

SS Shieldhall

14th June 2012 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

During the early 1980s village residents would see a smart well maintained grey steamship going past Hamble's Southampton Water foreshore, travelling from Southampton to south of the Isle of Wight and back most days. Few of them knew what she was carrying and most would be surprised but Graham Mackenzie gave the full details to the Society in an interesting illustrated talk about this ship, the 'SS Shieldhall'.

Graham told the Society that 'Shieldhall' was designed and built to carry sewerage waste from the river Clyde in Scotland and this was the same cargo she was carrying when Hamble residents saw her pass by. He gave the history of the previous sewerage boats that operated on the Clyde before 'Shieldhall' was built in 1955, the second ship to carry this name.

The 'Shieldhall' is 268 ft in length and her construction and machinery is similar to that of the 'Titanic'. She cost £28,000 to build and her normal operating speed is 9 knots, powered by two 800hp steam engines and her boilers fuelled by oil. She needed a crew of 12 to operate and her 1800 tons of sewerage took 20 minutes to discharge in an approved deep water location. Interestingly she also carried up to 80 passengers on her regular trips.

Due to high operating costs she was laid up in 1976, but the Southern Water Authority (SWA) purchased her £45,000 and subsequently brought her to Southampton from Glasgow. SWA had to spend a similar amount on repairs and had to wait until a previous sewerage shipping contract had expired before 'Shieldhall' could start to be used in 1981.

If you were sailing south of the Isle of Wight at this time, during the 20 minutes of her discharging of the cargo, you now know what the smell and the seagulls were doing following this smart steamship.

Unfortunately by 1985 SWA decided she was too expensive to operate due to the need to have 12 crew and high fuel costs. Southampton City Council called a public meeting and a preservation society known as the 'Solent Steam Packet Company' was formed. Fund raising took three years and 'Shieldhall' was then purchased for the scrap value of £20,000.

'Shieldhall' was restored by volunteers to a sea-going condition and is now part of the National Historic Fleet and in 2009 she was its flagship. All her life she has been grey but in 2012 she was painted black to commemorate those lost at sea, specifically those lost on the 'Titanic' in April 1912.

It costs about £80,000 a year to operate and most of this comes from visitors, taking passengers on trips or donations/grants. She can now carry up to 200 passengers but it takes 3 days to raise steam before she can leave the dock. 'Shieldhall' is also hired for private charter including film sets, attends

historic events/festivals and is the largest working steamship in northern Europe.

‘Shieldhall’ would not be in use today if it was not for the dedicated volunteers, a number of which are local residents. This includes Hamble’s Peter Roberts who is her captain and Terry Brook the membership secretary. Why not support the preservation society by taking a trip on the ‘Shieldhall’?

For more details look at:- www.ss-shieldhall.co.uk