

STOP 6 – RYDE PIER

You should be standing at the sea wall, overlooking the pier.

The pier you see today has three parts: the wooden platform for cars and pedestrians, an abandoned tramway and the railway pier. Ryde Pier is the oldest in the country; the original, wooden promenade being opened in 1814. Previously, landing at Ryde was problematic as described by Henry Fielding in July 1754:



“...was hoisted into a small boat, and being rowed near the shore, was taken up by two sailors, who waded me through the mud and placed me on the land.”

An inauspicious arrival! The early pier was extended on several occasions, before an adjacent pier, now the abandoned tramway, was opened in March 1864, and used for both a steam engine and horse drawn trams.

“On Monday afternoon the first trip was made with the engine alone ... After two or three experimental trips the spectators were invited to have a “run”, which invitation was accepted, and the carriages were both filled and covered with experimenting passengers. We should state the journey down the Pier and back again, after the engine was got into working trim, was made in three minutes... Passengers and their luggage will arrive at the end of the pier in two minutes without having parted company..... The name bestowed upon this fiery steed was “Vectis”. Although it ran for some time, this steam train proved unsuccessful. Later in 1864: “The new tramway carriage, to be worked by a horse, has arrived and comprises first and second class accommodation for 32 persons...It is fitted with brakes which can stop the carriage, with the horse at full trot, in the space of four feet!”

In 1880, a third pier, for the railway added, and in 1895, a concert pavilion was built at the Pier Head. During the Yachting Season, Ryde Pier was the place to be. Military Bands were regularly engaged to play there, and large crowds came to promenade. The trains in use on the railway pier today started life on the London Underground.

Image: an old postcard of Ryde Pier

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