



The Lymington Society

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Lymington Society Organises Fascinating Sell out Trip Round Berthon Boatyard As Part of Its Popular Members Social Programme



At the kind invitation of Brian and Dominic May, Directors of the Berthon Boatyard in Lymington, the Lymington Society arranged for one of its varied programme of member's social events to take place at the Berthon Boatyard on the 7th of May. This meeting proved to be one of the most popular that the Society has organised in recent years with almost 80 members and guests enjoying a fascinating and memorable visit to one of Lymington's most important and high profile businesses.

The evening was blessed with beautiful sunshine with only a slight nip in the air and as usual the event started with a drinks reception held this time on the quay adjacent to the Berthon main offices. Very kindly Dominic and Brian provided the wine for the drinks reception which certainly helped the evening to get off on the right foot.

Brian May started the tour of the boatyard with a short talk about the history of the yard. Standing slightly precariously on the narrow sea-wall, Brain gave a fascinating glimpse into the history of the site describing how early the yard was in operation. In fact during the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) the Lymington shipyard supplied nine ships to the Defence of the Realm, more than Portsmouth.

We also heard about the fascinating Rev Berthon. Rev. Edward Lyon Berthon was a great inventor: in 1834/35, at the age of 22, he invented the screw propeller, which at the time was dismissed by the Admiralty as "a pretty toy which never would, and never could, propel a ship". He was also invented the collapsible lifeboat which was eventually accepted by the Navy in 1873. Coming up to modern times Berthon is now one of the biggest employers of apprentices in the area and very much believes in bringing new skills to its employees to help the business and its employees keep up-to-date in a competitive world. Its apprenticeship scheme in fact led to the company being awarded the "Business of the Year Award" by the New Forest Business Partnership for its apprenticeship training programme.





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Following the quayside talk from Brian May, two groups were escorted through the huge new workshops where all manner of boats were being worked on or built from scratch. In the first shed we were shown a huge Chay Blyth Global Challenge steel yacht being refurbished alongside a very historic wooden boat being lovingly restored. This boat was an original West Solent One Design W-8 that the Berthon apprentices are currently restoring as an educational project. This beautiful wooden boat was originally designed and built at the Lymington based shipyard by Brian's great

grandfather H G May in 1925. The boat was originally christened "Dinah" but has been renamed "Ripple" by Berthon MD Brian May for whom this is clearly a labour of love.

The most impressive project currently occupying the majority of the yard's space is the latest RNLI lifeboat project. This has involved the construction and testing of the latest prototype lifeboat together with setting up a production line on which the first four boats which were seen in various stages of assembly. The hulls for these boats are made in two parts at the old Green Marine yard in Waterloo Road (now wholly owned by the RNLI) and then transported for the fitting out with the very extensive range of modern equipment so vital in these high-tech days.



Finally Society Members were escorted into a second huge boat shed where many small craft from the armed forces were both being repaired and refurbished following which they are sent back to front line service with a range of naval and special forces.



All in all members found the whole trip extremely interesting from the huge size of the workshops and boat sheds, to the encyclopaedic knowledge of Brian and Dominic May and the amazing organisation and cleanliness of the working areas which was commented on by many members.

Commenting after the visit Society Social Secretary Don Mackenzie said

"The Lymington Society is extremely grateful to Berthon Boatyard and its Directors Brian and Dominic May for inviting its members to undertake

a tour round its fascinating and impressive site on the banks of the Lymington River in the heart of Lymington.

Members were extremely impressed with the great depth of knowledge shown by both Brian and Dominic May and their obvious pleasure and pride both in the history of the yard and the future



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where providing excellent training under its apprenticeship scheme is so vital as technology advances so quickly.

Many of us had no idea quite how influential the Berthon Boatyard has been in so many aspects of sailing in the past, nor how large and impressive were the modern facilities and the range of high-tech and restoration work which is currently being undertaken by the yard.

Lymington really is the home of the lifeboat at the moment with the manufacture of the hulls in Lymington together with their high-tech fitting out process being a source of great pride for both Berthon and the wider community. In addition we will take a renewed interest when we see British naval operations abroad and wonder if Berthon might have had a hand in maintaining any of the small patrol boats which we might see on our screens.

We look forward to eventually seeing Brian and Dominic taking to the water in a beautifully restored Solent One Design when it is finally finished by the training apprentices. I am sure that when that happens it will be a thing of great beauty and of huge pride to the family.

We look forward to organising another trip sometime in the future for those members unfortunate enough to miss out this time.

Ends

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