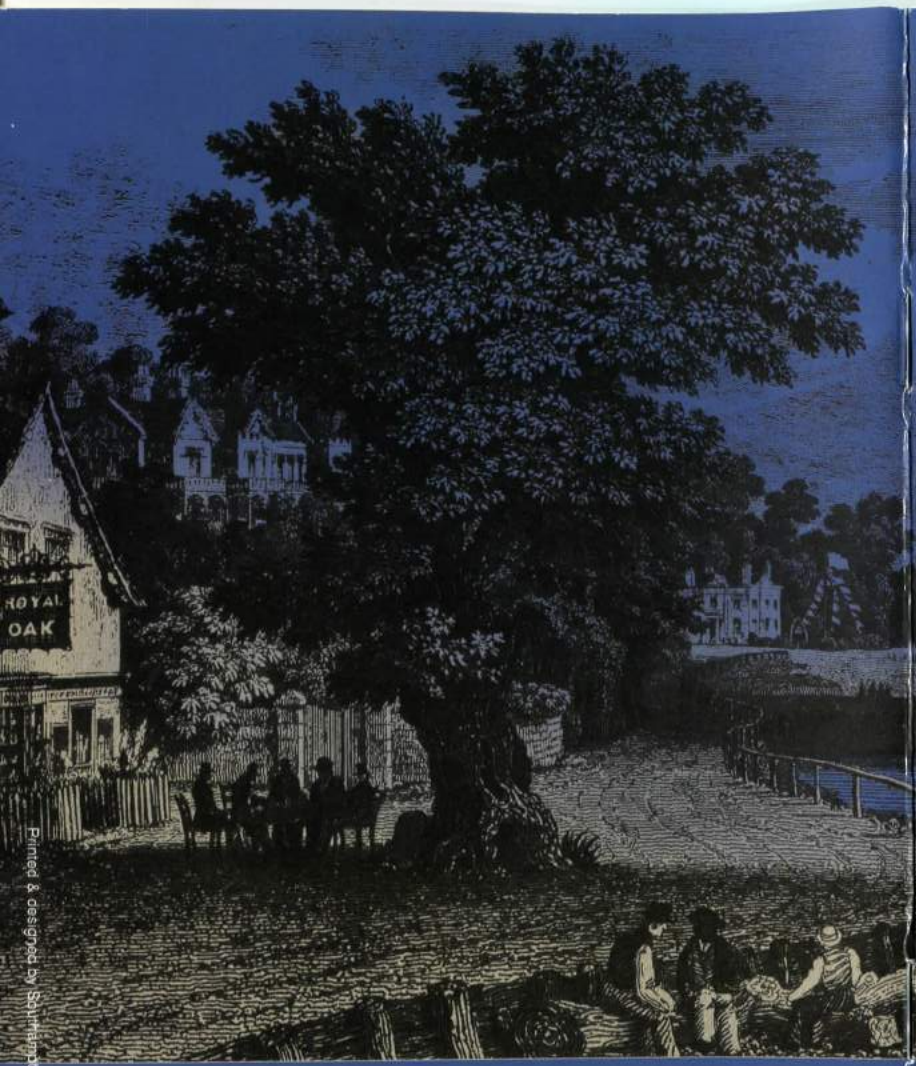

CUTTINGS
BIOGRAPHY
DIAPER

FISHERMAN FERRYMAN SAILOR SPY

The *Diapers* of Itchen Ferry

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EXHIBITION GUIDE

MARITIME MUSEUM, Town Quay Road, Southampton
From Friday 14 July 2006 to Sunday 4 March 2007

Printed & designed by Southampton City Council July 2006

Captain Tom Diaper
1867-1949

FISHERMAN FERRYMAN SAILOR SPY

The *Diapers* of Itchen Ferry

This exhibition, inspired by the seafaring memories of Captain Tom Diaper, explores the extraordinary contribution made by one family to Southampton's maritime heritage.

The Diaper Heritage Association family history project has enabled us to share the stories of individual members of the Diaper family and to examine the unique community in which they lived.

The family have been fishermen, ferrymen and sailors on the banks of the river Itchen for almost one thousand years, as well as world class yachtsmen and even spies!

EARLY YEARS

The Diapers are a family almost exclusively associated with Southampton. Some historians suggest their arrival dates back to the Norman conquest of 1066. One of the earliest Diapers was William d'Ipra whose seal was recorded in 1140-1. It is assumed the family were originally from Ypres in Belgium. By the sixteenth century they were well established in the town of Southampton and in the village of Itchen Ferry, on the east side of the river Itchen. This small fishing village was on land belonging to the Bishop of Winchester. He controlled rights on the river from 1199, and in turn the inhabitants controlled the ferry service across the Itchen. In the early years the family worked the land or fished the tidal waters of the Solent.

By the eighteenth century most inhabitants of Itchen Ferry village were fishermen. The skills employed in repairing nets and sails were often put to use making rope mats, bags and woven pictures that could be sold to supplement an often meagre and unreliable income.

Petition of Ferrymen 1834 (detail)

By the early nineteenth century there was a demand for a bridge across the river Itchen to replace the old ferry boats. The floating bridge service began in 1836 but not without some protest from the local ferrymen who feared the loss of their livelihoods. Seventeen Diapers signed this petition, those that could not write marked their name with a cross. The Floating Bridge was a chain ferry and this was not itself replaced by a solid bridge until 1977.

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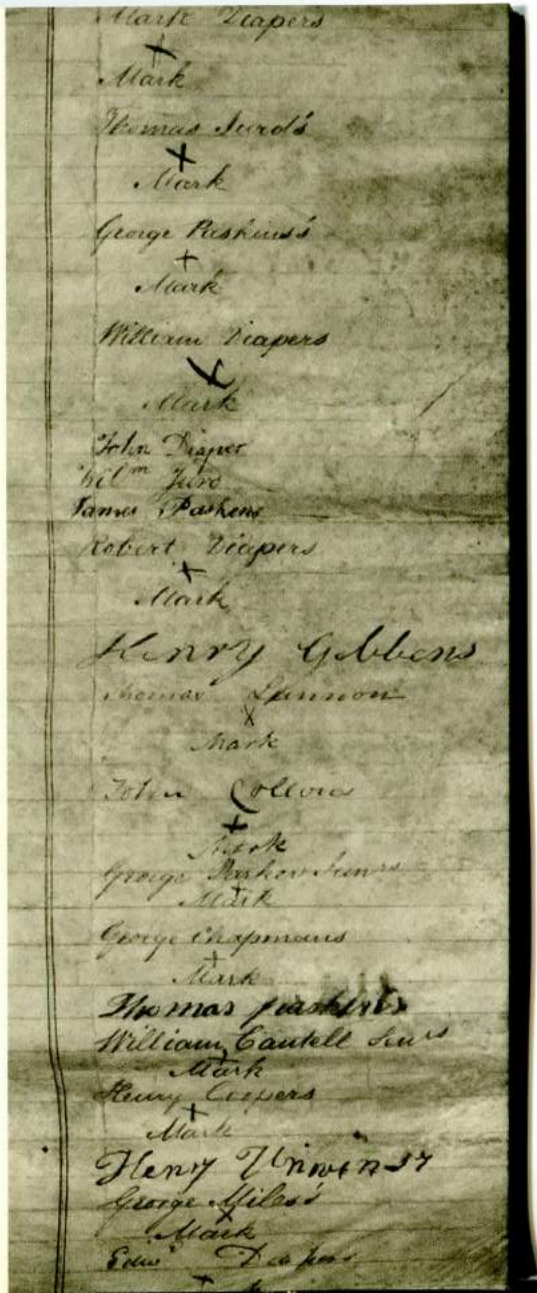
Mark Diapers
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Thomas Jurd's
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George Paskins's
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William Diapers
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John Diaper
Wilm Jurd
James Paskens
Robert Diapers
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Henry Gibbons
Thomas Lannon
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John Collins
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George Paskins Senrs
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George Chapmans
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Thomas Paskins
William Cantell Senrs
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Henry Coopers
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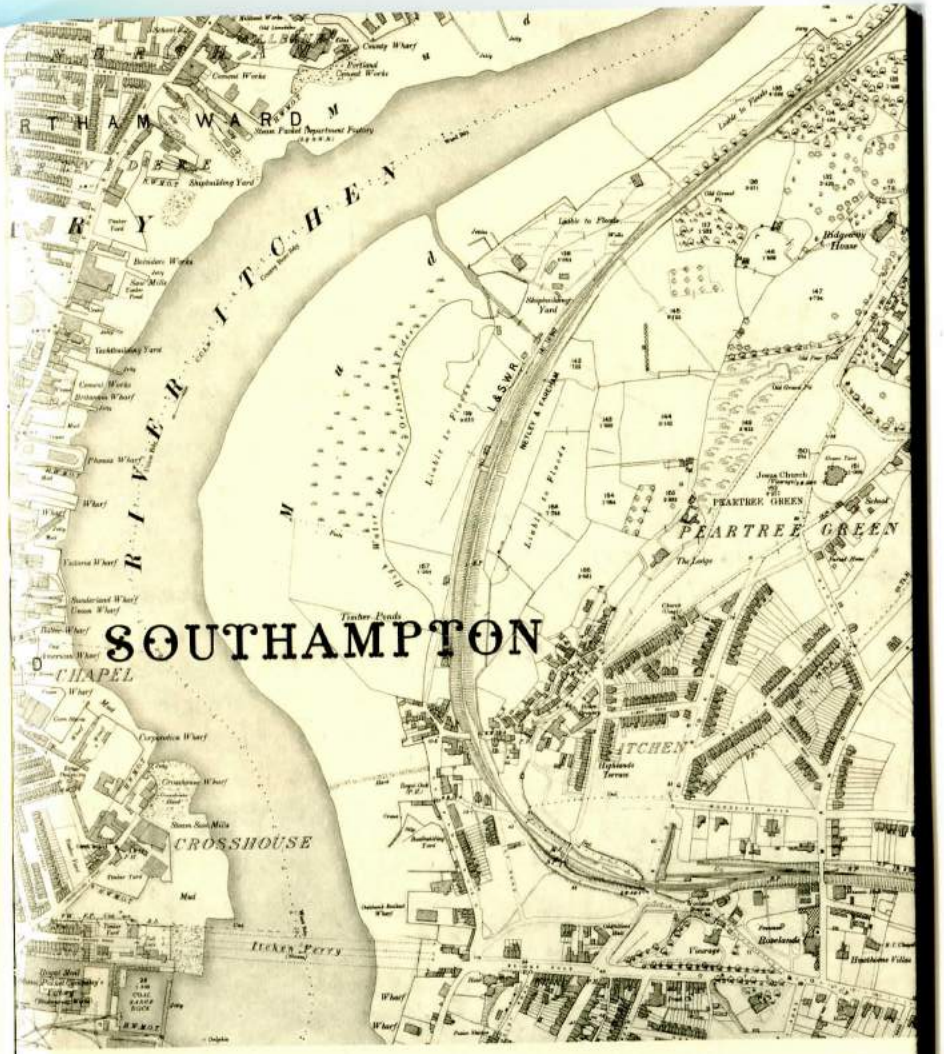
Henry Unwin Sr
George Miles's
Mark
Edw Diapers

ITCHEN FERRY FAMILY LIFE

Itchen Ferry village, on the east bank of the river Itchen, originally lay between Peartree Green and the ferry hard, close to the modern Itchen bridge. The village was too small to have its own church and parishioners had to be rowed across the river to St Mary's for services. Peartree church was finally built in 1620, thanks to the generosity of Captain Richard Smith of Peartree House. The church register shows that many members of the Diaper family were married, christened and buried there.

By the end of the nineteenth century the village was made up of small dwellings, many without gardens. To ease overcrowding, large families usually encouraged boys to find work at sea, and girls to go into domestic service.

Itchen Ferry village did not officially become part of Southampton until the town boundary was extended in 1920. During the Second World War, the village was all but destroyed by enemy bombing raids on the nearby Supermarine Aviation works and the docks. Today, all that is left has become part of the modern suburb of Woolston.



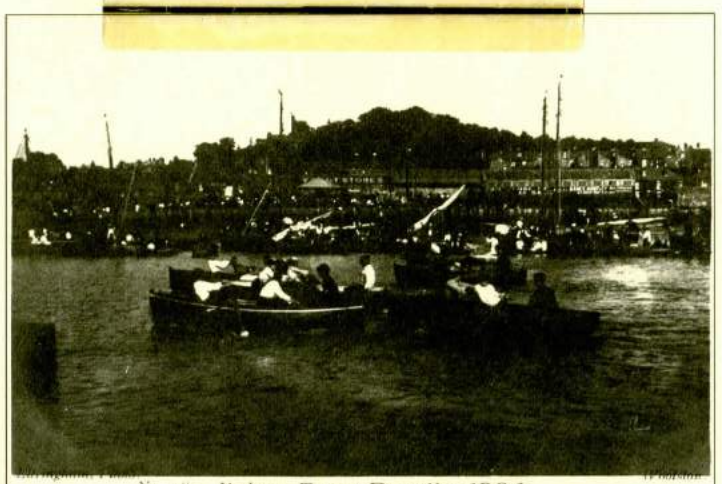
Itchen Ferry village 1897
Ordnance Survey; Second Edition. 1:2500 Sheet. LXV.11
Image courtesy of Southampton City Archives

AT SEA

Most Diapers had a close connection with the sea. Sons learned fishing and sailing skills from their fathers in the same Itchen *hoys* that were used as ferryboats. However, what really improved the fortunes of the Diaper families was the increasing popularity of yacht racing during the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a rich man's sport based around Cowes and Southampton, with many European kings and princes taking part. The big yachts needed skilled crews with good local knowledge of the Solent. Members of the Diaper clan were an obvious choice. They started as crew and worked their way up to become skippers. Pay was around £4 a week with a share of any prize money. Although lucrative, racing was only seasonal and most men had to return to other employment during the winter months, unless lucky enough to be paid a retainer.

ITCHEN FERRY REGATTA

The annual Itchen Ferry Regatta was organised by the Fisherman's Friendly Society. It always took place around October when the main racing season was over. It gave the Itchen Ferry locals a chance to race against each other in their own boats. George Diaper recalled "regatta day would be the event of the year". There were fairground rides, sideshows and a "penny scramble" for the children. In addition to the sailing there were rowing races, some specially for female competitors. This tradition began in 1827 when Ann and Maria Diaper both won prize money and tickets to a play.



No. 185. Itchen Ferry Regatta, 1904.

TOMMY LIPTON AND THE DIAPERS

Between 1899 and 1930 Tommy Lipton built five yachts to challenge for the America's Cup. Each named SHAMROCK, they were all subsequently beaten, but his efforts to return the cup to Britain made him one of the best known yachtsmen of the Edwardian era. The five sons of Tommy "Dutch" Diaper all sailed for him. Alfred Diaper was skipper of the SHAMROCK (23 metre) in 1920 when she sailed across the Atlantic to act as a trial boat for the SHAMROCK IV, Lipton's challenger for the America's Cup that same year. The records from Ellis Island, New York mark their arrival on June 7th 1920 noting that 7 of the 22 crew were Diapers.

Sir Thomas Lipton and the crew of Shamrock (23 metre) 1920.
Image courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow

CAPTAIN TOM DIAPER 1867-1949

Thomas Diaper was an Itchen boy, the eldest son of Tommy "Dutch" Diaper. He began sailing with his father at the age of six on board Major Ewing's cutter NORMAN. They raced the Solent classes together each school summer holiday until Tom was 12. NORMAN was Tommy "Dutch" Diaper's most successful command, winning over one hundred prizes in that period. Even as a young boy Tom must have benefited from his father's sailing skills. Upon leaving school Tommy "Dutch" secured him a position on board the QUEEN OF PALMYRA and he made his first trip to the Mediterranean at a rate of eight shillings a week. Tom gained further experience crewing on some of the big yachts like the Earl of Dunraven's VALKYRIE. He worked his way up from deck hand, via the job of mastheadsman, to mate. Working at the masthead, up to 180 feet above the deck was dangerous work and recognised by extra pay; but it was the established route for sailing career progression.

With his appointment as mate of the yacht HELEN, based in Rugen, Germany in 1894, Tom began a relationship with German yachting that did not end until the outbreak of the First World War. He crewed for the German Emperor on board his yacht METEOR. During the war he worked on troopships and locally for Thornycrofts.

Tom resumed his yachting career in 1920 on board Thomas Lipton's SHAMROCK (23metre). Skippered by his brother, they sailed her across the Atlantic to New York for the America's Cup races. Tom's final charge was as skipper of Commander James Bird's HARKAWAY after which he retired due to ill health in 1937.

TOM DIAPER'S LOG

Tom wrote down the story of his life, in the form of a log, shortly before he died in 1949, but did not live to see it published in 1950. It offers a vivid insight into the life of a competent and self reliant mariner whose success depended on his own skills at sea.

TOM DIAPER SPY?

There is no indication that Tom was ever a spy, although his knowledge of Germany and its ruling classes so close to the outbreak of the First World War was considered useful. He recounts in his log that he spotted a German spy, wearing a false beard on board the Itchen Ferry. He was also entrusted by Eustace Pinkerton, of the famous detective agency, with the security of the Royal yacht during the opening ceremony of the Southampton floating dry dock by the Prince of Wales in 1924. Members of the Diaper family did work as "spies" for British Special Forces during World War Two, but details of their work are still top secret.

SAILING IN GERMANY

Like his cousin Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), the German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II was a keen yachtsman. Thinly disguised as portraying the German nation as a "sport and sea loving people", the Kaiser was determined to challenge the British superiority of the seas. British-German naval rivalry spilled over into yachting. The Kaiser commissioned a series of yachts all called METEOR.

The most successful was METEOR II, built in 1896 at Henderson's Yard, Glasgow. She was designed by G.L. Watson specifically to beat the Prince of Wales' racing yacht BRITANNIA. Managed by a British crew, she raced at Cowes as well as in German regattas. METEOR II won every race she entered in German waters giving her a total of 24 prizes in 1896. Tom Diaper's cousin Ben Parker was her captain, and Tom was a member of the 42-strong British crew. METEOR was laid up at White's Yard in the winter of 1896-7 and Tom, along with 12 other crew members, was retained to carry out some of the re-rigging work.

Tom Diaper, together with his brother John and Dan Youren (married to Alice Diaper) spent some time working in Germany on German yachts, achieving notable success with the POLLY (1899) and the KLEIN POLLY, both built in Hamburg for Mr Buxenstein of Berlin.

ALFRED DIAPER
1871-1949

Born in Itchen Ferry, Alfred Diaper was the third son of Tommy "Dutch" Diaper and Eliza Lodden. He began his seagoing career aged sixteen. He joined the Merchant service working on the Cape mail run and the military transports to South Africa during the Boer War, before joining his father on board the yachts VALKIRIE and NAVAHOE.

He worked his way up from Able Bodied Seaman (AB) to Mate and Skipper. He was one of the most successful and respected Solent skippers of the early twentieth century. Especially talented in the 15 metre class, Alfred, often sailing with his brother John and his own son Alfred Thomas, scored a great many victories with Sir Charles Allom's advanced racing cutter ISTRIA. Out of 105 starts he won 91 prizes in two and a half seasons. He was famous as skipper of the J class racing schooner WESTWARD where in nine years before he retired he won the owner T. B. F. Davis more King's cups than any other professional skipper. The surviving testimonials from his employers are notable for their respect and genuine affection for a talented yachtsman.

(Opposite) Captain Alfred Diaper and the crew of the ISTRIA 1912.
Image courtesy of Reg Diaper

JOHN JOSEPH DIAPER AND THE TITANIC

John Joseph Diaper was one of the 177 firemen working to feed the TITANIC's 29 huge boilers with coal. He was born in Itchen Ferry in 1885, the son of Richard and Mary Diaper. He served seven years in the army before joining the White Star Line at the age of 24 in 1909. He regularly crossed the Atlantic working as a coal trimmer or a fireman on board the OCEANIC and the TEUTONIC. He transferred to the TITANIC from her sister ship OLYMPIC, signing up on April 6th 1912 at a wage of £6 per month. There had been a coal strike, many ships were not sailing and John's last voyage had been in January 1912. Now married to Alice, so with a wife to support, John must have been pleased to secure a position on TITANIC's maiden voyage.

John Diaper survived the sinking of the TITANIC although it is not known in which lifeboat he was rescued. His youngest son George, recounted that because he was not on duty in the boiler rooms he was helping the officers load the lifeboats. He was then ordered into the last boat to row the passengers to safety. His boat was picked up by the CARPATHIA and he disembarked at New York on April 18th 1912.

John Diaper made only two more trips to sea before giving it up for good. He served in the army during the First World War. Although wounded in action he recovered, and was demobilised in May 1919 holding the Mons Star and the General Service and Victory medals. He remained in Southampton until the 1940's before moving to Somerset where he died in 1955 aged 70.

John Joseph Diaper with his wife Alice (nee Strange) and their daughter Elsie c.1915.
Image courtesy of George Diaper

NOTES

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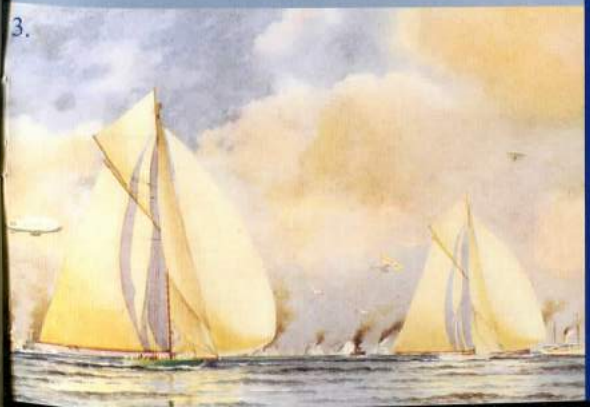

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1. Watermen's licence badge.

2. Alfred Diaper's pocket compass and stopwatch

3. Christmas card sent from Thomas Lipton to Alfred Diaper in 1920

4. Sailing cup won by Dan Youren at Itchen Sailing Club regatta, sailing his own boat FIND ME OUT in 1921.
Kindly loaned by Charles Youren