

Stop 17 – ST THOMAS’ CHURCH, THE GARDEN OF REST

You should be in the garden of rest at St Thomas’ Church and looking at the church. This church was the first in Ryde. A travel book of 1849 tells us: *“The Church was erected as a chapel of ease to the parish church of Newchurch, six miles distant. The original chapel, built in 1719 was replaced in 1827 by the present elegant structure, with a well-proportioned bell tower surmounted by a spire. This beautiful church was built at the expense of Mr George Player, the lord of the manor.”*

The Player coat of arms can be seen over the central door of the church. By marriage, ownership of the church passed to the Brigstocke family who continued to meet the running costs for many years. Eventually the spire became unsafe and was removed in about 1950. After George Brigstocke, the last lord of the manor, died the final service was held and the church closed in 1959. Many Players and Brigstockes are buried in the vaults under the church and are commemorated on memorials inside the church.

Outside perhaps the most interesting tomb is next to the path leading up to St Thomas Square and can be identified by its high railings. Here, in 1808, Capt. Daniel Maleyeff, of his Imperial Majesty’s Russian fleet was laid to rest. The inscription is in both English and Russian.

A colourful character buried in the graveyard is the Rev Edward Cannon. Once a priest of the Royal Chapel, he was expelled because of his eccentric behaviour: excessive drinking and satirical and disparaging writings about his fellow priests. He retired to Ryde in disgrace and died in 1834, forgotten and alone. His headstone can be found near the wall on the lower (north) side of the graveyard.

After the church closed, it was neglected for many years and fell into a sad state of disrepair. The walls became overgrown with ivy and the graveyard with weeds. In the 1970s, vandals broke into the church and caused terrible damage. Since then, restoration works have been carried out and the building is now available for community, heritage and cultural events. When the building was restored, the graveyard was turned into the garden of rest. Sadly, some of the headstones were smashed and used as part of the paving beneath the seats. However, by referring to the information board in the garden, you will still be able to locate the graves of some interesting people of the town.

You are now at the end of Ryde Heritage Audio Trail. We hope you enjoyed discovering about the history of Ryde.