

School of Navigation to Warsash Maritime Academy

17th September 2015 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

The Hamble River has had two nationally important maritime training establishments on it over the years, including TS Mercury at Hamble about which the Society has had two talks.

The Society had not had a talk about the other training establishment on the river, so to rectify this Warsash historian Bryan Woodford gave an interesting illustrated talk about the history of Warsash's internationally renowned maritime training centre. Bryan told the story from its formation as the School of Navigation prior to the Second World War to the present day Warsash Maritime Academy.

Bryan started by explaining his connections with Hamble, Warsash and the maritime training establishment, where his wife worked in the library for many years and he then told how this training centre began.

The Gilchrist Navigation School was founded in 1909 as a private establishment in Southampton and was incorporated into the University of Southampton in 1932. In 1935 it was renamed as Southampton School of Navigation. After the Second World War the School of Navigation took over the naval premises of 'HMS Tormentor' at Warsash to prepare deck officers for sea.

Bryan gave a summary of the previous history of site which included a chemical factory, Coastguard Station, WW1 Royal Naval Air Service Station and WW2 Naval Base.

The School of Navigation had its own sail training vessel the 'Moyana', but 'Halcyon' took over when the 'Moyana' sank. 'Moyana' won the first international Sail Training Ship race from Torbay to Lisbon in 1956 but foundered off Cornwall on her return voyage. Motor vessel 'South Hill' and later 'Somerset' provided navigation and seamanship practice at sea.

In the 1960s a building modernisation programme took place providing a classroom block, residential accommodation, library/theatre, refectory, workshops, boathouse and seamanship room.

The School had its own rowing and sailing gigs and a rowing race in its four oared gigs at Hamble Regatta for a Challenge Shield, was hard fought against other local crews including TS Mercury with the School's reputation at stake. These gigs were also used for charity events such as sponsored rows up the whole length of the river.

Over the years the School offered a wider range of courses, so it was renamed the College of Nautical Studies in 1980. Also at this time a scaled model ship handling facility started at Marchwood. To practise the essential skills of fire fighting and lifeboat launching extra facilities were acquired at Warsash.

In 1984 it became the College of Maritime Studies to reflect its work more accurately. In 2006 its name changed again to the Warsash Maritime Academy and in 2011 a new model ship handling centre was opened at Timsbury Lake near Romsey.

Today the College has ship bridge and engine room simulators and offers a large range of courses from ship handling to luxury yacht and hotel operations.

A significant proportion of the audience were former cadets or lecturers of the School of Navigation or Maritime College and they shared their memories and knowledge with the meeting at the end of the talk.