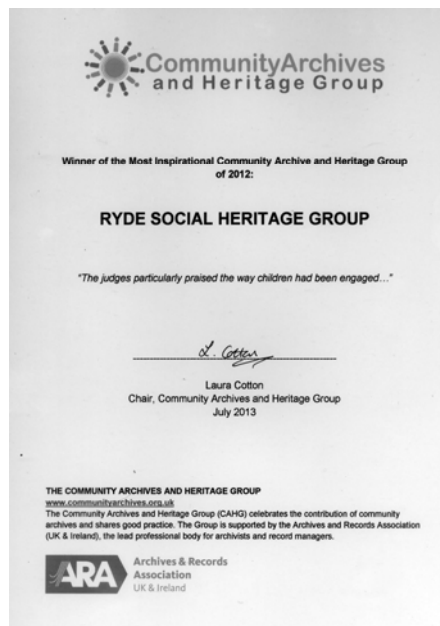


BEYOND THE GRAVES

Volume 8, Number 3, July 2013

MOST INSPIRATIONAL COMMUNITY ARCHIVE AND HERITAGE GROUP OF 2012



Ryde Social Heritage Group was announced winner of the **Most Inspirational category** at the Community Archives and Heritage Group conference in London on 10 July 2013.

The Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG) is a national group which aims to support and promote community archives in the UK and Ireland, bringing together bodies and organisations concerned with Community Archives, and provide a forum for the regular exchange of views and information. The second annual Community Archive and Heritage Award's were awarded to celebrate the importance of community archives and heritage.

Four members of RSHG travelled to London to receive the award on behalf of the Group, presented by Dr Nick Barratt, at University College London.



 **Community Archives
and Heritage Group**
RYDE SOCIAL HERITAGE GROUP
**Most Inspirational
Community
Archive
2012**

The all-day conference and AGM had the theme 'Our Industrial Heritage' and included the keynote speech by Tristram Hunt, MP, Vice-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History, and illustrated talks by David Tournay, Pioneer Sailing Trust; Harry Cumberbatch MBE, From Discovery to Independence; Alison Cutforth, Britain from Above; Marie Owens, New Archives Campaign; Elliott Wragg, Thames Discovery Programme and Rebekah Polding, London Screen Heritage. The four category award winners were invited to give presentations on their work in the afternoon. Janette gave an illustrated talk about the work of Ryde Social Heritage Group.

The award winners were:

Most Inspirational – Ryde Social Heritage Group (www.rshg.org.uk)

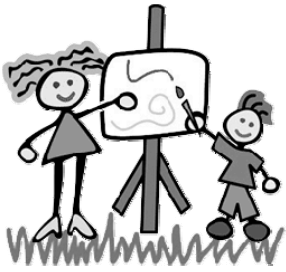
Most Innovative – Six Streets Derby (www.sixstreetsderby.org.uk)

Best New – St Margaret's History Society Archive Group (<http://catalogue.stmargarethistory.org.uk>)

Best Online – Beyond the Point (www.beyondthepoint.co.uk)

Beyond the Point, a heritage archive organisation founded and run by two teenage boys, Liam and Joe, from Canvey Island, Essex, also won the overall 'Community Archive and Heritage Group of the Year'.

RSHG Chairman Janette Gregson said *"Winning the award for 'Most Inspirational' Group is a tribute to our volunteers who devote so much time and effort to the group's activities and to our membership for the continuing support and encouragement they give us. It was pleasure to accept the award on behalf of the whole group."*



ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN

"The judges particularly praised the way children had been engaged..."

Ryde Social Heritage Group has been working with local schools for a number of years to develop an interesting range of lesson plans to use in Ryde Cemetery. Regularly classes from local primary schools descend on the cemetery for a fun day learning not only about the history and the people buried there but nature studies, art, maths and orienteering skills. Volunteers from RSHG are always on hand to assist the teachers and act as group leaders, leaflet distributors and tea ladies!

The day usually starts by dividing the children into groups named after a person buried in the cemetery. Their first activity is always to find the grave of that person; the children really enjoy learning about a real person and a family who actually lived in Ryde. Kent, Dashwood, Carter, Slade, Harris and Linington are some of the people they discover by using the cemetery map and following various paths and the carriageway.

Spring

In March a group of 75 children, armed with sketch books, descended on Ryde Cemetery. They had come on a cross hunt (linked to their Easter studies) and to look for the signs of Spring. They didn't have to look far to find a vast number of crosses of all shapes and sizes. Their group leaders had identification cards to assist them in naming the types of crosses. It was a lovely sunny afternoon and the signs of spring were also easy to find with clumps of primroses, daffodils and crocuses scattered across the cemetery.



Summer



On a fine June day the theme for the school visit was 'Birds, Blooms and Butterflies.' The children were given identification sheets with examples of birds, flowers and butterflies which are commonly seen in Ryde Cemetery. The children were asked to notice not only the profusion of wild flowers growing but also the

many cut flowers and pot plants which adorn lots of the graves. An added interest was drawing attention to sculpted floral relief on many tombstones and group leaders had information on the Victorian symbolism of flowers.

Autumn

A September morning was for orienteering at Ryde Cemetery and enjoying aspects of Autumn. Groups set off in different directions and first of all they were asked to find their favourite Autumn leaf, a difficult task as they could not decide on just one, there were so many beautiful varieties. The children also noticed quite a lot of interesting fungi but a dead bird proved more of a talking point than any of the toadstools! All corners of the cemetery were explored and the chapel buildings were visited.



Winter



On a surprisingly mild morning in early February sixty 5-7 year olds descended on Ryde Cemetery. The children had been studying their local area so orienteering skills were needed and they combined these with tree studies. We had six groups of ten each and off they went, armed with maps, trail instructions and information, tree identification sheets and their Group Leaders. They were soon discovering various paths and the carriageway by following their leader and using the cemetery map. Being Wintertime identification of trees is limited to fairly obvious evergreens and the children had to concentrate on noticing yew trees ("millions of them"), bay trees, bushes and hedges, fir trees (mostly cypress) and the beautiful large cedars. Sustaining the interest of 5-7 year olds required the extra challenge of meeting three special trees, Billy Bay, Cedric

Cedar and Yoko Yew! Before break the groups all got together in one big circle around Billy Bay ("probably the biggest bay tree in the world") and joined in reciting a poem. Afterwards another whole group activity took place within the first turning circle where all involved became the parts of a tree.

RESEARCH

The work RSHG does is only possible with the help of the wonderful team at the Isle of Wight Record Office. Our research team, led by Ann Barrett, spend many hours looking for information in the vast archives at Newport. We are very pleased to receive this congratulations message from Richard Smout:



CONGRATULATIONS FROM THE RECORD OFFICE

Many congratulations to the members of the Ryde Social Heritage Group on winning the Most Inspirational Community Archive award for 2012. This is recognition from a national organisation that is richly deserved. The Community Archive awards have considerable standing in the archive world and the competition will have been of a high quality, so this is a real tribute to everyone involved, and to the wider membership whose support and encouragement is invaluable.

Ryde Social Heritage Group has been in existence for over ten years now, and many of its members had of course been researching for even longer before the group was set up. It is the mix of local knowledge, technical skill, sheer hard work and masses of enthusiasm that bears such good results, and it is always a pleasure to see the Group's researchers in the Record Office in Newport.

Over the years we have worked together, helping members find out information for their exhibitions and open days, for talks and walks, not least the Audio Trail through part of Ryde, which was an absolute delight to be involved with. All of this has involved going back to basics, looking for the documents and the memories that help us keep a record of what happened in the past. For the Group's researchers the core activity has been to find out more about the lives of those people who are buried in Ryde Cemetery, and the obvious starting point here has been to look for the obituaries published in back numbers of the Isle of Wight County Press, and two Ryde-based newspapers, the Isle of Wight Times and the Isle of Wight Observer.



The earliest of these gets us back into the 1850s, but of

course by no means everyone will appear. If the person you are researching was heavily involved in the local community or had a shop or other business then your chances of finding an obituary are quite good, especially if the person who died was a man. If however you retired to the Island and made little attempt to engage with the community then it is much less likely that the fact will be recorded. This all makes the hunt for information more of a challenge, especially when the physical location of an obituary within a newspaper seems to change on a regular basis. It would be very easy to be distracted by all the wealth of other fascinating information which is irrelevant to the task in hand, but could so easily be of use some day for some other project, and so researchers have to be very focused and well organised, and I know that they are helped in that by Ann Barrett's lists of things to find.

I do not believe that the public who look at Ryde Social Heritage Group's website can have a full appreciation of the amount of work that goes into finding, copying and then placing on-line all the information that is to be found there. Although the newspaper articles are at the core of this, there is also a wealth of additional information at the Record Office that has been used so that it can be added to the personal stories, and the looking back section of the site. The old Ordnance Survey maps of Ryde tell us something about the development of the site and the town generally, while the records of the Ryde Burial Board contain the story of how the cemetery was developed on this site. A lot of work has been done to ensure that the prints, postcards and photographs for Ryde and the surrounding area are well covered. An image can sometimes tell us something that it would take a page of text to explain less vividly and so there has been a lot of work undertaken to track down as many pictures as possible that tell the story of Ryde.



There is always more information to find, which I hope is good news. Sometimes records of businesses run by the deceased survive, or there is information about the homes where people lived, or the public houses or clubs that they frequented or helped to run. The careers of those who were elected onto Ryde Borough Council or helped to provide its services can be traced, and exceptionally correspondence or a diary may give us a very personal insight into the lives of the town's inhabitants.

I suspect that this means that Ryde Social Heritage Group is going to have many decades of happy researching ahead of it. One of the features of the Group that attracted so much interest and positive comment from the judges was the way in which local schoolchildren were involved, and the strength of the educational offer from the group. This is excellent news as it gives hope that the next generation will be inspired to build on the excellent work carried out so far, bring new undreamt of skills to bear, and help to offer yet more to the visitor and the Island in years to come.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

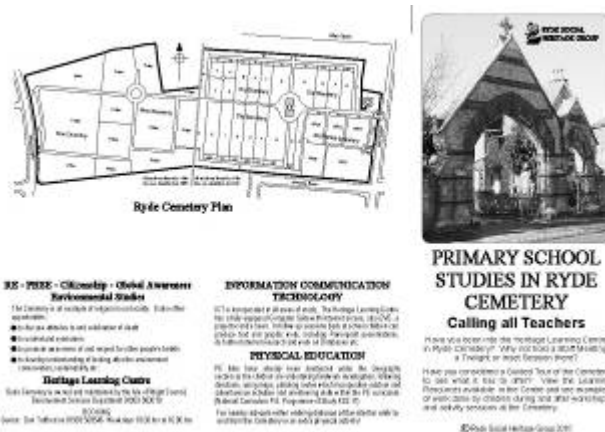
Ryde Social Heritage Group has produced a range of information and trail leaflets for Ryde Cemetery as resources for primary schools.



The latest lesson pack added to our education resources is called 'Dead Good Maths' and includes lots of fun ideas and exercises for children to enjoy while using the cemetery as a place of learning. All the lessons have been tried and tested by children from Dover Park School and it was the children who came up with the fantastic title of Dead Good Maths. Included in the pack which can be downloaded for free from our website www.rshg.org.uk are exercises on surveying, counting, measuring, angles and calculation.

Kate MacDonell and David Earle both worked very hard to design the exercises and the worksheets and we are grateful to them for giving their expertise and time to this fantastic project. Thanks also to the children from Dover Park School for their enthusiasm and whole-hearted participation in testing the exercises for us.

The Heritage and Learning Centre in Ryde Cemetery has excellent facilities including a classroom with tables, chairs, small kitchen area, toilet, computer suite and plenty of information relating to the history of the cemetery, the flora and fauna, the people buried there and the history of the town of Ryde. There is also exhibition space to display work carried out by school groups.



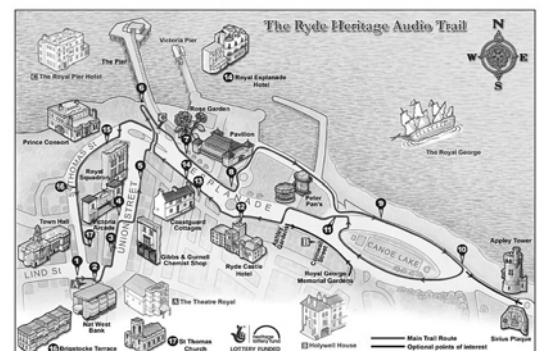
Other lesson packs already published by RSHG are Cross Curricular Primary School Studies, Ideas for Art Activities at Ryde Cemetery, Ten ideas for Creative Writing at Ryde Cemetery, Geography at Ryde Cemetery – Orienteering and Mapping skills. In production at the moment are Victorian Studies at Ryde Cemetery, Symbolism at Ryde Cemetery, and Ryde Cemetery and Wartime.

GUIDED TOURS AND ILLUSTRATED TALKS

Ryde Social Heritage Group has produced a range of booklets and leaflets designed as self-guided walks around Ryde Cemetery and the town and also arrange guided tours and host visits from local groups and organisations.

RYDE HERITAGE AUDIO TRAIL

Our walking tour of Ryde town centre and the Esplanade, illustrated with historical detail selected from archives, includes a map with a suggested route. Audio files can be downloaded to MP3 players and listened to at various points along the trail. The whole trail is accessible to mobility scooter users. If you are not able to undertake the trail you can still listen to the audio files on your computer.



We have members who are able to visit other groups and meetings to give illustrated talks on various aspects of Ryde's history and the work of RSHG.

RSHG IN THE COMMUNITY

Ryde Arts Festival

RSHG are very proud to have been closely associated with Ryde Arts Festival for several years providing cultural, heritage and social history aspects of the art and music events, workshops and training, and featuring in the festival week each July. In 2013, we are extremely pleased to not only design a new display for the library based on the festival theme of 'Books', but this year to work closely with the commissioned local artists to produce 'The Chalk Talks' exhibition at St Thomas' Heritage Centre. Chalk Talks is a very old term for the giving and sharing of information and sermons with the use of chalks and a board. The artists visited us in the cemetery and learning centre, and at St Thomas' to create an artist's impression of Ryde's history, using our knowledge and research to form their ideas.



There was a large wreck of a boat erected as the centrepiece in St Thomas' by Chris Jenkins and Ian Whitmore. This depicted the sinking of HMS Royal George at Spithead in 1782.



Janette held three workshops creating artworks for display in the Depozitory, Nelson Street.

Ryde Library

We regularly hold exhibitions in the library to share our research into Ryde's history and its people. Some of the most popular are the 'Living Memories' displays which feature stories and memories from people who still live and work in Ryde or are visitors to the town. Photographs and adverts for local shops and businesses show a great diversity of trade in the town and this together with entertainment and recreation memories make a varied and colourful history of our town.



Ryde Pier



For the last three years Wightlink, current owners of Ryde Pier, have invited us to 'Party on the Pier'; in 2011 it was to celebrate the reopening of the original pedestrian pier after repair and restoration works, 2012 was to mark the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Act of Parliament which allowed the original pier to be built and this year to celebrate the laying of the foundation stone in 1813.

On each occasion we designed a different exhibition on the history of the pier and its impact on the town and collected many memories from our visitors. Volunteers are always on hand at our exhibitions to promote the town's history through our research.



On Friday 23 March 2012 we spent an enjoyable afternoon at Ryde Pier Head as guests of Wightlink to witness the unveiling of the plaque by HRH Prince Edward commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the passing of the Ryde Pier Act.



Ryde in Miniature visits Havenstreet

As part of Heritage Open Days and Ryde Social Heritage Group's 10th Anniversary Celebrations last September, we had a 'Ryde in Miniature' exhibition depicting some of the businesses and buildings from Ryde's past. This consisted of small scale representations of 32 business and buildings ranging from one of the oldest buildings, a fisherman's cottage, right up to the present day Christmas display at Busy Bee. Following the success of this we were approached by the Havenstreet Country Women Group and asked if we would do a talk on dolls houses and bring along some miniature items for their members to view. Kate gave a short talk with slide show accompaniment. Some of the smaller houses and projects, as well as a variety of dolls house people, furniture and accessories were displayed for the audience to view, handle and discuss afterwards.



The Big Draw

The 'Big Draw' is a National event held annually in October and promoted by 'The Campaign for Drawing' to encourage everyone to draw, and to use drawing to engage with the past, present and future. In 2008 the Big Draw was celebrated in Ryde for the first time with two free events.



Ryde Social Heritage Group hosted 'The Art of Remembrance' in Ryde Cemetery. People were encouraged to be inspired by the beautiful surroundings or to contribute to two large drawings; one on four panels to interpret Ryde Cemetery and the other on 12 panels to interpret the town of Ryde. Many children and adults turned up to participate in the weekend and even the local policeman came along and added a drawing of Ryde Police Station to the big picture of Ryde.

An event for 200 school children and 100 visitors, held at St Thomas' Heritage Centre, was organised jointly by Ryde Arts Festival and Ryde Social Heritage Group and attracted local residents and visitors from as far away as Egypt. The children were encouraged to draw some of the buildings of Ryde and then, inspired by loaned Victorian costumes, they drew themselves in period clothing to produce a huge Portrait of Ryde.



Big Draw events have been held at different locations in the town each year following the success of 2008.

Local History Groups

Interacting with other groups is a pleasurable and essential part of what we do. Ryde cannot be researched in isolation as much of what happened in other parts of the Island affected Ryde too. The working population moved around for employment, businesses had a good rapport with their suppliers from outside Ryde, and many of the social activities involved other areas.

We like to visit other groups when they have open days or exhibitions, the displays are so interesting that often a few hours go by without anyone realising. The members appreciate us showing interest in their local history, often resulting in a reciprocal visit. The exchange of ideas and information is such a help to all groups alike. In May, at our Open Days in Ryde Cemetery, we were pleased to welcome members from the Totland and Freshwater Group, a small fledgling West Wight group, and our friends from Northwood Cemetery, to share our Group's experiences and activities with them.



Jon Matthews gives a guided walk at Northwood Cemetery Open Days March 2013.

We also arrange Group outings to places of historic interest on the Island, the latest to St Mildred's Church at Whippingham. This gives our members and volunteers a chance to meet up socially outside of our quarterly meetings and events. The trips produce many friendly discussions and shared memories finishing with a lunch or tea. Previous outings have included Carisbrooke Castle Museum and The Brannon Exhibition at Brading Roman Villa.