

STOP 7 – TRANSPORT

You should now be sitting in the Rose Garden opposite the Royal Esplanade Hotel with the Hovercraft Terminal.

Sailing boats, paddle steamers, ferries, horse trams, steam and electric trains – this area has always been the main hub for transport, a constant hustle and bustle. Once there were cabs and horses, the fly-drivers touting for work. *“Need a cab sir? Best value on the island”*

During the season, trips around the Island were popular, with a change of horses at each stop. The coaches were precariously top heavy. *“Hold on tight everyone!”*

Later, the open top motor charabanc took over these trips, equally heavily laden. *“Squash up there ladies, room for two more!”*

Imagine the sea right up to this low wall by the path. Carriers would load their wagons with goods from boats tied up alongside the esplanade. Take a look behind the wall to see iron rings used for that purpose, still remaining.

The Isle of Wight is famous for the birth of the hovercraft, but Ryde’s terminal has only been on this site since 1965. It all started a year earlier further along the beach. Listen to the memories of the first Hover-Hostess. *“It was a pioneering venture for the Island. We began a six weeks passenger service in June 1964 from the beach near Appley Tower, using an SRN2 hovercraft, seating 60 persons and with 2 pilots. At our small hut on the sand, long queues waited for each trip, the excitement was plain to see. Dressed in my navy air-hostess uniform, I would greet the passengers, make sure they were comfortable and explain about the trip as we crossed to Eastney, near Southsea.”*

It almost didn't start as scheduled. Mr Lucy, a local builder, went out in his boat to set the buoys in place to mark the path that the hovercraft would take towards Appley Beach. He became concerned about a large object protruding from the sea in that path and the Royal Navy divers from Gosport were summoned to investigate. They discovered a German aeroplane with its wingtip just visible at low-tide. A decision was made in the interests of safety, for the divers to blow it up.

Now continue along towards the Pavilion, cross the approach to the car park and keeping to the pavement, walk until you reach the Eastern Gardens arch, walk under the arch and stand by the corner turret of the Pavilion.