

# Amazing Story of Hamble Regattas

## 4th April 2024 - Memorial Hall

The Society's chairman, Ian Underdown, gave a well-illustrated and fascinating presentation of the amazing story of Hamble regattas that have given river users, residents and visitors much enjoyment over the years. The first known regatta held at Hamble was in 1868 and it was the Hamble River Regatta that involved all the villages on the river.

This was patronised by "the nobility, clergy, gentry and visitors in the neighbourhood" along with the river's village residents. In the 1870s it was a very large event in the area with royalty attending and visitors from far afield. Large seagoing fishing boats were moored in the middle of the river off Hamble foreshore to be used as committee boats to start and finish the races, for the subscribers and a band. As well as sailing and rowing races there were events such as walking a greasy pole for the prize of a live pig at the end, live ducks cast adrift on the water for boys to swim after them and an aquatic derby with boys paddling a horse made out of wooden barrel. The regatta was in mid-week and the schools were given a day off to attend.

In the 1890s the regatta continued to be a popular and big occasion. Now there were rowing match races for crews from the Royal Navy, Coastguards, TS Mercury, yachtsmen and fishermen. Sailing races started with sails down, from anchors, which were slipped. There was no limit to sails but no shifting of ballast.

The Hamble River Regatta resumed at Hamble after the First World War. New events such as Sea Scouts and Sea Rangers gig races for crews from the surrounding area, shovel and hand races, plus by now outboard races. There were many ashore events and by the end of the 1930s the 'Fools Company' were putting on huge novelty events such as the Crabtown Circus and a bull fight on the Quay. This was a whole village affair with Lukes Boatyard, Hamble River Sailing Club and Manor Farm greatly contributing during this period.

The Hamble River Regatta continued after the Second World War but at the beginning of the 1960s it became Hamble Regatta and Carnival. A land and water carnival with a carnival queen was incorporated with the regatta. As well as the normal sailing, rowing and swimming races there were blindfold rowing races, boat tug of wars, canoe races and demonstrations plus school children displays, barbeques and floodlight sailing ballets.

Towards the end of the decade there were many very amusing novelty events, the premier race being the Drumaran World Championship raced in rafts made of oil drums with unspecified number of spars, sails and crew. Other popular novelty events were riding a bike along a plank, pillow fights on greasy poles and the water derby. Unfortunately, with risk assessments, health and safety issues these events would not be able to take place today.

The annual regattas and carnivals ended by the end of the 1970s and occasional ones were held over the next few years until Hamble Week started in 1997. The River Hamble Combined Clubs wished to find a slot in the sailing season to run a similar regatta as Cowes and Cork Week. Sailing races were held on mid-week evenings and at the weekends with over 300 boats taking part. There were also the associated social activities and land events with various markets, a competitor's marquee on Hamble Quay as well as a Grand Extravaganza Dance at Hamble Point.

In 2001 the concept of Hamble Week being similar to Cowes Week was given up. The sailing clubs continued the format of sailing races, as well as aquatic and land events at Hamble. There was a Come and Get Wet that gave the public an opportunity to have a go at paddling a canoe, rowing and sailing a dinghy, together with crab fishing and model boat competitions.

One of the highlights of the week was the Hamble Week's spectacular 'Soap Box Derby'. This was described as a madcap human powered contraption built to race from the Village Square into the river, round the public jetty and back to the King & Queen pub. This drew huge crowds who attempted to drench the competitors and throw bags of flour as they made their way round the course.

The last evening of Hamble Week was so popular with the bars and fireworks that it attracted people from the surrounding towns and villages. Unfortunately, with alcohol available this led to anti-social behaviour and the authorities asked for it to change its format or cease its evening events. The last Hamble Week was in 2011.

Ian concluded by showing pictures of the fun fair and fireworks that usually ended most Hamble regattas. Despite the heavy rain on the evening of the meeting, that would have put many others off attending, the good number present enjoyed seeing the wide variety of activities that had been part of the regattas over the years. Afterwards a few people in the audience said they were trying to restart a regatta at Hamble again this year. Hopefully they will be successful!