

BEYOND THE GRAVES

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RYDE PIER CELEBRATES 200TH ANNIVERSARY



The first view that many people travelling to the Island see is the lovely Victorian outline of Ryde with its pier reaching out into the Solent. On 26 July 2014 the Promenade Pier celebrates its 200th anniversary. The pier itself has seen numerous changes in the last 200 years. It's hard to imagine Ryde without the Pier now but this early description of the approach to Ryde gives you an idea: "Between the sea and shore at low water there is an impassable gulf of mud and sand, which can neither be traversed by walking or swimming, so that for near one half of the 24 hours Ryde is inaccessible by friend or foe". Visitors, their baggage and trade goods would be rowed as far as the sandbanks permitted and then carried piggyback fashion to the shore across the mud flats.

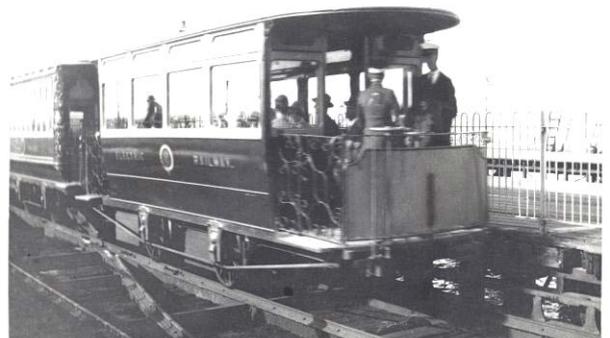
In 1812 a group of prosperous estate owners and businessmen with a vision of the future, realised the benefits to the town if it could be easily reached at all times of day and they formed the Ryde Pier Company. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1812 allowing the construction of the pier. The foundation stone was laid on 29 June 1813 and it opened a year later on 26 July 1814. The original timber pier, designed by John Kent of Southampton, was 1,750 feet long and 12 feet wide. It was extended in 1824 and 1833 bringing the overall length to 2,250 feet. It is one of the earliest public piers and the third longest in the country. The cost of building was estimated at £16,000.

A Tramway pier, built alongside the existing Promenade Pier, opened on 29 August 1864 to take passengers to and from the Pier Head and Ryde Esplanade. The original trams were horse drawn until 1885 when the lines were electrified.



It became one of the first electric railways in the world, earlier even than the London Underground which was still completely steam-powered until 1890. It was considered a great feat in the electrical world.

Petrol driven trams were introduced in 1927 and Drewry diesel railcars in 1959. The tramway finally closed in 1969.



GRAND OLD RAILWAYS – 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RYDE TO SHANKLIN LINE

The railway line from Ryde St John's Road to Shanklin opened on 23 August 1864. It was built by the Isle of Wight Railway as a single track line with passing loops at Brading, Sandown and Shanklin stations. In 1866 the line was extended to Ventnor.

ST JOHN'S ROAD STATION

This station opened in August 1864 as the terminus for the Isle of Wight Railway from Shanklin. It was also used by the Isle of Wight Central Railway for their trains from Newport via Smallbrook Junction. At this time the railway was not allowed to start from the Esplanade because of the number of level crossings needed to cross the town, and although approval had been given to build a terminus in the Melville Street area, the company decided to stop at St John's where they had already based their headquarters and workshops. In July 1865, the Isle of Wight Railway tried and failed to get permission to cross St John's Road by level crossing – the Town Commissioners insisting a bridge should be built as specified in the original Act of 1860. The road bridge was finally built in 1880 at the same time as the line was extended to the Esplanade.

Ryde St John's Road became the main Island depot in 1957 when the Newport shed and workshops closed. Locomotive sheds west of the station were demolished after the withdrawal of steam trains in 1967; the workshops to the east continued to be used by British Rail.



ESPLANADE TUNNEL AND ESPLANADE STATION

"The new line which runs from St John's Road Station to the Pier Gates, passing by means of a tunnel under the Esplanade, was opened for traffic on Monday, and the railway carriages are now brought as far as the Pier Gates, where a commodious station has been erected." Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle 7 April 1880.

The tunnel under the Esplanade and Monkton Street is an incredible feat of engineering. The builders and engineers overcame extreme difficulties and hazardous conditions to build it due to the depth of the silt deposit, and nature of the soil it had to be driven through. Still in use today, the tunnel is 396 yards (362 metres) long and the tunnel descent, part of which is below sea level at high tide, is 1 in 50. To allow trains to enter the tunnel, the exit from the Esplanade Station had to be a sharp left curve so the track ran parallel to the Esplanade.



Original ironwork can still be seen at the Esplanade Station and the date 1881 above the tunnel entrance.



GRAND NAVAL PAGEANT 1914 – INSPECTION BY KING GEORGE V

SUNDAY JULY 19, 1914.

GRAND NAVAL PAGEANT,
300 WARSHIPS AT SPITHEAD,
 including 24 Super-Dreadnoughts, 35 Pre-Dreadnoughts, 50 Cruisers, 23 Seaplanes.
 Visit of H.M. The King This Day on board the Royal Yacht Victoria and Albert.

SPECIAL TRIPS from COWES
 (Victoria Pier) and
RYDE PIER HEAD
 by COSENS & Co.'s BUFF FUNNEL STEAMERS
EMPERESS AND QUEEN
 (weather and circumstances permitting).

MORNING CRUISE BY s.s. QUEEN
Through the Lines of the Fleet.
 Leaving Cowes (Victoria Pier) at 10.30 a.m.,
 Ryde Pier-head at 11.15.
 Arriving back at Cowes about 12.45, Ryde 1.15. **Fare 1/-**

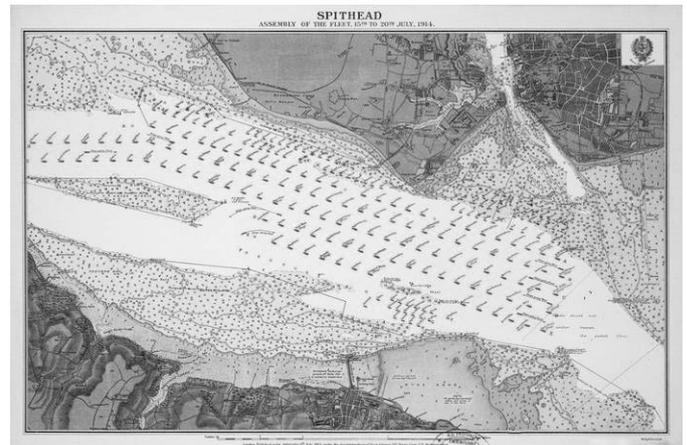
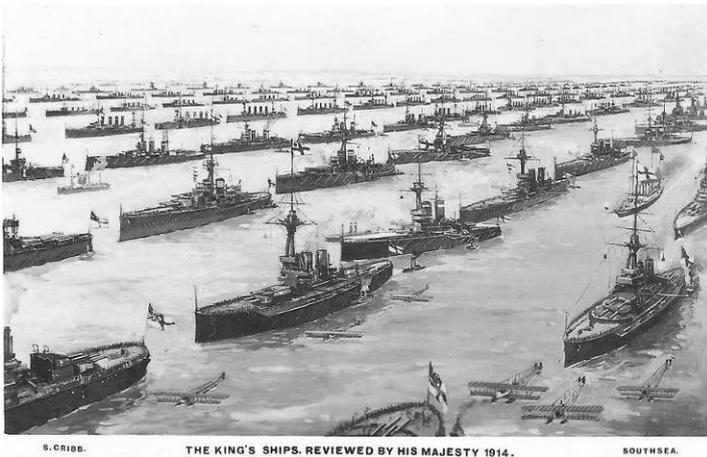
Afternoon Trips by Empress and Queen

As Ryde Pier was about to celebrate its 100th anniversary, King George V inspected the largest Fleet ever assembled at Spithead. Not only were there 300 warships, including four battle squadrons headed by the great "Iron Duke", the largest and most powerful super-Dreadnought, and flagship of Admiral Sir G A Callaghan, the Commander in Chief of the Home Fleet, but airships, seaplanes and aeroplanes graced the skies.

The Isle of Wight County Press published the official programme for the weekend on 18 July 1914 which included His Majesty King George arriving at Portsmouth on Saturday at 11.40am, boarding the Alexandria at noon, and in the afternoon "The Alexandria will proceed to Spithead cruising at His Majesty's pleasure" returning by 5.30pm for "Dinner to the officers on board the Victoria and Albert".

The County Press editorial said "The presences of four air-ships as well as 20 seaplanes and eight aeroplanes is an indication as significant at it is unprecedented of the position now assumed by aircraft as an essential adjunct to the Fleet. In addition, five spare seaplanes and five spare aeroplanes will be available, making a total of heavier-than-air machines of 38."

Ryde Pier was the ideal place for the public to see the Fleet in all its splendour, providing "the best full and uninterrupted view". Reserved seating at the Pier Pavilion and Pier Head cost from 5s to 10s. "Our advertising columns contain a number of announcements in connection with this historic event." Boat excursions from Ryde, Cowes and Clarence Pier, Southsea were advertised, along with band concerts and searchlight displays in the evening.



The ships waiting in line for inspection by King George and the plan of the ship's positions at Spithead

Isle of Wight County Press 25 July 1914

"Ryde was packed with visitors during the weekend. The unprecedented collection of aircraft created a profound impression. Four huge airships glide gracefully over the Fleet, and high above them quite a collection of aeroplanes, biplanes, and hydroplanes manoeuvred. The Western Gardens claimed the majority of people in the evening. At night the Royal Victoria Yacht Club premises were illuminated with countless lights, and the Commodore's yacht, which was lying opposite, was also lit up. The magnificent searchlight display from the battleships in the evening brought practically everybody out, and until past 11 o'clock hundreds of people were strolling about charmed with the weird effects the lights produced. From 9 o'clock until 11 o'clock on Saturday evening it was as light as at midday. Boats from Bournemouth, Brighton, Bexhill, Hastings, Eastbourne, and many other places on the coast brought more visitors on Sunday, whilst specially chartered vessels took thousands round the Fleet. The King's yacht was observed passing up and down the lines during the afternoon. Most people were astir early on Monday to witness the King lead the Fleet to sea. Various specimens of aircraft were buzzing about in all directions whilst the Fleet went out in very stately procession, and by noon the Solent only bore its normal quantity of traffic."

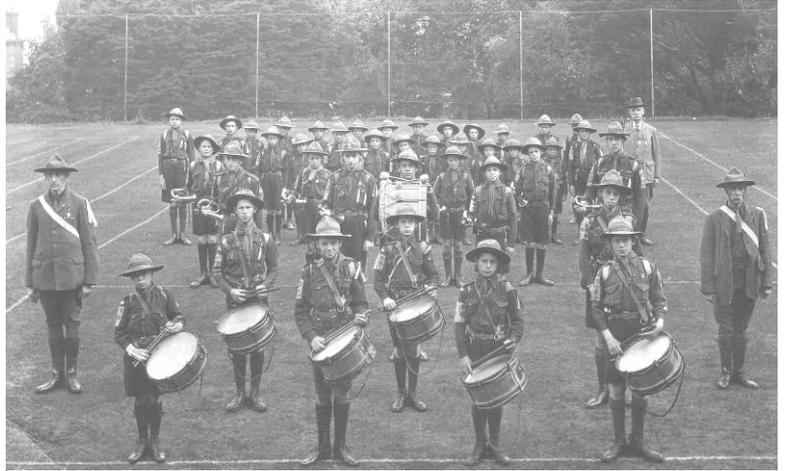
RYDE 100 YEARS AGO - JULY 1914

Isle of Wight County Press 11 July 1914

A GYMKHANA was held in connection with St John's (6th Ryde) Scouts in a field in Arundel Road, High Park, Ryde, kindly lent by the Rev J Puckle, on Thursday, and brought together a large number of ladies and gentlemen who interest themselves in this splendid movement. With the glorious weather, the ideal venue of the sports, and a good gate, it is hoped that the proceeds will furnish a substantial sum for the fund which is being raked to provide equipment for the St John's Scouts.

The attractions include performances by the Band of the 2nd Wessex Howitzer Brigade (under Bandmaster Palmer), which went through a capital programme of selections, and numerous side shows, stalls &c.

In the afternoon the Scouts gave an interesting drill display. In the evening a concert was given by the Minister Glee Singers from Portsmouth. After the concert the troop gave a feast of lanterns, which consisted of six items beginning with the grand circle and continuing with the crescent, the morning star, the passing of patrols, the grand wheel, and the march past.



1st Ryde Scout Group
Photograph of a similar drill display taken August 1915
courtesy of Barry Groves



Isle of Wight County Press 25 July 1914

LAWN TENNIS - The Ryde open lawn tennis tournament has this year attracted a much larger number of entries than usual. Play began on Monday with the local events and finishes today (Saturday). It is interesting as each year comes round to see the players turning up to defend their titles.

The brothers E H and C G Allen, who for two successive years have swept everything before them, are again playing this year with a view to winning the cups for a third year. A very keenly contested final, however, is anticipated. Mr W C Crawley is defending his title for the singles challenge cup for the second year, and Mrs Lamplough, who has already won the singles cup twice, is also playing.

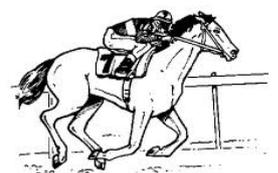
Isle of Wight Observer 11 July 1914

ROYAL VISITORS - The Duchess of Parma, mother of Princess Zita of Bourbon Parma, consort of the Archduke Francis-Joseph, heir presumptive to the throne of Austria-Hungary is staying incog. as the Countess de Sala, at Wight Hall Private Hotel, Ryde, with a party of fourteen members of the family.



Isle of Wight Observer 4 July 1914

MOTOR TRAFFIC - The rapidity with which mechanical traction is displacing the horse, even in the Isle of Wight, is rather alarming to those interested in seeing the breeding of horses kept up. In a few years, if the present rate of increase of motor traffic is maintained, there will not be a horse left, except for sporting purposes.



THE SS HILDA DISASTER 1905



In November 1905, due to stormy weather, the cross-Channel steam packet "Hilda", belonging to the London and South-Western Railway Company, bound for St Malo was wrecked on reefs a few miles off the harbour. 125 passengers and crew members lost their lives in the disaster.

The Isle of Wight Observer reported:

The bodies of 21 of the crew and 4 passengers of the steamship "Hilda" were brought to Southampton in the "Ada." The little steamer, on leaving St Malo, ran straight into a gale, which pitched and rolled her considerably. However, she weathered the storm splendidly, and, considering the conditions, made a smart passage.

At seven o'clock the "Ada" was sighted off Ryde. At eight o'clock she went slowly up Southampton water with ensigns half-mast. Simultaneously the ensigns of all the shipping in the harbour were hoisted at the same level.



The bodies were in plain oak coffins, on which were small zinc plates giving the names and date of death. They were carefully laid on the platform in slings, and hoisted by crane ashore. Reverently the coffins were carried into the shed which had been prepared for its reception. There were in the commodious building a number of improvised tables, at each end of which the Union Jack and Tricolour were entwined.

The inquest on the bodies of the victims was held at Southampton when the jury found a verdict of "Accidental death", and added that the captain and crew did everything in their power.

One of the victims was 17 year old Alice Mary Denham, maid in the service of the Stanley family, who also perished; she was from a large Ryde family. At her funeral a collection was made for the widows and orphans of the Breton men who lost their lives in the disaster. The Observer reported that "The impression made on the minds of Ryde people by the tragedy, and the feelings of sympathy it has evoked, was shown by the large number of people who attended the funeral".

Le Salut, a French newspaper also reported on Miss Denham. A loose translation reads:

We remember that among the shipwrecked corpses of Hilda, found on the beach of Saint-Cast, was a girl of 17 years, Alice Denham, from Ryde, Isle of Wight, whose body was returned to its homeland. At the funeral of the unfortunate girl, her parents made a collection, reported sum of 163 francs 90, the rector of the parish sent to the mayor of Saint-Cast for distribution to needy families. This demonstrates the inhabitants of Ryde sympathy for their brethren in mourning Brittany.

Madame Michèle Segura-Coz is the President of the Association Le Hilda. Ann Barrett has been helping Michèle for some time with research on the disaster and during our May Cemetery Open Days Michèle visited us and the Denham family grave. We are also pleased to welcome Michèle as a new member of RSHG.

In a recent email Michèle told us that she is now off to Scotland to locate the grave of another Hilda victim but unfortunately she has not got an Ann to assist her with that one!



Ann and Michèle at Ryde Cemetery May Open Days

Sources: Isle of Wight Observer 2 December 1905; Le Salut 13/14 February 1906 & SS Hilda picture from Wikipedia.

RYDE CEMETERY OPEN DAYS MAY 2014

The end of May Bank Holiday weekend saw us once again hosting Ryde Cemetery Open Days. Although a bit overcast and windy on Saturday morning, the decorative bunting at the West Street entrance looked very attractive, the open gates at the Pellhurst Road end of the cemetery always encourage people to walk through and the surprise of an open door to the old Mortuary Chapel enticed curious passersby, so within a short while we had a steady stream of visitors. With improved weather we had even more visitors on the Sunday.



Our main theme for this event was 'Ryde on the Brink of War' and included the first few months after the outbreak of the First World War until the end of 1914. The South Chapel was very busy, as always, with lots of display boards, books, leaflets and artefacts. Our miniature Ryde Castle as a Red Cross Hospital was in situ with a new mini Red Cross Field Treatment Centre.



A vintage First World War British Officer Action Man and his machine gun, kindly loaned by Mr Les Kirkby, was another interesting addition to our displays this year.

Our ongoing and updated exhibition on 'Ryde 100 Years Ago' proved to be of great interest to visitors, especially the adverts for shops and business premises. Our new 'War Cemetery Trail' was also on display with lots of information about the graves of people who had served in the First World War. Part of the exhibition dealt with the volunteers and work for the war effort. There was a detailed section on the work of the Red Cross. Our mannequin stood in the corner and on this occasion was portrayed as Mrs Forsyth, appealing for jam and knitted garments to be parcelled up and sent to the Front.

On both days David Earle gave a very interesting guided walk and talk on First World War graves in the cemetery. Kate MacDonell and four RSHG Cast Members also presented 'Meet the Residents' which this year introduced characters from Ryde in November 1914. Shelagh Gaylard was the wife of Major General Fetherstonhaugh, a very important lady at the forefront of the organisation of the War Effort in Ryde. Janette Gregson portrayed Miss Kleo Friend, Commandant of the Ryde VAD, 'competent, capable, skilled, disciplined', and actually a bit scary! Janette's costume, made by her most competent and capable Mum, Maisie Kitching, was stunning - it looked like it had come straight off the set of 'The Crimson Field.' David Bushell is now expected to be a 'mad someone' and did not disappoint with his portrayal of Mr Harry Baxter, an Honorary Special Constable with many official duties. Ann Barrett played the part of Mrs Eddis, the wife of the Vicar of Holy Trinity. She spoke of many activities the community was engaged in and stressed how everyone was working together at this time of National Crisis.

This year we were very pleased to have a section of the South Chapel set up by Jo Dodd of Ryde Library, displaying a large collection of wartime books and posters, also a collection of artefacts and replica First World War uniforms loaned by the IW Museum Service.

Clare Martin, Information and Advice Officer, Age UK was on hand all weekend offering free advice and information leaflets on all aspects of the work of Age UK in the community. Our friends Nikki and Wendy from 'Grave Concerns' joined us again on the Sunday and were busy telling people of the wonderful work they do on maintaining graves and the various ways they can help relatives with any matters related to the graves of loved ones.



Please visit our current exhibitions:

'200 Years of Ryde Pier' and 'Ryde 100 Years Ago' in Ryde Library until the end of July.

'Summertime' and 'Lives of the First World War' in Ryde Cemetery Heritage and Learning Centre.

See us at 'Party on the Pier' Sunday 27 July from 11am, Ryde Pier Head, for the pier bi-centennial celebrations and Osborne Cottage, East Cowes, Saturday 30 August 2 – 4 pm for their summer fete.