

Extract from an Isle of Wight Newspaper during the week of Monday 4th to Friday 8th
November 1940

ROUND THE ISLAND IN THREE DAYS!

Ryde Diamond Wedding Couple's Reminiscences

Mr and Mrs Harry Williams, of 8 Church Lane, Ryde, on Saturday celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of their wedding in the cottage; which has been their home for 49 years. They were married at the Ryde Wesleyan Church on November 2nd, 1880, and for seven years lived at the old Brigstocke Mews situated at the lower end of Church Lane. "We have been happy here and I would not care to live anywhere else," Mrs Williams told a reporter.

Although for the past few years he has lived in retirement, Mr Williams for several years enjoyed the distinction of being the oldest licenced carriage driver in Ryde. He was born at Dudley House, John Street, Ryde, 82 years ago, his father, the late George Williams, having kept a posting yard with the proud horses and stately carriages so characteristic of the mid-Victorian era.

Mr Williams, who was one of family of eight children, soon obtained his own horse and chaise, and at the age of 18 was a fully-fledged licensed carriage driver.

Both Mr and Mrs Williams dislike the haste and bustle of the age of machines, and Mr Williams has never driven a motor car. "They are too quick for me" was his only comment.

He drove a coach and pair in the days when a tour of the Island took three days, not just a few hours in a charabanc and a whirl of dust.

"Excursions used to be run each weekend from London," said Mr Williams, "I would set off on Friday with four passengers in the carriage, with sometimes one horse and sometimes two. After driving leisurely through the woods and chimes and avenues lined with trees, we would put up for the night at Blackgang Hotel. Then the next day we continued our journey, and spent the night at Alum Bay Hotel, returning to Ryde on Monday. When, as was often the case, I had nice people the trip was enjoyable, and I was able to point out the various things of interest. Sometimes the people were a bit grumpy, and I let them get on with it and did not talk overmuch. The weather in those days was much more seasonable, and we never got summer weather in the winter as we do nowadays."

He once had the honour of driving H.R.H. Princess Beatrice and Prince Henry of Batenburg from Ryde to Seaview in a pair-horse landau.

In one respect, however, Mr Williams admitted that the "Good Old Days" were not so good. "The roads were all gravel," he said, "And we had to flatten down the roads with our horses' hooves and carriages. Just when we had got one side of the road nicely levelled off the road authority would place barriers across it forcing us to start all over again and wear down the fresh gravel on the other side. Later they had a roller drawn by six horses."

Both Mr and Mrs Williams can remember Ryde in the days when the railway from Ventnor reached only as far as St John's.

There was no railway to Newport, horse drawn trams plied up and down the pier, and they used to walk on a long since demolished structure known as "The Penny Pier." "Ryde's policemen wore top hats in those days," said me Williams with some relish.

Mrs Williams, formerly Miss Elizabeth Nippard, was born at Hythe, near Southampton, 79 years ago, and came to Brading with her parents when she was only a small child. Since the age of 13 she has lived in Ryde. She was brought up in a family of nine children, of whom five sons and two daughters are living, four of them in the Island. Five of Mr and Mrs Williams' sons fought with the Army in the last war. Two of them, George and Sydney, both members of the Hampshire Regiment were killed in action, and a third, Arthur, who is living in the town, was badly wounded.

They have 16 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

A knock came at the door, and the postman handed Mr Williams a parcel. "It's from our son Frank," Mrs Williams explained, "We've got a good family to look after us."

Plot No 1806A