. The history of the ferries and the bridging of the river were outlined, as well as its sailing clubs and regattas.

Hamble's contribution to the World Wars was described, including the need for a battleship mast in the mud off Badnam Creek. Seaplanes played an important part in the river's First World War role. Seaplanes first came to Hamble in 1912 and were the foundation of its subsequent aviation industry.

Some stories of smuggling activities were told, as well as Hamble River's connection with pirates. There are more records of Hamble River vessels being taken by pirates, than local people being pirates, but Ian gave some details of the river's pirates. The voyage of the slave ship 'Mary Anne' of Warsash, captained by Israel Brown of Titchfield, was recounted.

Ian concluded by showing the magnificence classic large yachts, such as the J Class, which were kept on the river and some river scenes of the 19th and 20th centuries, so different from the crowded harbour of today. These pictures were much appreciated and enjoyed by those attending. He was thanked at the end of the meeting for bringing back many fond memories.

A booklet has been produced entitled 'Hamble River - A glimpse of the Past'.