

STOP 11A – THE ESPLANADE - LAYER “THE DOVER”

Unfortunately the Dover is long gone, so you will have to use your imagination to picture the scene. Dover is an island word describing a low-lying sandy area of coast occasionally breached by a high tide. Ryde Dover was made famous by Dr William Bromfield a botanist who lived nearby.



William Bromfield trained as a doctor but was wealthy enough to be able to pursue his interests in botany and travel rather than a medical career. He moved to Ryde in 1836 and soon embarked on an extensive study of all the flowering plants to be found on the island. With a small army of helpers he discovered and recorded many rare species of plants on the Dover at Ryde, including the Thorn Apple, Cotton Thistle and the Childing Pink. *“I have seldom failed to see them on turfy parts these last ten years in some abundance.”*

William Bromfield died in Damascus in 1851, and his book on Island flowering plants *Flora Vectensis* was published posthumously in 1856. It was exceptional for its detail, and included the dates and location of discovery of every species. He had argued: *“... consider how rapid are the changes of this island, the progress of building and increased cultivation; low lands, lately waste, now enclosed; spots not long since free and accessible now dotted with tenements and fenced, and it is evident that the first recorded station for some rare or local plant may often be the last.”*

Bromfield’s European herbarium and collection of 600 books were donated to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and formed the nucleus of its new library. His Isle of Wight herbarium, containing the specimens on which *Flora Vectensis* was based, was donated to the Ryde Philosophical Society. For decades it was believed to have been lost but surprisingly it turned up in the 1970s, having apparently been stored in a tin trunk in a garden shed for many years! In 2001 the collection was given to the care of the Hampshire County Council where it remains today. By 1860 Ryde Dover had disappeared, given up to development, as noted by Edmund Venables in his Guide to the Isle of Wight *“Traversing what was once the Dover, now covered with modern villas, the road crosses the divide between Newchurch and St Helens. Ryde Dover was famous for rare plants, but now they are so utterly exterminated, the botanist can only look with fond regret.”*

Now cross the road at the crossing by Peter Pan’s playground and walk along to the entrance of Ryde Castle.