

# Hamble River's Classic Superyachts

## 3rd April 2025 - Memorial Hall

The Society's chairman, Ian Underdown, told the fascinating story of some of the best-known world classic superyachts that were saved by the mud of the Hamble River to sail in their magnificence today. He gave a well-illustrated history of these superb Hamble yachts from their launching to their revival and videos of them sailing today in the world's most luxurious locations.

During the 1950s to 1970s the J Class 'Endeavour' and 'Velsheda', plus the Big Class yacht 'Lulworth', were passed by in their mud berths on the river with most yachtsmen dreaming of owning them and getting them sailing again. The J-Class were the most beautiful racing yachts ever built.

Ian started by telling the story of 'Lulworth' the Big Class yacht that raced against the King George V's renowned yacht 'Britannia'. She was 151ft long, built in 1920 for Richard Lee and was originally named 'Terpsichore'. She was not successful in her early racing until a new owner bought her in 1924 and changed her name to 'Lulworth'. He made Swanwick's Captain Charles Bevis her skipper who made significant alterations to her and she was successful in regattas until the 1930s when she was outclassed by the new J-Class. In 1935 she was converted to a cruising ketch.

After the war 'Lulworth' was bought by Richard and Rene Lucas and moored off the 'Jolly Sailor' pub at Bursledon until 1955 when she was moved to Crableck Boatyard. Here she was put in a mud berth and they lived on board of her until the end of the 1980s. In 1990 she was sold and transported to Italy for restoration. Due to financial difficulties this was not achieved until 2006. It was called the 'Restoration of the Century' and 'Lulworth' is now the world's largest gaff rigged cutter.

Ian then mentioned 'Hispania' that had connections with the Hamble River but was not kept on it. 'Hispania' was built for the King of Spain in 1909 and Swanwick's Captain Charles Bevis became its skipper from 1911 to 1914. She was then sold to a Norwegian ship owner but returned to England in 1935 and was beached in a mud berth at West Mersea to be used as a houseboat. She remained there until 1997 when she was taken to Hamble for restoration by Fairlie Restorations and is sailing today with other renowned classic yachts.

Next Ian moved on to the magnificent J-Class yachts and 'Velsheda' that was built in 1933, the only British J-Class yacht not built for the America's Cup. She was named after the daughters of the owner William Stephenson, chairman of the Woolworth chain of shops, Velma, Sheila and Daphne. She raced against the best yachts of her time and in her second season won 40 races.

After the war she was towed to a mud berth at Swanwick and subsequently to her permanent mud berth opposite Badnam creek. She had several owners until she was bought by Mike Mahoney in the mid-1970s and towed to the River Itchen for restoration that never happened. In the mid-1980s she was bought by Terry Brabant, a metal merchant, who undertook an economical refit. Still without an engine she regularly sailed along the south coast on charter work.

‘Velsheda’ was sold and laid up at Camper Nicholson at Gosport until a new Dutch owner in 1995 took her to Southampton Yacht Services for a two-year comprehensive rebuild to bring her back into immaculate racing condition. Today she is one of world’s superb superyachts.

Finally, Ian told the story of ‘Endeavour’. She was built in 1934 for rich aviation pioneer, Sir Thomas Sopwith, to challenge for the America’s Cup. Her skipper was George Williams, the son of a Hamble fishing boat skipper. When she was about to leave for America, the professional crew went on strike and an amateur crew of keen yachtsmen, under skipper George Williams, raced in the America’s Cup. She was the British challenger that has come closest to winning the Cup, even up today.

George was the skipper of the next J-Class yacht, ‘Endeavour II’, to compete for the America’s Cup that was again unsuccessful. Unfortunately, George died from a burst ulcer on the return voyage home across the Atlantic.

After the war she was bought by Richard Lucas and similar to ‘Velsheda’ was taken to a mud berth at Swanwick. In the mid-1950s she was moved to Crableck Boatyard along with ‘Lulworth’. Here she stayed until 1972, when after Richard’s Lucas’ death, she was acquired by the Maritime Trust. She was taken to the River Medina where she sank and was refloated. By 1978 the Trust had been unable to form a viable plan for her restoration so sold ‘Endeavour’ to John Amos, price just £10. He returned her to the Hamble River on the eastern shore at Foulkes Riverside Boatyard.

John found he could not undertake her rebuild in a mud berth so arranged for her to be taken ashore at Calshot Spit. Although he made a valiant effort it proved beyond his resources. He sold her to young American heiress, Elizabeth Meyer, who spent £2 million on completely rebuilding her steel hull. In 1984 ‘Endeavour’ was then taken to a Dutch boatyard to finish the restoration.

This was completed in 1989 for her to sail for the first time in over 50 years. Elizabeth Meyer was responsible for encouraging the restoration of other classic yachts and the resurgence of the J-Class again.

As with the other yachts that Ian talked about, he concluded by showing a video of ‘Endeavour’ sailing today, including revealing her superb luxurious onboard accommodation and features. She is said to be the world’s greatest classic superyacht.

The mud of the Hamble River saved these three world classic superyachts for the future.

Another very popular and extremely well-presented talk by Ian, that was obviously very much enjoyed by those present. The meeting concluded by the audience sharing their memories and experiences of these yachts with some having been onboard or sailed them. The most common comment as people left was ‘That was amazing’.