

A JAPANESE FUNERAL IN RYDE  
From the County Press, June 1897

An unwonted spectacle was witnessed in Ryde on Monday morning (28 June 1897) in the shape of a Japanese funeral. A blacksmith Tetsunosuke Suzuki, belonging to His Imperial Majesty's ship, the Fuji, died at 9 o'clock on Saturday evening of septic peritonitis, having been taken ill on 22<sup>nd</sup>. Mr J. PURNELL was summoned on board on Sunday, and a wish was expressed that the deceased might be cremated; but time was not permitting of this being done, it was arranged that he should be buried at the cemetery, a site being granted for the purpose. Mr PURNELL was not permitted to see the body, all the necessary arrangements being made on board. The corpse was enclosed in a rectangular oak coffin, which was beautifully dovetailed together, covered over with a plain black cloth with no ornamentation what ever. The Fleet were firing the midday Coronation salute on Monday as the body was being brought ashore, and the Pier-head was crowded with people. The funeral party were in a steam launch and two boats, the latter towed by the former. The coffin was in the first boat and was covered by the Japanese flag. The party landed at the Pier-head steps. Here, the Mayor, (Ald E. GROVES) and Dr. DAVEY, J. P. and Messrs. W. GIBBS, J. O. BROOK, and MEERES (directors of the Pier Company) were present, and the Mayor was presented to the senior officer, who wore the three gold-lace rings of an English commander. All the officers wore similar uniforms to those of the English Fleet, and those sailors were only to be distinguished from their English confreres by the inscriptions round their caps and by the stripes the Petty officers wore. Many of them wore two medals; one of bronze and one of strange shape of silver-like appearance. In addition to these, the officers had what appeared to be medals of various orders on their breasts. The coffin was placed on a gun carriage and a procession formed. First came a seaman trumpeter, then 15 seamen, a sailor carrying a long white bannerette bearing the name and rank of the deceased in black Japanese characters, hung on a lofty bamboo pole, six sailors carrying flowers artistically made of white paper with blue leaves, two resembling chrysanthemums and the other four resembling water lilies. These flowers were in little crown shaped cardboard pots half filled with sawdust and stood on miniature stools. Other sailors carried floral wreaths and one the medals of the deceased. The gun carriage followed, the procession being wound up by the officers, the Mayor, and the Pier Directors. The procession passed through lines of people up the pier, via Union Street to the cemetery. The knell of the Parish church was tolled. Arrived at the cemetery the body was taken to the non-conformist chapel, where the engineer read something in Japanese from a paper scroll, standing in front of the coffin. Each of the men in turn advanced towards the coffin, deposited a spray of flowers near it, bowed, and returned to his place. Then the procession was resumed to the grave, round which a large crowd had gathered. Here the flag was removed from the coffin and the white cords untied from it. After it had been lowered into the grave the deceased's hat from which the ribbon had previously been torn, was thrown in on it. The bannerette with the deceased's description was also thrown in. The trumpeter then blew several calls, all the officers and men saluting. Each sailor having thrown a clod of earth on the coffin, the interpreter informed Mr PURNELL that they wished to see the grave filled in. This was done by Mr BUTCHER and his men, the sailors remaining until the work was done, and the turf placed over the earth. In the centre of the top a temporary monument – a wooden obelisk covered with the deceased's name and rank – was fixed. This had been carried in the procession covered with a white cloth. On the ground at the head side of the obelisk was placed a large wooden stool, on which was a large floral anchor of red, white and blue bloom from the Mayor and inhabitants. This bore the inscription – "Sleep thy last sleep with friends". On other parts of the grave were four wreaths from the ships company. The paper flowers above described were placed on each side of the grave. Near the Mayor's

anchor was what looked like a tiny pair of three-barred gates standing on their ends, parallel to each other, on another piece of wood. These things having been placed in order, each sailor took a spray of white flowers from boxes and placed them in the turf on top of the grave, round each side and in lines across the top. As they retired they doffed their caps and bowed to the obelisk. The bowing was repeated when the party were marched away. Before the men left, the engineer officer handed Mr BUTCHER a length of black cloth which had been used in the funeral, saying it was of no use. The Mayor subsequently entertained the officers at his residence, and with the Mayoress, (Miss GROVES) went on board the Fuji in the evening.

On Wednesday morning, a party of about 40 officers and men landed from the Fuji and again visited their late shipmate's grave. Each man doffed his cap and bowed to the grave, and two of the officers afterwards photographed it with hand and stand cameras, the men being grouped around it. The Mayor (Ald E. GROVES); Ald. MARVIN, J.P., Supt. HINKS, and Mr. H. BUTCHER were present at the ceremony in the chapel on Monday.

We are asked on behalf of the Commander and officers of H.J.M.S. Fuji, which left Ryde on Thursday morning, to express their thanks to the Mayor and the directors of the Ryde Pier Company for their great kindness and courtesy, to Mr PURNELL for making all the arrangements, and to the inhabitants of Ryde generally for the great respect shown to them on the occasion of the funeral of their late shipmate.

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Under the column in the County Press describing the funeral, the following poem was written:

#### BURIAL OF THE JAPANESE SAILOR AT RYDE I.W.

Lay him to sleep in Vecta's bonnie Isle –  
The sailor brother from the distant main,  
Lay him to sleep so free from death's sharp pain,  
While round his head the summer roses smile.

Some heart will sadden o'er the distant blue,  
Some heart will mourn the sailor laddie's loss –  
But here beneath the shadow of the Cross  
We lay him down amid his comrades true.

Kind mayor with thy noble heart,  
That bids this sailor laddie rest with friends,  
And shares the common grief that inward rends –  
We thank thee for thy sympathetic part.

And may they floral tribute ever bring  
Sweet thoughts of purest joy to thee and thine,  
Who loved the stranger from the distant clime,  
And made the townsmen's hearts responsive ring.

ALFRED DEDAMESS

The Japanese ship Fuji had been part of the Naval review held at Spithead, under the command of Sir Nowell SALMON, V.C., in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, June 26 1897.