

## **ROBERT ARKLEY COOKE 1840 – 1912**

### **Death of a Ryde Bandsman**

Robert Arkley Cooke, an army pensioner, of Salisbury Cottage, Daniel Street, Ryde died suddenly from heart failure on Monday 17th June 1912, aged 72.

Robert was born in Montrose, Angus, Scotland in 1840, the son of Jacob and Elizabeth (nee Knight). Elizabeth was born in Montrose but Jacob, christened on the 26th July 1801 at All Saints Church, Calbourne, was from an Island family.

Robert Arkley Cooke, joined the army, and on the 1861 census he is listed at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, Middlesex with fellow soldiers. His Army career lasted 27 years and took him to India where he met and married his wife, Jane Ann Townley, in Sanawar on the 12th September 1867. They had 13 children.

Robert was a Bugle-Major in the Shropshire Light Infantry (the 85th Kings Regiment of Light Infantry) and afterwards bandmaster of the Royal Munster Fusiliers (the 104th Bengal Regiment). He was also in the Gordon Highlanders and the 69th Regiment of Foot, Rochester.

On his retirement from the Army in the 1870's, he was attached to the Volunteers for 17 years and also helped train the Boy's Brigade, Boy Scouts and the Church Lads' Brigade.

For some years he was bandmaster of the Ryde Town Band and on the Wednesday before his death conducted an orchestra at the Town Hall for a meeting of the National Reserve.

#### **Isle of Wight County Press Saturday 15th June 1912 - Report of the National Reserve meeting**

"On Wednesday evening a very successful meeting was held at the Town Hall, Ryde to further the objects of the National Reserve. Col. Craddock thanked bandmaster Holland and the members of the R. F. A. (Howitzer Brigade) Band for their kindness in playing outside the Town Hall prior to the meeting, and also Bandmaster R. A. Cooke and his band for instrumental selections inside the hall."

#### **The Inquest**

An inquest into his death conducted by the Acting Coroner for the Island, Mr Francis A. Joyce, was held on Tuesday afternoon, the 18th June 1912, at the Park Road Baptist Chapel, Ryde. He heard evidence from the deceased's widow, Jane Ann, that Robert had complained of chest pains after they left church on Sunday. She made him ginger tea and a bread poultice to ease the pain. On Monday he got up but went back to bed, and at one o'clock, when she couldn't rouse him, sent for the doctor. Dr. J. W. Pridmore, who attended the deceased said "When I arrived at the house deceased was dead but the body was still warm and the appearance of the face was consistent with death from natural causes". From the evidence given the Coroner said the jury might reasonably assume that death was due to heart trouble. The jury returned a verdict accordingly.

## **The Funeral**

The funeral took place on Thursday afternoon, the 20th June 1912, and was attended by a large number of people. The funeral procession from the house in Daniel Street was headed by the trumpeter, Mr E. Palmer, and the firing party of the Isle of Wight Rifles marching with arms reversed, under Colour Sergeant Instructor Evans.

Then came the massed bands of the Howitzer Brigade, R. F. A. and the Isle of Wight Rifles, with whom were several retired bandsmen not attached to any regiment, who were allowed to play out of respect for an old comrade. The drums were draped in crepe and the coffin, of polished elm with brass mountings, was covered with the Union Jack, on which was placed the deceased's busby, sword, and belt, together with a wreath from his wife. The pall-bearers were all retired warrant officers. The bearers, members of the old Ryde Town Band, of which Mr Cooke was the bandmaster, were Messrs. J. H. Daish, H. Thearle, Crabb, J. Long, Coyne, Austin, E. Drayton and Sayers.

About 40 members of the National Reserve followed the coffin under the command of Col. E. W. Craddock, J. P. Then followed the Isle of Wight Rifles, under Lieutenant Swain and the Howitzer Brigade, under Lieutenant A. J. Hartnell and Lieutenant C. Swain. The bands played Chopin's "Marche Funebre" and Beethoven's "Funeral March" on the way to the Parish Church. The Rev. Hugh Le Fleming, M. A., Vicar, assisted by the Rev. Cyril L. Blake, M. A. conducted the service.

As the procession left the church the organist, Dr. R. Yates Mander played the 'Dead March' in Saul and 'O Rest in the Lord'.

At the graveside committal the Territorials and National Reserve formed up in a hollow square. The firing party fired three volleys over the grave, and the trumpeter very impressively sounded the "Last Post".