

BEYOND THE GRAVES



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RYDE SOCIAL HERITAGE GROUP

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About us

Membership is open to anyone who is interested in the heritage of the town of Ryde.

Research is centred on Ryde Cemetery, and the people who are buried there, their links to Ryde's past, their lives, homes, businesses, families and descendants.

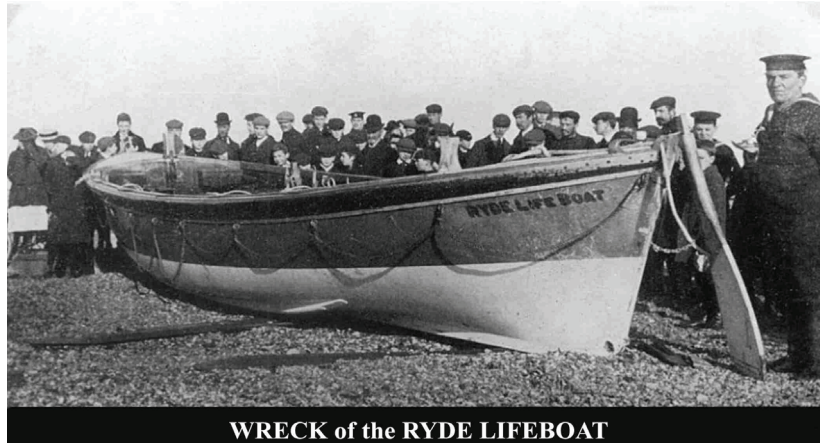
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To commemorate the Centenary on New Years Day of the "Selina" Lifeboat tragedy when two gallant lifeboatmen lost their lives, this newsletter has a Maritime theme.

"Selina" Lifeboat Disaster - New Years Day 1907



WRECK of the RYDE LIFEBOAT

In the early afternoon of New Years Day 1907, Augustus Jarrett, master of the 56 ton barge "Jane", complained to Mr Brooks, Chief Officer of the Coastguards, that a boat belonging to the barge had been stolen and he was referred to the police. It was later thought the boat had not been tied up properly and the rising tide and wind had carried her away.

Later in the afternoon a man was seen to put off from the Dover Street slipway in a small boat and was observed sculling, with some difficulty, near the Sewer Buoy. If he had realised it was low tide, he could have waded ashore as he was only in about three feet of water. On seeing the man adrift, George Jeffery, one of the lifeboat crew who was employed on the pier, put off in a boat but was unable to reach the man and turned back. He reported to the coxswain, William John Bartlett, and the signal to call out the lifeboat "Selina" was given just after five o'clock.

The "Selina", a 30 foot wooden non self-righting lifeboat of the whale boat class, was specially designed and constructed to be used in the relatively smooth and shallow waters off Ryde and to assist yachts anchored in the Solent in stormy weather. She was never intended to be a sea-going lifeboat. Stationed at Ryde in July 1905, she was provided with all the proper equipment and manned by a crew of nine men. When under sail, she carried a small jib, a lug-sail and a small triangular mizen; the whole canvas area totalling 173 square feet. She also pulled eight oars and was steered with a yoke.

The "Selina" left Ryde at about 5:30pm on Tuesday 1st January 1907 with the full complement of crew on board: William John Bartlett, coxswain, George Jeffery, bowman, Ernest Cotton, Alfred Linington, senior, Alfred Linington, junior, Daniel Reeves, Albert Reeves, Henry Heward, second coxswain, and Frank Haynes, commissioned boatman of Coastguards.

Under sail, the boat behaved well going eastwards towards the Sandhead buoy and then to Horse Sand Fort and Norman Fort in what turned out to be a futile search as the crew saw nothing. After communicating with the "Warner" lightship and finding no further information they decided to return to Ryde. The sea was choppy and the weather squally. Close to the Bell buoy, about 200 yards from the pier, and having passed the No. 6 chequered buoy, the "Selina" was struck by a sudden and heavy squall and capsized immediately throwing the crew into the icy cold water. They had nothing to hold on to and nothing to signal with.



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In the darkness, the boat drifted at the mercy of the wind and tides across the Solent with the crew clinging to its keel and finally beached at Southsea some 20 yards from Southsea Castle at about 1:30am. A policeman on duty, P.C. Vines, seeing her and hearing the cries of the crew, summoned the Coastguard and finally the survivors were rescued although in an exhausted state. Unfortunately two of the lifeboat crew, Frank Haynes and Henry Heward, died after succumbing to exhaustion and exposure in the cold seas despite the efforts of their colleagues to hold them above the water. Their bodies were washed up at Southsea later that night.

The man they set out to rescue, who turned out to be Augustus Jarrett himself, had managed to scull across the Solent landing opposite Eastney Barracks at Southsea earlier the same evening and it would appear at no time was he ever in any real danger. When interviewed Jarrett stuck to his story the boat had been stolen and said he later found it at the Dover Street Slipway. He set out to return to his barge but was soon in difficulty, breaking two of his thole-pins. He got out of the boat on the sands but did not have sufficient power to move it. He got back into the boat to try again and eventually sculled across the Solent.



The funeral of Frank Haynes and Henry Heward took place in Ryde the following Monday afternoon and was attended by huge crowds of people who lined the streets and literally filled the Cemetery.

The funeral cortege, passing through Pier Street and Union Street to St. James Church, was lead by a firing party of the Coastguards from the Cowes Division who marched with arms reversed. Flags were flown at half-mast at the Town Hall, the Pier, The Coastguard Station and the Castle as well as at many private houses while shutters were up and blinds down along most of the route.

After the service at the Church, the procession reformed in Lind Street which was thronged with people. The service was made more poignant by the presence of a little white coffin containing the body of Haynes three month old daughter, Edith Louisa Haynes, who predeceased him on 30th December 1906. The Church bell rung out as the long line proceeded through the High Street and Hill Street to the Cemetery. The Rev. R R Cousens gave an address at the graves which were side by side, three volleys were fired and the "Last Post" sounded. The crowd slowly filed past the graves in a mark of respect for the gallant lifeboatmen who perished in the terrible tragedy of the "Selina" lifeboat. The graves are marked by headstones and anchors.



The Royal National Lifeboat Institution made a grant of £200 with "an expression of deep regret and with the sincere sympathy of the Committee" to the fund opened by the Mayor of Ryde, Albert J Coombes, for the benefit of the dependant relatives of the two lifeboatmen. Special grants were also made to the survivors and to those who gave valuable assistance on the day of the accident.

The inquest into the deaths of Haynes and Heward was held at the Town Hall, Portsmouth on Friday 4th January 1907 before the Coroner, T A Bramsdon, M.P. Much of the examination was made to determine why the crew did not use a self-righting boat but the Coroner was satisfied the crew selected the "Selina" as being the right class of lifeboat to be stationed at Ryde and they had every confidence in her.

After hearing all the evidence the Coroner summed up at some length saying the case was "sad indeed because these poor fellows went out as volunteers to try and save the life of another person. As it happened the duty was unnecessary, as the man was saved in another way, but they went out with a noble purpose. The disaster was due to a very heavy gust of wind which struck the boat on her way home."

Looking at the whole case from beginning to end he said he could not see that there was the slightest blame to attach to anyone, and "a very great deal of praise should be accorded the crew who so gallantly went out to save life, and to the members of the police force and coastguard service who, with equal gallantry, prevented a further disaster." He also commended the efforts of the Bembridge Lifeboat which had spent three and a half hours searching up and down the Solent for the "Selina" and the row boat.

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AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Ryde Social Heritage Group was held on 11th November 2006 at the George Street Centre, Ryde. Sally-Ann Garrett, Chairperson, provided a report of the activities of the Group over the past year, and the leaders of the Working Groups made short presentations on their activities.

Members voted on the adoption of the constitution, and agreed this should be reviewed by the Committee over the coming months. The Treasurer's report was accepted and the members also agreed on a membership fee of £10 per year. A charge of £2 will be made to non members who wish to attend the Groups quarterly meetings.

The following Officers were elected: Sally-Ann as the Chairperson, Matthew Bell as the Treasurer, Janette Kitching as the Secretary, and David Earle as the Membership Secretary. Ann and Les Barrett, Carol Strong and Rachael Mead were co-opted to join the Committee. 17 members renewed their membership and paid the new membership fee at the meeting. Three new members also signed up on the day.

There was an exhibition to commemorate the War Dead buried in the Cemetery, from both the First and Second World Wars, and the members held a two minutes silence at 11:00am. The exhibition included details of the 51 war graves, and some war poems.

After the meeting, leaders of the Working Groups were available to provide information about their groups and the activities planned for the coming year. Members were encouraged to join the groups to participate fully in the objectives of Ryde Social Heritage Group.

Exhibition

An exhibition of some of the interesting people and stories from the Cemetery was held on 24th November 2006 at the George Street Centre, Ryde. The display was held in conjunction with a talk given by Roy Brinton and Tony Gale on the brewers and pubs of Ryde for the Vernon Square Preservation Society.

The Vernon Square Garden, just off Melville Street, Ryde dates from the early 1800s and is bordered by a beautiful mix of Regency and Victorian houses dating from 1828, nine of which are listed.

The Society's website www.vernonsquare.co.uk gives details about the Society, the history of Vernon Square and the continuing conservation work.

Living Memories

The Group is busy collecting and documenting the stories and memories from RSHG members and the public. The information is building into a fascinating picture of the social history of Ryde and will be available for you to read at our exhibitions and displays throughout the year.

Have you told your story yet? Have you got old photographs or postcards of Ryde? Please contact us now.

Please send any items for the April Newsletter to the Editor by 1st March 2007.

Dates for your Diary

Ryde Social Heritage Group members meetings 2007

14th April 2007 - Roy Brinton, Honorary President RSHG, will give a talk on Early Ryde to 1840.

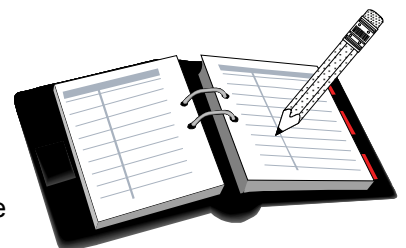
14th July 2007 - Richard Smout, County Archivist, will give a talk on Family History Resources in Ryde.

13th October 2007 - Annual General Meeting. Derek Warman will give a talk on Michael Maybrick and other musicians of Ryde.

All meetings will be held at the George Street Centre, George Street, Ryde between 10:30am and 12:30pm. Free to RSHG members on production of membership card or £2 on the door.

Exhibitions 2007

There will be exhibitions in March, May, September and December. Details will be published in the local press, in newsletters and on our website www.rshg.org.uk



Local Heritage *initiative*

*LHI is a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund,
Nationwide Building Society and the Countryside Agency*

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Fatal Accident 1852 - Two Lives Lost

On Friday 12th November 1852, during an easterly gale, the pilot boat "Ann and Eliza" from Ryde ran into Lymington creek at about 6pm. On board were James Wearn, master, James Wearn, pilot, John Buxey, pilot, Henry Wearn, boy, and George Bran, passenger.

In bringing up she slipped her anchor and chain cable, she then let go her kedge anchor and rode safely. James Wearn (pilot) insisted, against the advice of the others, on getting into the small boat and taking his nephew, Henry Wearn, with him to recover the anchor.

A few minutes later cries of distress were heard, but it was pitch dark and, as there was no other boat on board, assistance could not be sent. The two were not seen alive again.

At daylight next morning the boat was found upturned on the mud. The anchor and cable were picked up later that day, the buoy rope was found to be broken and the buoy missing. It was assumed the accident resulted from the rope breaking as they were weighing anchor which caused their boat to lurch and overturn. Two boats from Ryde and Lymington, the "Mary" and the "Fox", searched on Friday and Saturday for the two men without success.

Their bodies were recovered 5 days later.

Inquest

The inquest for Henry Wearn, aged 19 years, was held at the George Inn, Yarmouth before Mr F Blake, Coroner for the Isle of Wight.

James Wearn of Ryde identified the body stating it was his cousin Henry Wearn of Dore's Alley, Upper Ryde who was a mariner. Mr Wearn said the last time he had seen the deceased alive was in the late afternoon of 12th November. He was then in a small boat about 13ft 6in long with his uncle James Wearn, a pilot of Ryde.

"I was on board a pilot boat, (the Ann and Eliza), in Lymington Creek, the deceased and his uncle left the boat to go and weigh our anchor, which had slipped. It was quite dark and we lost sight of their boat in the darkness. The water was smooth and about fifteen minutes after they left we heard cries from the direction they had gone. I sent off three blue lights, hoisted a lantern all night and remained up all night on watch. I saw no other boat and was sure the cries came from the deceased and his uncle. We had no other boat and had no means of rendering assistance. The pilot boat was on the mud with land about three hundred yards from us. The uncle was an experienced sailor. We found their boat the next morning nearly a mile from us with no sails set. I think they got to the anchor and broke the buoy rope, as we found it broken the next morning."

Mr John Dore, mariner, of Yarmouth said, "Yesterday morning I was going to Lymington in a boat and about half way across I saw the body of the deceased floating in the Solent about a mile and half from the spot described by the last witness. Charles Lee was with me and together we brought the body on shore."

Verdict – "Accidental death."

Severe Storm - 20th December 1884

The Isle of Wight County Press on Saturday 27th December 1884 reported a severe storm at Ryde.

"On Saturday last one of the strongest gales that has been known for some years visited Ryde, the wind at the time being N.N.W. One of the Chaplin's boats, the "Surprise", from Portsmouth, under close reefed topsail, attempted to make the George Street slipway, but the tide not being high enough at the time, she ran aground close to one of the mooring buoys. The ketch "Jane" of Cowes, was seen dragging her anchor, and the lifeboat crew, seeing she was in danger, went off and put two hands on board, the boat lying by until sails were set. The ketch made for St. Helens harbour, where she arrived safely. At the time she slipped anchor she ran close to the Esplanade wall, where no doubt she would have been totally wrecked if it had not been for the prompt assistance rendered by the lifeboat crew. Several of the watermen's boats were sunk during the day, and the sea, breaking against the wall, was blown across the Esplanade."



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The “Prince of Wales” Pleasure Boat Tragedy 1856

On Thursday 11th December 1856 the “Prince of Wales” pleasure boat, belonging to John Wearn, left Ryde at 3pm for Southampton, with a party of gentlemen on board. It had been a stormy day, but as the weather improved the boat started out on its return journey to Ryde. Shortly after midnight, as the boat neared the “Menelaus” lazaret, (a ship set apart for quarantine purposes), which was anchored at an area of the Solent known as the Motherbank, the weather turned stormy once again, and the boat capsized. Fortunately, the men on duty on board the lazaret heard the crew’s cries and immediately lowered a boat and hastened to the rescue. They managed to save two of the men, George Austin and Charles Wearn. Unfortunately, one young man named, George Page, also known as George Stone, drowned before he could be rescued.

Due to the continuing bad weather, the boat was only recovered and brought back to Ryde on the following Sunday. The Isle of Wight Observer on 20th December 1856, reported “she was found all sails standing and sheets fast, which does not indicate watchful seamanship”. The rough weather also scuppered all attempts with trawls and drags to recover the body of George Page at that time.

In response to the tragedy, a subscription was opened for the benefit of the seaman’s widow, at Mrs Wagner’s library in Union Street, to which Sir Augustus Clifford, Sir James Caldwell, Sir John Burgoyne, and many others of the gentry contributed.

When George Page’s body was eventually recovered from the sea, an inquest was held on 18th May 1857 at the Vine Inn before Mr F Blake, Coroner. The body of the 31 year old seaman was only identified by his clothing, his wages for the day, sadly, still in his trouser pockets. The evidence given by the two surviving crew members demonstrated that George Page had died accidentally, and the jury returned a verdict of “Accidental drowning” accordingly.

Loss of the “Eirene” 1928 - Fund opened for Replacement

The Isle of Wight Times reported an accident that occurred on Saturday 25th November 1928 when the Missions to Seamen motor yawl “Eirene” drifted near the pier and became a total wreck. This proved such a shock to Mr Jenkins who had, with Mr Brooker, taken parcels to weather bound coasters in the Solent for some years, that he became seriously ill. The “Eirene” came to Ryde in 1860 and had been in service for the Mission since that time.

A replacement boat was needed and would cost £400. An “Eirene” Replacement Fund was opened at Lloyds Bank. Miss A E Purcell of “Northfield” who was the local Honorary Secretary of the Missions to Seamen, wrote to the paper to make an appeal:

“We all know how much we owe to our seamen, who, but for them we would starve. They have never failed England. Theirs is a hard lot and one would not like them to miss the pleasure of the visits of the Mission boat and the comforts she conveys for mind and body. We shall be pleased to receive and acknowledge any subscriptions towards a new “Eirene”.

Mr P B Phelps of the South District of the Missions to Seamen wrote to the Editor to give his thanks:

“ I wish to express my appreciation on behalf of the Missions to Seamen for your kindness in devoting part of your valuable space to an appeal to replace “Eirene” which for many years, since 1860 in fact !!! Has done such excellent work from our Ryde Station. I do hope that Ryde people will nobly turn to, and help us replace the gallant old craft, which under Messrs Jenkins and Brooker has done so well.”

The Mission to Seafarers celebrated their 150th anniversary in 2006, having been founded in 1856 as The Missions to Seamen. The foundational meeting was held on 28th February 1856. This led, after many further discussions, to the drafting of a constitution two years later.

The constitution read as follows:

1. The object of the society is the spiritual welfare of the seafaring classes at home and abroad.
2. In pursuance of this object the society will use every means consistent with the principles and received practice of the Church of England.
3. The operations of the society shall for the most part be carried on afloat and for this purpose its chaplains and scripture readers shall, as far as possible, be provided with vessels and boats for visiting the ships on roadsteads, rivers and harbours.



By 1858 the society was represented by 14 stations manned by seven chaplains, seven honorary chaplains and six scripture readers. The 14 stations were: Southampton, Liverpool, South Shields, Swansea, Tyne and Wear, Avonmouth, Bristol, Great Yarmouth, Hartlepool, The Tees, Ryde, IOW, Milford, Cork, Ireland and London.



TICKET TO RYDE

Probably everyone who lives in or around Ryde travels to the Mainland using the Hovercraft or one of the ferries. Most people can remember the diesel powered ferries and many will remember the older paddle steamers. There are many well written and illustrated books on the subject but this article will hopefully draw your attention to, or remind you of, some lesser known facts.



Paddle Steamer "Portsdown"

The "Portsdown" was built in Dundee and entered service in June 1928. The accommodation below decks and towards the bows had portholes just above the waterline which can be seen in the picture. In anything but calm seas these portholes were often underwater, plunging the accommodation into watery gloom.

The "Portsdown" was involved in Operation Dynamo, the Dunkirk Evacuation, in May and June 1940.

On the 20th September 1941 she was to make the trip from Portsmouth to Ryde carrying Island Residents and Service personnel, some of whom had been accommodated on board overnight. She is believed to have unfortunately struck a mine off Southsea and was sunk with great loss of life.

Car Ferry "Freshwater"

In March 1982 the Catamarans in use now were on order but had not been delivered. Of the diesel ferries the "Shanklin" had been sold leaving only two ferries in service, the "Southsea" and the "Brading". When one of these broke down there was insufficient passenger seating when the Car Ferry "Freshwater" was pressed into service. This ferry operated from Ryde Pier head and the picture shows a Southern Vectis single-decker bus in the stern when it was rather unusually pressed into service to provide additional passenger seating.



Catamarans

Two Catamarans were ordered to be named "Our Lady Patricia" and "Our Lady Pamela" after Lord Mountbatten's two daughters. "Our Lady Patricia" was transported from Tasmania to Antwerp as deck cargo on board the bulk-carrier "Corato" before making a crossing of the North Sea to the Isle of Wight. "Our Lady Pamela" had a much more dramatic trip, sailing under her own power from Hobart in Tasmania to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight. She left Hobart on the 9th June 1986 on a 13,987 mile journey and went into service on the 9th August. During the trip the windows of the vessel were boarded up and additional fuel supplies were carried in oil drums. On arrival in the Isle of Wight she was flying the Tasmanian flag.

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