

An Armchair Tour of the Hamble Valley

6th February 2025- Memorial Hall

At this meeting Geoff Watts gave 'An Armchair tour of the Hamble Valley' telling some stories of places in this lovely and fascinating part of Hampshire. Geoff explored parts of the Hamble Valley in the Borough of Eastleigh using its Coat of Arms as his guide. He explained each part of it symbolised a particular location or piece of the Borough's history.



Geoff started by saying the present Borough of Eastleigh was formed as part of Local Government Reorganisation in 1974 but its history went much further back. There are intertwined Hampshire roses and lilies of St Mary, the lilies representing the patron Saint of the churches at Bishopstoke and South Stoneham.

The naval crown indicates the Borough's naval connections, the Knight's helmet is traditionally used for corporate bodies and the bishop's mitre refers to the connection with the Bishop of Winchester. The wheat sheaves symbolise the rural nature of some of the area.

He also said it was interesting that North Stoneham Church only has one hand because it dates back to when it was a rural area and the agricultural workers only required to know the important hours of the day, not the precise time.

Geoff mentioned the Itchen Navigation (an improvement river not a dug canal). At Allbrook in 1665, one of our first recognised female portrait painters, Mary Beale, moved there and her house still survives today.

The chequered strip on the Coat of Arms recalls that Eastleigh was once the Manor held by the Chamberlains of the Royal Exchequer. The two narrow black lines indicate the importance of the railway and cable making activities of the Borough. The winged wheel signifies the theme of progression of industry, communication and transport.

Geoff then talked about Botley's rural nature explaining that is why William Cobbett moved there. He was a writer of pamphlets and publications including his 'Rural

Rides'. The coming of the railway also helped the strawberry growing industry to expand its market to a much wider area.

Of course, at Netley, the Abbey was mentioned and there was a grave in Netley Hospital's cemetery belonging to a member of the First World War Army Cycling Corps.

The Medieval ship at the bottom of the crest represents the shipbuilding and yachting activities of Bursledon and Hamble. As an example, Geoff gave George Parsons' ship HMS Elephant that was built and launched at Bursledon in 1786. This was Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Copenhagen where he put his telescope up to his blind eye and he said he could not see the signal to break off action.

At Hamble he spoke about the Hardwicke family that had naval connections. The wife of the 4th Earl of Hardwicke, who owned Sydney Lodge, is buried in Hamble churchyard but it was her son, Charles that lost the family's seat and large estate, Wimpole Hall, in Cambridgeshire. Her eldest son's problem was that he was a spendthrift and became £300,000 in debt hence lost their Cambridgeshire estate. He was the inspiration for the musical character of 'Champagne Charlie'.

An interesting talk from Geoff with many fascinating facts about our area that most people would not have known.