

## **A Hamble Foreshore Business**

### ***Blue Star Boats to the Beach Hut Cafe***

#### **9th February 2017 - Roy Underdown Pavilion**

The Society's Chairman, Ian Underdown, gave an illustrated talk about a business that has been on Hamble Foreshore since the 1930s, now known as the Beach Hut Cafe, but formerly Blue Star Boats and Cafe.

The business was started when Alf Dornom, a chauffeur/skipper for prominent local families, obtained a boatman's licence in 1932, when his last employer sold her boat. He was a Cruising Association Boatman, who hired out dinghies, looked after other people's boats and did mooring work. Alf caused a Public Meeting being called as he let the Foreshore from Winchester College and parishioners feared the loss of their foreshore rights and its character.

This resulted in the Parish Council leasing and subsequently purchasing the Foreshore. From that time owners of the business had to obtain permission and a licence from the Parish Council to operate from the Foreshore.

When Alf retired, Peter Davies bought the business and was helped by Ernie Stagg, Hamble's postman. Ernie started river trips and when Peter left he continued the business which he called Blue Star Boats. Ernie operated river trips on a more regular basis in 12 seat launches to see the big ocean liners and when there were none he ran trips around TS Mercury. He also hired out dinghies and was greatly helped by local lads.

At the end of the 1950's the business was getting too big to operate by himself, even with help by the youngsters, so he decided to sell to the Borrett family. The Borrett family greatly improved the business by purchasing a larger trip boat that could carry 56 passengers, so the trips could be extended to either Bursledon Bridge or Hamble Point Buoy. They also ran trips to see the ocean liners and for other special events.

Bob and Mary Borrett could not have operated the business without the help of their 4 children. Being a seasonal business Bob and Mary had to undertake other work, particularly during the winter months. At the beginning of the 1970s they asked if they could sell tea and ices from their foreshore hut, but withdrew the request because of objections from other local businesses.

Subsequently Blue Star Boats was sold to Roger Downer and a partner and they were given permission to erect a wooden kiosk to sell refreshments. This was allowed to support the river trips and boat business during bad weather. Renting out moorings also subsidised it during the winter.

The business passed through a number of other owners until Cliff Hall bought it at the beginning of the 1990s. He made a significant investment in it, making huge improvements, particularly with the river trips. The most significant was the construction of a brick kiosk. All previous Councils had only allowed temporary

buildings on the Foreshore, due to it being purchased as 'Public Open Space'. It was agreed he could have a 25 year lease in order to write off the capital costs and at the end of that time the kiosk would revert to the Council.

At the beginning of the millennium Clive and Angie Fish took over the business, continuing the river trips, including a River Bus service, but no longer operating a river taxi service. By this time hiring out boats had ceased. A few years later they had outgrown the kiosk's facilities and wished to offer undercover facilities for inclement weather, plus provide a food service throughout the year. After much negotiation they agreed a 100 year lease and planning permission for a cafe/kiosk, which opened in 2010.

In 2014, Richard Beach bought the cafe/kiosk to be managed by his brother Phil, but not the boat business although under the lease it is required to run a trip boat. At the beginning of 2016 it was renamed the Beach Hut Cafe and this will be a new chapter in the history of this Foreshore business.

There was a much larger attendance than expected for this special local interest topic and not a seat to spare. Feedback at the end was that it was a most worthwhile and stimulating compilation of a significant village business' history. Previous owners, their relatives and friends attended and thoroughly enjoyed it. So much so, they shared their memories at the end of the meeting and it was difficult to get them to leave.