

# The Story of Itchen Village

**8th February 2018 - Roy Underdown Pavilion**

It sounded a familiar story about a ferry, America's Cup crews and Spitfires however it was not about Hamble but Itchen Village. Cheryl Butler told the story of Itchen Village that grew around a ferry crossing point, along an important route to Southampton. The village was small with just a handful of families the Diapers, Jurds, Parkers and Dibles.

Cheryl's interest started in this topic when she found a family log by Tom Diaper which led her to research the full story of the village from which he came. Peartree Green was part of Itchen Village and where Queen Elizabeth I planted a pear tree there. The area was also known as St Mary Extra because a chapel was built there in 1620 with its mother Church being St Marys in Southampton. In later centuries a few large estates with big houses were established further inland from the ferry.

The ferry and fishing were the important source of income for the waterside families. The ferry was rowed across the river and nearby on the Itchen side was the Royal Oak pub. There were a number of reports of delays for passengers because the ferrymen preferred to stay in the pub. It was not just ferrymen that rowed the ferry but the women of the village also rowed it. Famous people such as King Charles II, Samuel Pepys and Jane Austen used the ferry.

Despite the ferrymen and fishermen objecting and signing a petition, eventually a steam floating bridge chain ferry was introduced in 1836. Some of the original ferrymen were employed to work on the new floating bridge. At this time the fishermen were developing their own type of fishing smack to suit the local conditions and obviously it was known as an Itchen Ferry boat. This led them to racing these boats amongst themselves and at local regattas and they became experienced yacht racing crews.

When the large racing yachts, including the J Class yachts, needed crews some of their owners employed these experienced yacht racing Itchen Village men. One of these owners, Sir Thomas Lipton, employed them on his yachts named Shamrock. He appointed Captain Alfred Diaper as skipper of his yacht in a challenge for the America's Cup and obviously Alf chose the crew mostly from his family. The crew were given a uniform and a set of sailing clothes. They were the professional crew that sailed the yacht to America and took part in the practice races beating the other yachts. When it came to the America's Cup itself it was a Sir Thomas Lipton gentleman crew that raced and lost.

Over the racing seasons Captain Diaper won enough prize money to build himself a house in Itchen Village. While their husbands were away sailing abroad the women ran the village. When the racing crews got old and had to retire many of them became publicans. Cheryl told a number of sailing stories of Itchen skippers and crewmen such as taking a yacht to Australia and the crew running out of water and killing a young Itchen crewman to survive.

Itchen Village eventually became part of Woolston as it developed with Thornycrofts shipbuilders and Supermarine aircraft manufacturers setting up there. The fate of the village was sealed in 1940 when the Germans targeted and bombed the Supermarine aircraft factory which was making Spitfires. The factory was destroyed along with most of the village. The troops used the bombed-out Itchen Village buildings to practice and prepare for the D-Day invasion. Although a few houses remained, this was the end of Itchen Village as it was not rebuilt after the war.

A fascinating story told by Cheryl in a very interesting way and the Society had many visitors from the Itchen Village area who asked her many questions at the conclusion of her well-illustrated talk.