

Howard's Way - 40 Years On

5th February 2026 - Memorial Hall

Despite the rain it was a capacity audience to hear James Arnott, a Hamble Valley Guide, tell the story of the television series Howard's Way that started 40 years ago. It was a hugely popular television drama series filmed on the Hamble River.

It dealt with the personal and professional lives of the wealthy yachting and businesses in the fictional town of Tarrant. Much of the filming was carried out at Bursledon using the Elephant Boatyard (that was renamed the Mermaid boatyard for the series), the Jolly Sailor pub and local houses. Hamble, Swanwick and Warsash were other locations used for the television series.

The BBC wanted to produce a British television series to compete with the very successful American series Dallas and Dynasty. Howard's Way started on 1st September 1985 for its popular Sunday evening viewing time and at its peak had 14 million viewers. As it was a water-based series the producer wanted it to be realistic, so he hired yachting journalist, Bob Fisher, as its technical nautical adviser.

James then went on to describe some of the main characters of the series. They included Tom Howard who was made redundant from his job as an aircraft designer and as he was a sailing enthusiast, he decided to pursue his dream of designing and building boats. He put his money into the ailing Mermaid boatyard run by Jack Rolfe. Tom's family included Jan his wife, son Leo and daughter Lynne. Ken Masters, a chandlery owner, was a wide-boy and the villain of the series. Another character was Charles Frere who was a millionaire businessman.

Next James showed the locations used for the filming of the series that were the more important aspect of the programmes than the cast. The two main ones were the Elephant Boatyard and the Jolly Sailor pub but several houses in Bursledon were used as the homes of the television characters. Some of the inside shots were filmed in the studios of Pebble Mill, Birmingham.

Tarrant Service Station was Hamble Garage; the Royal Southern Yacht Club and Compass Point Chandlery were other filming locations. Hamble's public hard and foreshore were converted into a beach hut and small boat hire business. Ken Master's chandlery business was filmed at Warsash, as well as it being turned into New York Harbour for the arrival of one of Howard's Way's yachts after a trans-Atlantic voyage.

Fashion and glamour were another main theme of the series with Jan Howard owning a fashion store. The female characters of the series such as Lynne Howard, Avril Rolfe, Polly Urquhart, Abby Urquhart and Laura Wilde played by Kate O'Mara added much to the series glamour and fashion costumes. The filming of a wedding took two days just for a 6-minute sequence.

The new boats designed in the series included 'Flying Fish' a Laser 28, 'Barracuda of Tarrant', the prototype of the Sadler Barracuda 45, and 'Spring of Tarrant', the prototype of the MG Spring 25. The Elephant Boatyard built the prototype of the Barracuda and Howard's Way had a good effect on the British boatbuilding industry. It also greatly helped local tourism with people coming from far afield to see the

locations at which the television series was filmed and particularly a large number of pleasure trip boats came from all around the Solent to view the river and Howard's Way.

The theme tune for the series by the Simon May Orchestra was made into a chart hit by Marti Webb. Maurice Colbourne who played Tom Howard died in 1989 that led to Howard's Way finishing after the 6th series with the final episode shown on 25th November 1990. Finally, James spoke about what had happened to the actors of the series 40 years on and of course some of them were now dead.

The meeting concluded by the audience sharing their memories of the television series including some who had worked at the Jolly Sailor pub when Howard's Way was being filmed. James said it was more than a television series as it made yachting more accessible. A very popular and professionally presented talk by James as you would expect of a Hamble Valley Guide.