The Bibby Line

The distinguished two hundred and eight year history of this long-established Liverpool firm was expertly outlined by the archivist to the Bibby Line – Christina Spencer – on the 24th September, 2015. Her most informative talk charted the varying fortunes of this famous shipping line from its earliest beginnings in 1807 to its present day success in current global markets. From developing an intriguing link with H.M.S. Victory, Christina traced the firm’s gradual progression from sailing ships through to the championing of steamships and the Bibbys’ pivotal role in the establishment of the Harland and Wolf shipyards; and eventually to their investment in modern bulk tankers. A close connection with key historical events witnessed the growth of trade routes as the British Empire expanded and as the Suez Canal opened up the Far East; with Bibby vessels being regularly requisitioned by the Government as troopships or hospital ships from the Crimean conflict right through to World War Two. The company was also noted for its early pioneering work in establishing high class passenger voyages, especially to the Far East.

However success always came at a price: from the 1840 murder of the founder, John Bibby to the betrayal of the firm by Frederick Leyland in 1870 when he seized twenty of the twenty-one vessels leaving only the family yacht. Loss of ships in action during the two world wars proved damaging as did the recent loss of the oil tanker M.V. Derbyshire in 1980 in the South China seas during a
typhoon. Nevertheless the firm has always adapted to changing circumstances, and road haulage has today established the Bibbys as one of the leading delivery companies. John Bibby’s initial involvement in the Bank of Liverpool [now Barclays] has nowadays been developed to create an organisation that provides global financial services; and which has diversified its involvement in many business ventures including the Costcutter chain of convenience stores.

Our local connection with the Bibby family was initiated when James Jenkinson Bibby purchased Hardwicke Grange [1868] and Sansaw Hall [1879] before financing the major renovation of Clive Church and the creation of the tower and spire in memory of his wife, Sarah. His son Frank became Master of the North Shropshire Hunt and successfully bred two Grand National winners. The family, through Robin and James Thompson, continue to play a major role in the local economy of Clive and Grinshill.
Our sincere thanks must go to Christina for delivering a lively, entertaining session, and one that was packed with fascinating information and a keen humour clearly