

Working at Fairey Marine

14th July 2022 - Memorial Hall

Alec Wotton, Work's Manager of Fairey Marine at Hamble between 1968 and 1984, spoke about his experiences and memories of his time with the company. He described Fairey Marine as not just a boatyard but a manufacturing institution.

Alec started by giving information about its parent company Fairey Aviation that came to Hamble during the First World War. Its owner Richard Fairey was a keen yachtsman and between the wars owned and raced a 12-metre yacht and the magnificent J Class 'Shamrock V'. After the Second World War, due to a glut of aircraft on the market, Fairey had to diversify so set up Fairey Marine at Hamble.

Details were given about how the site at Hamble Point developed and how the development of other Fairey subsidiary companies sometimes had an influence on the work undertaken. Fairey Marine boats were built by the hot-moulding process, a technique that had been used in the aviation industry. Alec explained about how its range of boats developed from the 'Firefly' sailing dinghy to its classic powerboats such as the 'Huntsman'.

Fairey Marine produced a wide range of dinghies, sailing and power boats which Alec illustrated and it became the largest boatbuilding company in Europe. It had a boat park with a tractor and trailer launching customers' boats at their convenience. During Alec's time, Fairey Marine followed boatbuilding trends and customers' demands, therefore started to build GRP powerboats and opened Hamble Point Marina in 1973. With the introduction of VAT in the 1970s, demand for pleasure powerboats decreased so Fairey Marine decided to concentrate on military/patrol powerboats.

Alec shared many memories about things that are not normally included in a more factual presentation, such as interesting incidents during boat demonstrations and deliveries. He also spoke about other diverse projects undertaken such as the building of America Cup challenger 'Victory 83' and non-marine projects that included constructing a replica early wooden aircraft for a film.

Of course, he talked about the work force and the managing directors with which he worked. He had great admiration of their skills, more than most other boatbuilding companies, as many of them had aviation engineering skills as well. He also valued the co-operation and the good relationship he had with the trade unions. When the company was producing 350 Combat Work Boats for USA and 130 for the UK, Alec said Fairey Marine had a workforce of 450.

Fairey Marine closed at Hamble in 1983 and Alec left with many good memories of his time working there. He continued to work for other Fairey related companies, including constructing Red Funnel Isle of Wight ferries and ferries in Hong Kong.

Many members of the Fairey Owners Club attended, some travelling from quite a distance to be at this interesting talk. It was the ex-employees who seemed to enjoy Alec's presentation the most and meeting up with colleagues some of which they had not seen since the company closed.