

Welcome aboard the Oliver B for your cruise on the beautiful Beaulieu River. As we depart please listen to the following safety announcement. In the unlikely event of an emergency, you'll be asked to remain calm and await instructions from the crew. Lifejackets are stowed under the seats in the wheelhouse and in the large wooden box on the outside deck. There are two orange buoyant apparatus aft and one inflatable raft on the stern. This will be launched by the crew and boarded from one of the main side exits. Please take care as you move around the boat, and I would like to remind you all that this is a no smoking vessel. Thank you.

As we turn you have a splendid view of Buckler's Hard. It looks very different now from its appearance in the 18th century when the whole river side would have been alive with shipbuilding activity, or in 1944, just before the D Day landings when the River was filled with landing craft and men waiting for the signal that would see them begin their journey across the English Channel to Normandy.

Buckler's Wood Sir Reginald Poole c 1920,

Now take your imagination back to **1079**. The New Forest has just been founded by William the Conqueror as a royal hunting preserve and this included all the land surrounding the Beaulieu River. William and his sons loved hunting around here and he had a hunting lodge where he stayed at the head of the Beaulieu River. The Romans had left the land largely alone and it was a wild and uncultivated place. The river was known as the River Otter no doubt due to the large populations of the animals that lived here. Today Otters are a rare sight having been hunted until the 1930's.

When King John in 1204 decided to build a new Cisterian Abbey in England he choose a site known for its remoteness and tranquillity as well as being on a river — vital for bringing building materials in for construction.

Stone could not be carted overland, it had to come up the River Otter from the quarries in Binsted on the Isle of Wight, from Purbeck and all the way from Caen in the heartland of Normandy.

In the King John Charter of 25th January 1205 the abbey lands are defined by

"being between the Beaulieu River and the sea, giving it a seashore for two and a half miles along the Solent as far west as the stream called `Freiswater"

or as it is now known as the Sowley pond outflow.

Most importantly the King also gave specifically the flow of the tide rising and falling on both banks of the river'. Because of this even early on the monks asserted their rights to the river and any

revenue due. They got from the owner of Exbury, Walter Foliot, a payment of 4s. a year for the right to construct a weir even though it was on a site where one had formally stood. Walter from Exbury also acknowledged that he and his men had no fishing rights in the river, something he had done for generations. Somehow I think there must have been a lot of bad feeling between Beaulieu and Exbury — of course something not known today!

In 1278 some men from Southampton were attacked whilst fishing, allegedly by the Abbot of Beaulieu, with Monks and laybrothers armed with swords, axes and bows and arrows. The Monks took their boat and some men were injured. The case went to court. The men argued that they had been fishing there for years and they sued for damages for being injured during the attack for 40s but in turn they promised to settle privately on the fishing rights in future. After this incident there are no more accounts of people poaching in the monastic period. The Monks were tough land owners and the river a much prized part of their estate.

Mallards George Tozer 1929

The Monks created fish traps and ponds, weirs and banks to hold back the river. They fished extensively and even today there are remains of medieval fish traps along the coast at Needs Ore. These were photographed in 2000 in a maritime survey and they consist of V-shaped structures approximately 10m long below the surface of the sea roughly 400m from the current shoreline. It is possible that the structures are the remains of timber frames which would have held numerous conical woven baskets that trapped and collected shoals of fish. The monks ate a lot of shellfish in particular Oysters, the shells of which are found all around the Abbey remains.

The Monks had a duty to protect the coast against invasion for the King and men were sent to help with the fortifications of Southampton. In 1338 Portsmouth was burned and Southampton attacked. The Abbot was asked again to provide men- at —arms at his own expense to defend the coasts.

Boats were commandeered by the King as well as a lot of supplies for the defending army. In 1377 the French invaded the Isle of Wight where they burned Yarmouth, Newtown and Newport. The Beaulieu River was on high alert but luckily escaped attack.

The king gave the monks exemption from tolls and feudal taxes including freedom of passage on the Thames from Farringdon where the monks had another Abbey, to the sea. It may seem a long way around by river and sea to get from Farringdon, just South West of Oxford, to Beaulieu by boat but it was the best way to transport bulk such as food and materials .

The land along the river was used for farming. At **Warren Farm** the Monks kept rabbits using the sea and river boundaries to keep

them enclosed. I have to report that a few have escaped over the centuries and mostly seem to now be in our garden.

Clobb Copse Albert Ehrman 1937,

On the right hand side are **oyster beds**, created more than a hundred years ago by great grandfather. The oysters were considered a delicacy by the 1880s, but the cost of producing them far outweighed the price they could fetch and the business closed. Today oysters are again being bred in the Beaulieu River, where the water is pure enough for a licence to be granted.

During the **Second World War**, an experimental floating dock was built in these old oyster beds, together with components for the **Mulberry harbours** used in the D Day landings.

At the outbreak of war, the Admiralty ordered the removal of all boats and installed a log boom across the river mouth to deter enemy craft. Initially, Buckler's Hard had a concrete slipway installed so it could be used as a repair and service base for motor torpedo boats — but as the war progressed, the demands on the river increased.

In 1941, Bailey's Hard was requisitioned as a base for Husbands' Shipbuilders to fit out their wooden minesweepers. The following year, the Harbour Master and his assistant were seconded to the Admiralty and in 1943 the village itself was requisitioned for naval personnel and their activities.

The Master Builder's House had been used by officers since the start of the war (with the ratings put up in hastily erected Nissen huts) but now a top secret operation required military police to occupy all rooms facing the Hard. The closely-guarded secret was 'Operation Quicksilver', a deception plan in which dummy landing craft were built for mooring on rivers and harbours in the south-east. Built by the Pioneer Corps, the purpose of these dummies, called 'Bigbobs', was to fool the Germans into thinking that any invasion would take place in the area around Calais.

The next project saw the old oyster beds off Clobb Copse occupied by men from Wates the Builders and the Marley Tile Company. The 100-strong workforce were engaged in making segments of 'Mulberry Harbour' which were towed across to the Normandy coast for the D-Day landings. They built over fifty concrete pontoons needed to support the harbours' floating roadways. These 80 x 60 foot concrete accommodation and storage chambers were launched by knocking down a temporary retaining wall adjoining the river.

The site was also used to build a concrete floating dock large enough to take a tank landing craft. It was launched in April 1944 and towed to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Brought back after the War, it is thought to be still in use in Norway.

Lieutenant Commander Nevil Shute Norway RNVR, well known for his novel *Requiem for A Wren*, about *HMS Mastodon* at Exbury, worked in the Department of Miscellaneous Weapons Development. He used the Beaulieu River to experiment with *Swallow*, a rocket-propelled pilotless aircraft. D-Day came too soon for it to play a part, but the results were later used to develop guided weapons systems. The build-up to the D-Day landings in Normandy on 6th June 1944 saw unprecedented activity on the Beaulieu River as it filled with a variety of landing craft and associated ancillary units. King George VI visited *HMS Mastodon* at Exbury on 24th May, then sailed down the river, informally reviewing the thousands of army and navy personnel, gathered on or around the river in anticipation of an order to sail.

Finally, on 4th June, the signal came and the craft began their uncertain journeys; some foundered before reaching their destination, but many more played their part in the landings before running a shuttle service of troops and vehicles to sustain the Allied advance through Normandy.

Fiddlers Mrs Beatrice Gross 1929 Ted Fort

At **Salterns** the land was drained for the production of Salt. Between Gins and Needs Ore at the mouth of the river, there are embankments that act as sea defences. Hundreds of years ago the land was under water and in the 18th century much of it was reclaimed for use as salterns. Salt was a highly prized commodity and salt officers were based at Buckler's Hard to check that the quantity of salt produced and the amount of tax paid, tallied. They were probably not the most popular men in the Village. NICHOLAS CORY, the Salt Officer, he was paid only £40 a year to do this unpopular job. He had to be present at the sale and removal of salt, supervise the weighing, and record the amounts, at the many salterns in the neighbourhood, so that the tax could be assessed. At least one Salt Officer lived in Buckler's Hard from 1730 until 1825, when the tax was abolished.

Gins Farm is on the site where the monks of Beaulieu Abbey kept their ships at a quay. As the river dries out at low water at Beaulieu they needed a place to moor at all states of tide. The boats were used for fishing and trade, wool from their farms or granges was taken round to Southampton before being exported to what is now Holland and Belgium. The name Gins is thought to derive from a piece of lifting machinery, a jin-pole, not one of the cargoes the monks brought back from Southampton after a night out!

Today at Gins you can see the club house of the Royal

Southampton Yacht Club.

At the surrender of the Abbey in **1538**, the precious stone was taken yet again by boat to the new defences being built in the area. Hurst, Cowes and Calshot Castle all built from Beaulieu Abbey stone.

The ownership of the river passed with the Abbey lands to the new owners, the Earls of Southampton and through the generations to today.

In 1927 one of the yachtsmen refused to pay landing and boomage charges challenging the river ownership rights. My grandfather John, 2nd Lord Montagu went to the Board of Trade and asked them to establish that he was the rightful owner of the river and river bed. They studied the original grant from King John and found in his favour and to this day this is one of the unusual aspects of the Beaulieu River.

Life continued without the monks as a quiet agricultural estate and it is not until new threats from the continent spread that the Beaulieu River came to life again.

Under threat of war in 1690, the Navy ordered 27 new ships. The Royal dockyards did not have the capacity to build them all. The Admiralty gave contracts to civilian ship yards.

In 1696, Richard Herring, a shipwright at the Bursledon yard on the Hamble River, won a contract to build the *Salisbury*, a 48-gun ship. Herring leased a site on the Beaulieu River, at Bailey's Hard, a mile downstream from Beaulieu Village from Ralph, Lord Montagu of Boughton, owner of the Beaulieu Estate.

Herring wrote to the Navy Board requesting exemption for his workforce of 80 men from impressment into the Navy. Work was progressing when he suddenly died in January 1697. His brother James took over the contract but he got into financial difficulties and a year later work had completely stopped. The Beaulieu Estate took over the yard and the uncompleted ship in lieu of debts. An agreement was reached with the Navy Board, workers and materials came from Portsmouth to complete the ship in 1698.

It would be another 47 years before naval shipbuilding returned to the Beaulieu River.

In the early 1700s Buckler's Hard was a landing place on the Beaulieu River surrounded by the trees of Dungehill Copse. The 'hard' was one of the few places where gravel ran down to the low-water mark. On the Beaulieu Estate map of 1718 a building is clearly shown in the vicinity of the current slipways at Buckler's Hard. I have no doubt that boat building had been going on in this location for centuries, even during the medieval period. The monks

needed lots of boats for transport to their other lands, for trade and fishing. It was the perfect location for such an activity.

In 1722 The owner of the Beaulieu Estate, John, 2nd Duke of Montagu, had ambitious plans. He proposed to build a free port for the import and export of sugar from the West Indies. The settlement was to be called **Montagu Town**.

The early 18th century saw Britain, France and Spain all vying for colonial supremacy in the 'New World'. St Lucia and St Vincent were eventually declared neutral in 1713 but in 1722 George I granted them to the Duke of Montagu. The Duke then organised an expedition of seven ships, led by Captain Nathaniel Uring, to colonise the islands and set up sugar plantations. The expedition cost around £40,000 and was equipped with cannon, muskets and bayonets, and two prototype machine-guns.

When the flotilla of ships reached St Lucia in December 1722, it received some bad news: in nearby Martinique, the French had claimed St Lucia as their own. Undeterred, the British nevertheless established a base which they named 'Montagu Point', but the new colony lasted less than a month. French forces landed on the island and the expedition was ordered to leave. It fared no better on St Vincent, which the French also claimed, and the project was eventually abandoned.

Meanwhile, in England, plans for the new settlement on the Duke's Beaulieu Estate had taken shape. Woodland was cleared in Dungehill Copse and an 80-foot wide street was built down to a quay at the edge of the river. Montagu Town was to have symmetrical blocks of houses in squares as well as a chapel, inn, salt-water baths and large storehouses for imported sugar. A prospectus was issued offering plots of land on a 99-year lease for 6s 8d, but although the terms were very attractive, there was little interest in the new town. By 1731 only seven houses had been built, five at the Duke's own expense.

There was little interest in the new town after the expedition failed. Its name went back to being Buckler's Hard. The tenants were three salt tax collectors, a widow, a night-watchman, a blacksmith and a retired parson.

Between 1744 and 1749 several men built naval ships on the Beaulieu River, but none were able to make it a commercial success.

The first was James Wyatt, a local entrepreneur and timber merchant from Hythe, who won a contract to build a Royal Navy ship, the *Surprise* in 1744. He chose Buckler's Hard because of its many advantages. The quay and village created for Montagu Town twenty years earlier, the depth and width of the river, the sheltered site from the prevailing westerly winds and the wide street used for timber storage. It was surrounded by trees which could be bought from the Beaulieu Estate.

Building a wooden naval ship required huge quantities of timber. 40 acres of 100-year old trees, or about 2000 trees, were needed to build a 64-gun ship such as the *Agamemnon*. The wood had to be left to season or dry for two years before it could be used. Supply of good quality wood was a problem, especially for private shipyards. They were reliant on trees planted by previous generations. Timber in royal forests like the New Forest was reserved for use in the royal dockyards, so other sources needed to be found. In 1747 shipwrights from Buckler's Hard went to the neighbouring Exbury Estate to select oaks for future use. The wood arrived some 9 years later to be used to build the *Coventry*.

In 1744 Henry Adams was appointed as a Navy Board Overseer at Buckler's Hard. His job was to supervise the building of naval ships. Living away from home on wages of around 30s a week, it was not a popular job, but it could lead to advancement for men of ambition.

Adams' first job as Overseer was the *Surprise*, followed by the *Scorpion* and the *Woolwich*. In 1748, during the building of the *Woolwich*, he left royal service to become a ship building contractor, leasing the shipyard at Buckler's Hard from the Beaulieu Estate.

Adams' first ship, the *Mermaid*, was launched in 1749. This was followed by several difficult years before a demand for new ships was triggered by the outbreak of war in 1756. In peacetime Adams replied on building merchant ships and supplemented his income as a timber merchant.

Occasionally he built ships on speculation', successfully gambling that the Navy would need them before he had finished building.

The last ship completed by Adams before retirement was the *Cerberus* launched in 1794. He then left the day-to day running of the business to his sons, Balthazar and Edward, but remained in financial control until his death in 1805.

In 1793 the second generation of Adams' shipbuilders at Buckler's Hard coincided with difficult economic conditions. There were timber and manpower shortages, inflation, and a fall in the number of naval contracts causing increased competition.

Balthazar and Edward had served as apprentice shipwrights to their father Henry and took over the yard from him.

The shipyard was split in two, Balthazar taking the western side and Edward the east, but naval shipbuilding ended with the launch of the *Towey* by Balthazar in 1814. Edward kept his yard going by undertaking repairs and building smaller merchant ships, but by 1830 these jobs were becoming scarce. Steam and iron were

taking over and shipbuilding was moving to the large towns and cities.

The Adams also built and repaired boats for the Preventative Service or Coastguard. Their function was to prevent smuggling and give assistance to ships in distress. There were two local stations, one at Lepe (3 miles east of the Beaulieu River) and another at Pitts Deep (4 miles west). In 1826 a boat was built for the Hurst Castle station near Lymington.

Edward Adams gave up the tenancy of the shipyard in 1847, bringing to an end a family association with Buckler's Hard that had lasted over a century.

The most important feature, the launchways, was where the ships were built. Until the 1770's the largest ships built here were 44-gun 5th Rates, but Henry Adams wanted the prestige of building 74-gun 3rd Rates. At his request the Navy Board sent a surveyor, John Henslow, to report on its suitability. Following approval Adams built four launchways with a dock in the middle. The furthest upstream, angled towards the bend in the river to maximise space, was for the 64s and 74s. The first large warship he built was the 64-gun *Vigilant* launched in 1774. The first 74-gun was the *Illustrious* launched in 1789.

In 1805 when two 74s, the *Victorious* and the *Hannibal*, were being built a workforce of around 150 men were required. A smaller warship might require only 50 men in total. Many of the workers lived at Buckler's Hard, either as tenants of the Beaulieu Estate or of the Adams family. Others, often the less skilled, lived at Beaulieu Rails (now East Boldre).

Ships were commissioned into the Royal Navy under their first captain shortly before launch or whilst fitting out. The naval ships launched on the Beaulieu River were empty shells — they had no guns, stores, fittings, masts or sails. This was all added as part of the 'fitting out' process in the Royal dockyard at Portsmouth; after the 1760s this included coppering the bottoms of the ships.

Once the Overseer had reported that the boat was acceptable, the Master Shipwright could agree a launch date with the Navy Board. A launch party would then be sent from Portsmouth to supervise the operation several days before the event. Launching a ship was a dangerous and difficult procedure.

A wooden cradle, known as the bilgeways, was built around the completed hull to support it during the launch; this ran on two wooden rails called slideways. At low tide they were greased with melted tallow and soap. The ship was launched on the following high tide by gradually knocking away her supporting props. Gravity carried her into the water; the speed being controlled by ropes.

Once mid-stream ropes would be thrown to riggers in small boats; they would take the ship in tow down river on the first stage of the 8 mile journey to Portsmouth. This normally took two or three days depending on the tides and the weather. Now the ship was in 'Portsmouth hands' and provided everything was in order, the Master Shipwright could claim the final payment of their contract.

Needs Ore cottages built 1841 Census Returns for Beaulieu indicate that the Preventative Service was maintaining a presence at Needs Ore on H.M. Brig, ICARUS at this date. The entry in 1851 calls it "Needs Oare Station" & it would appear from correspondence over the construction of a well for their use [18534], that they were still using the ICARUS. Correspondence suggests that the Needs Ore Coastguard Cottages were erected between 1857 & 1861, first appearing in the Stewards' Accounts in 1861.

Almost the entire Beaulieu River estuary forms a part of the **North Solent Shore nature reserve**. This was established in 1979 to protect the areas' animal and plant life. Needs Ore Point, at the heart of the reserve, was an important nesting site for black headed gulls and several species of tern. A special act of Parliament was passed in 1986 closing one of the navigable channels to help prevent erosion of the site. We are very pleased to say that this year the black headed gulls have returned to Needs Ore and Gull Island to nest after a number of years. It is amazing to think that only 15 years ago there was a license to take some 20,000 gulls eggs a year from this small island. Presently we are not harvesting the eggs but hope that in coming years if the populations return we will be able to again. There are many theories as to why the gulls disappeared, some say foxes, some birds of prey, tidal heights, a change to picking routines, we can not know for sure.

The area is designated as

- . **SSSI** — Special site of Scientific interest
- . **NNR** — National Nature reserve
- . **SPA** — Southampton water special protection Area
- . **cSAC** — Solent Maritime candidate Special Area for Conservation
- . **Ramsar Site** — Wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention

The site is currently being managed under **HLS** (Higher Level stewardship scheme).

Needs Ore nature reserve is of **National Importance** for its breeding waders, gulls and terns.

Also Needs Ore Nature reserve is of **International Importance** for its populations of over-wintering and migratory wildfowl.

Breeding Waders at Needs Ore Nature Reserve

Waders nesting at Needs Ore — Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Redshank *Tringa tetanus*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, and Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*.

Needs Ore Nature Reserve has the **largest breeding colony of Avocets in Hampshire** and with an increase in numbers this year possibly the largest colony of breeding Avocets in the South of England (This is yet to be confirmed). The site has been recognised as holding a significant percentage of the entire breeding UK Avocet population.

1 Juvenile **Osprey** has been hanging around the Beaulieu River between Sevills Copse and Needs Ore point over the last 2 weeks, has been seen hunting mullet in the river and feeding on fish on the Osprey platform that was erected at Severals.

300+ Black headed Gulls nesting in *Spartina* saltmarsh in front of Needs Ore cottages. A very welcome return as the site use to have the largest Colony of breeding Black headed gulls in South of England.

Avocet numbers have increased, approx 25-30 nesting Avocets, at present at least 7 broods of chicks have hatched.

Lapwing numbers are steady (approx 18 pairs) many nests have hatched and chicks have been seen.

Ringed plover nesting on warren shore

The Beaulieu River has been a favourite haunt of **yachtsmen** for over 100 years and there are still a great variety of boats on the River today.

Bucklers Hard has seen many well-known yachtsmen and women over the years; indeed many of today s Olympic sailors and intrepid round-the-world sailors have learnt their skills on the Solent. The **BRSC** was founded in 1931 by my grandmother, Pearl to create a local fun sailing club for residents who raced on the river in Scows. The club now has some 400 members and has an active racing programme through out the year, a popular course for children and plenty of parties! They started out with a base at the No 3 quay at Buckler's hard where they held Sunday afternoon races followed by tea. In 1934 the club members decided they wanted a bigger boat. The Montagu Sharpie 16' x 6' built by Elkins of Christchurch was chosen and some 15 boats bought by members to race. They later moved to a pontoon base just upstream of Gins where they raced twice a week. All sailing activity stopped during the war and much damage was done by moored landing craft to the jetties and pontoons. In 1960 a new Needs Ore clubhouse was opened and the introduction of the latest technology, a fiberglass scow helped to reinvigorate the

fleet. I am a keen Scow sailor, you will regularly see me in my scow Pearl.

The Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother once visited Needs Ore, She was on the Royal Yacht for Cowes week in 1937 and they wished to take the two princesses for a quiet picnic and a swim. They landed at Needs Ore and walked up past the cottages where an astonished Mrs Peach who lived in the end cottage came out wondering who they were. AS she was in her trousers she didn't know whether to curtsy or bow and in her confusion offered the royal party a cup of tea, which they politely refused and carried on to park shore for their picnic.

The Beaulieu River was the home port of one of the most famous of his day, Sir **Francis Chichester**, who in Gipsy Moth IV became the first person to complete a true solo circumnavigation of the earth.

His 29,630 mile voyage around the earth in a 54ft ketch took nine months and a day and broke seven records. Asked why he had done it, he replied, Because it intensifies life . The Beaulieu River, which Sir Francis described as "the most attractive and beautiful river I know", played an important part in his epic journey. Mrs Rhoda Martin, who ran the stores in the village, helped Sir Francis with his food supplies; her tasks included preserving eggs by covering the shells with liquid paraffin and de-eyeing hundreds of potatoes to prevent sprouting.

Trials for the yacht took place on the Beaulieu River and in the Solent before Gipsy Moth IV set sail from Plymouth on 27th August 1966 arriving back in Plymouth on 28th May 1967.

After being knighted at Greenwich by the Queen with a sword that had belonged to Sir Francis Drake, Sir Francis returned with Gipsy Moth IV to Bucklers Hard on 17th September, his 66th birthday. The river was full of craft of all sizes, their crews and the crowds on the riverside all cheering, waving and blowing horns and sirens. An 18-gun salute accompanied him ashore, where three hundred people attended a reception and birthday party at which he was given the Freedom of the Beaulieu River by Lord Montagu.

Lepe House -

The history of Lepe probably goes back to Roman times, when Lepe may have been a small port. There is evidence of a Roman road linking Lepe to Eling at the head of Southampton Water.

The Ship Inn, an ale-house in the mid 18th century, forms the basis of the current Lepe House. Nearby Gardener's Cottage (Grade II listed) probably existed at that time as well. As shown in Thomas Milne's 1791 map, there were certainly other dwellings at Lepe during the latter part of the 18th century when Lepe was briefly a site for naval shipbuilding.

Shipbuilding

Moody Janverin was asked by the Admiralty to create a shipyard at Lepe in 1744.

The gravel beach with the low cliff behind provided him with the site for the building of the Greenwich (1,053 tons), which was launched in 1748. This was followed in 1749 by the 28-gun Fowey (513 tons). Janverin also took over the building of the Woolwich which was being built by John Dailey at nearby Buckler's Hard.

Janverin left Lepe in 1749 and the site remained unused until 1763 when Henry Adams, who was building ships at Buckler's Hard, built the 64-gun Europe (1,379 tons) at the yard. The Europe was launched in 1765.

Coastguard station

A coastguard station was built on the Lepe Estate to combat the smuggling activities in the region shortly after the modern-day Coastguard was formed in 1822. Completed in 1828, the Coastguard Cottages (Grade II listed) and the Watch House remain largely unchanged today. These appear in C & J Greenwood's 1826 map of Hampshire and are clearly shown below in the 1871 Ordnance Survey map of the area. The commander of the first crew appointed as coastguards was Lieutenant Hodge.

Lepe Estate has been in the ownership of the same family since it was acquired, together with Exbury Estate, from the Mitford family in 1879. Inchmery House was sold to Lionel de Rothschild in 1916. He bought the remainder of Exbury Estate, including Exbury House, in 1919. Lepe House has been substantially added to over the years, particularly between 1895 and 1925.

The House was requisitioned by the Navy in 1943 and became the Headquarters of the J-Force Assault Group for the West Solent embarkations before the D-Day Normandy landings. The concrete hard and access ramps, which enabled tanks to be loaded onto landing craft, remain in evidence on the foreshore. Perhaps the best description of Lepe, and nearby Exbury, at this time is to be found in the novel Requiem for a Wren by Neville Shute.

The House was returned to its owners after the War.

Inchmery house The western block of Inchmery was built in the 1780s and the eastern in the mid 19th.

Lionel de Rothschild moved to Exbury in 1912, purchasing Inchmery House with plans to create his gardens in the land surrounding this house. Unfortunately this didn't prove to be possible and so in 1919 he purchased the Exbury Estate, neighbouring his Inchmery home, and set about creating the world famous Gardens

It was used during ww2 by the Free French Forces and various organisations including Polish paratroopers.

In 1930 My father and his sisters moved to Inchmery after the death of my grandfather for a summer retreat as guests of Lionel De Rothschild. My grandmother Pearl had let out Palace House to some well off Americans to help pay some of the death duties. My Aunt Anne has happy memories of being there having lots of cousins to stay and her mother giving lovely sports parties for all the local children.

St. Margarets Creek. Old salting with a sluice gate.

You will notice that branches of willow trees known as **withies** are used to mark the channel rather than the usual flat and round top system of buoys. This Beaulieu method was begun by John, 2nd Lord Montagu before 1914. Willow is used because it doesn't rot in water or root once it's fixed in the river bed. The branches are replaced every year. Fish in the river are mainly bass, grey mullet, dabs and eels, with the occasional sea trout.

The strong grass that covers the mud flats along the river is Townsend's cord grass. This is a hybrid plant with British and American parents, found growing in Southampton Water in the 19th century. It was planted on the Beaulieu River in the 1870s to stabilise the mud flats but is now in decline.

The development of the steam pleasure yacht heralded a new era in which the Beaulieu River became a destination for those seeking the delights of the unspoilt countryside. This, the dawn of tourism, breathed new life into Buckler's Hard.

Visitors

The earliest recorded visits are those of the Princess of Wales (later Queen Alexandra) and Empress Eugenie of France in 1871, the Crown Prince of Germany (later Emperor Frederick III) in 1881, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson in 1883. Following in their footsteps, parties of day-trippers were brought to Buckler's Hard by the Gosport Steam Launch Company which ran regular excursions from Gosport and Ryde. The influx of trippers presented the inhabitants of Buckler's Hard with new opportunities and some opened their front rooms to sell sweets, postcards and cream teas. Occasionally, trips operated in reverse, taking people from Beaulieu on outings to Southsea and Cowes.

The early 20th century saw a huge rise in the number of people sailing their yachts for pleasure. The Solent, with the Royal Yacht Squadron in Cowes at its centre, became a favourite sailing

ground, so moorings on the adjoining rivers were consequently in demand. Unspoilt by industrial development, the Beaulieu River proved to be especially popular.

My great grandfather Henry, 1st Lord Montagu owned a succession of steam launches for transport and pleasure. However, it was his son John who excelled as a boatman. At 15, he slipped out of Palace House at dawn, walked to Buckler's Hard and sailed around the Isle of Wight in his dinghy, returning home at 11pm! In later life, he became a pioneer of power boat racing, winning the 1905 British International Trophy in *Napier II*.

In the early part of the 20th century, there was still some commercial traffic on the river: deliveries to the mill at Beaulieu, bricks from the Bailey's Hard brickworks and coal for the estate's Electric Light Station. Policing the river was undertaken by Lord Montagu's boatman, Jim Thomas. From his home in the Master Builder's House, he was able to see the arrival of visiting yachts and organise the laying of moorings for them. However, as traffic increased, Lord Montagu appointed his first official Harbour Master, Frank Downer, in 1927.

The river benefits from a double tide, and a secondary high water. The flood tide takes six hours coming in; then, after a gentle fall, there is a second high tide some 2 hours later followed by a period of slack water for about an hour. Then the ebb sets in, and low water is reached in just two and a half hours.

On your left is **Gilbury**, part of the manor of Exbury. 200 years ago, a ferry between Gilbury and Buckler's Hard linked the banks of the Beaulieu river.

Upstream you can see the **Agamemnon boatyard** and the yacht harbour, which was opened by the famous yachtsman, Sir Chay Blyth in 1972.

The thatched cottage in the trees is known as the **Dukes Bath Cottage**. It was built in 1760 by George, Duke of Montagu for his arthritic son. Bathing in salt water was one of the recommended treatments of the day.