

BEYOND THE GRAVES

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RYDE SOCIAL HERITAGE GROUP - CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

Back in 2002 a group of three friends came up with a crazy idea of recording the inscriptions from the memorials in Ryde Cemetery, (12 acres of one of the best collections of Regency and early Victorian architecture in Britain) and to form a local history group called Ryde Social Heritage Group.

At the four day 10th birthday celebrations at St Thomas' Heritage Centre, St Thomas' Street, Ryde in September 2012 there was a huge exhibition to showcase the group's achievements over the past decade, a 'Ryde in Miniature' exhibition as well as talks, drama and musical entertainment. This was the group's sixth year participating in the National Heritage Open Days scheme and it was by far its most successful event to date; a perfect way to celebrate the 10th Anniversary.

The exhibition included displays on: The history of Ryde Social Heritage Group; Timelines showing items of local, national and international events for the past 10 years and for every 10th year from 1912 to 2012; The Great War and World War II; The History of Ryde Pier; Ryde Schools; Ryde Heritage Audio Trail; Ryde Cemetery Heritage Trail; Memories of Ryde collected by the group from local people over the past 10 years; Local shops and business; Royals in Ryde; St Thomas Church; The Lords of the Manor of Ryde and Helping People across the World showing some of the assistance the group has given to people from across the world researching their ancestors from Ryde. Shelagh offered to display her Great Aunt's trousseau which took pride of place in the Player Family pew!



As some of the group's members also have an interest in dolls houses it was decided to have a 'Ryde in Miniature' exhibition depicting some of the businesses and buildings from Ryde's past. This part of the exhibition surpassed everyone's expectations and consisted of 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.

Just after the opening on Thursday, the group's special guest, Dr Nick Barratt, Editor in Chief of 'Your Family History' magazine arrived. As this day was also the first day of Isle of Wight Festival there had been some anxiety as to whether he would be delayed crossing the Solent. Fortunately Wightlink staff assisted and he boarded the ferry without having to wait in the long queue although he did cross on a ferry packed with young people off for a weekend of partying at Festival. Dr Barratt, travels all over the British Isles, visiting Local History Groups collating information for articles, and Family History.



Dr Barratt spent the first hour looking around the exhibition, meeting members of the group and being very complimentary about the displays and the amount of work and thought that had gone into the exhibition. He exclaimed "I am never at a loss for words, but this is amazing!" Shelagh and Janette then took him to the Heritage Centre in Ryde Cemetery to show him the group's base; where the work started and continues today. There he was introduced to the wonderful David Earle and was told how the group has devised lesson plans and assists when local schools visit the cemetery. The lesson plans mean that school children can visit the cemetery for a day and have all normal their lessons there.



At 2pm Janette introduced Dr Barratt to the waiting audience at St Thomas' and he spoke for over an hour about his background in studying history, obtaining his Phd, his work for various television programmes including 'Who Do You Think You Are' and the importance of the sort of work being done today by Ryde Social Heritage Group. The talk was very well received and Nick stayed on to answer questions from the audience. Sadly at the end of the day he had to leave to catch a ferry back to the mainland and to travel home. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed his visit.

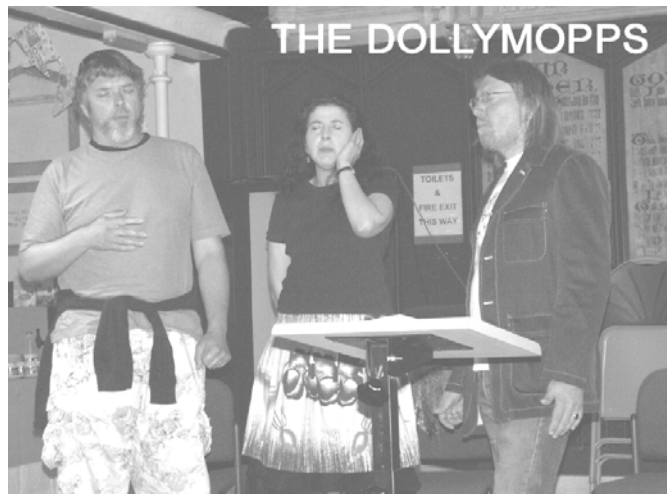
On Friday the group was kept busy with over 100 visitors during the day; lots of people shared their memories, helped name some of the people in old photographs and generally enjoyed the exhibition. In the evening the Group had a private party for invited guests to celebrate its birthday. Guests were greeted with a glass of wine and were able to have a look at the exhibition before Janette gave a short talk about the aims and work of the group and its achievements in the past decade. Richard Smout, Island Heritage Manager, gave an entertaining talk on Ryde Characters from the past. Then the Birthday Cake was brought out with its 10 candles burning. Janette invited Sally-Ann Garrett, who was one of the founder members of the group, to join her to blow out the candles and cut the cake which had been especially made for the celebrations by Barbara Hunt. The cake was cut and shared with all the visitors and teas and coffees were served. It was a fantastic evening and everyone enjoyed themselves.



Saturday brought even more people to visit the exhibition and the Ryde in Miniature display became the talk of the town, everyone was fascinated by and commented on the attention to detail in each part of the miniature display. Each model had accompanying text about the history of the building or business. Children loved the display, whilst many adults happily reminisced about shops and buildings in the past.

At 2pm was the first showing of 'Meet the Residents' a dramatic portrayal of some of the people from Ryde's past by members of RSHG. As it was such a lovely day visitors were led outside to 'Meet the Residents' under the shade of the trees in the garden of rest. Kate the narrator introduced them to the Rev Moore, Curate of St Thomas'; the beautiful young Comtessa Metaxa Anxoloto; Countess Claire and her companion Miss Elliot; the gracious Lady Lees; eccentric Harry 'Yankee' Withington and his nagging wife and finally the 'saintly' Miss Brigstocke. It was a fabulous performance enjoyed by all.

On Saturday evening there was a free event open to the public. The wonderful Shore Women Poetry group gave readings of original poems about benches both in and around the town and further afield. This was followed by a presentation from a Ryde group, the Dollymopps, which included their research into the history of William Henry Long. Long wrote A Dictionary of the Isle of Wight Dialect in 1886 and included Songs Sung by the Peasantry. The presentation was illustrated by songs from the Long Collection. The Dollymopps are Virgil and Dorana Phillpott and Dr Justin Smith. They sing in harmony from the folk tradition of Southern England. The poetry, history and singing were a great combination much appreciated by the audience.



Sunday was the last day of Heritage Open Days and of the Group's 10th anniversary celebrations. The day started out fine and sunny and many visitors came to see the exhibition. At 12:30 the Group gave another 'Meet the Residents' performance in the garden of rest which amused and entertained the visitors. Sadly there was one embarrassing faux pas to the whole proceedings of the four days when Janette mistakenly started her talk on Union Street at 2pm on Sunday rather than the advertised time of 2:30pm. She only realised the mistake about half way through the talk which she completed. After apologising and taking a short break she repeated the whole talk for a second time for benefit of those who had arrived at the correct time and had only caught the end of the first talk. After this talk the draw was held for the Raffle which included many prizes donated by local businesses.

Then, all too soon, it was 4pm and time to close Heritage Open Days for another year.

Achievements of Ryde Social Heritage Group include the award of a £22,000 Lottery grant in 2004 which enabled us to: purchase equipment for exhibitions; have a website to be built to contain all the records from the cemetery; research into the lives of the people of Ryde; produce educational materials, purchase a display case for an interpretation panel and map for Ryde Cemetery and publish a 152 page book on the history of Ryde called "Ryde's Heritage, Our Town, Your Histories". The project was successfully completed with the book launch and exhibition at Ryde High School in June 2008 attended by 100 invited guests.



From 2005 until its completion in 2010, Ryde Social Heritage Group was an integral support to the Isle of Wight Council's Ryde Cemetery Restoration project and was represented on the management committee for the project. The project was jointly funded by the Isle of Wight Council and by a Heritage Lottery Grant of about £450,000. This money allowed for all of the buildings and some of the memorials and boundary in the cemetery to be restored. RSHG provided much of the research for the new Ryde Cemetery Heritage Trail and produced several cemetery walks and information sheets on some of the people buried there. One of the main objectives of the Restoration Project was to provide a Heritage and Learning Centre in the North Chapel.

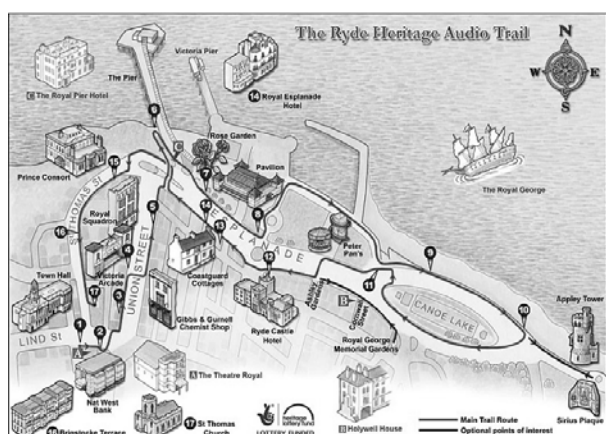
Considerable research was completed by Ryde Social Heritage Group volunteers and the volume of maps, information on the history of Ryde, its inhabitants and events, is now available for people to research at the Heritage Learning Centre at Ryde Cemetery. The Centre is opened and manned by RSHG volunteers on Monday to Saturday mornings between 10am and 11:30am, during summer Saturdays when volunteers are available and for Open Day events and exhibitions throughout the year; admission is free. The Centre has a computer suite where Ryde Social Heritage Group's databases for graves of all Ryde Cemeteries are available. Access to the Centre can be arranged at other times by contacting our website.

The group has also hosted several Open Days, exhibitions and events in Ryde Cemetery. For example: The Big Draw, Christmas, Remembrance Day, Royal Weddings, Seaside, Jubilee and Royal Ryde. We have organised butterfly, bird, fungi and tree surveys. We conduct a wide range of cemetery walks on the history and people of Ryde.



In recent years, numerous school groups have visited Ryde Cemetery to study English, Art, Mathematics, History, Geography and Natural History. The children enjoy working within a safe and green environment, drawing and computer work in the

Learning Centre, having picnic lunches in the grounds and meeting the wild life, (including slow worms). Ryde Social Heritage Group has produced a host of activities for school children to participate in, also available to download from the Education page of our website, and volunteers from the Group assist with arrangements and provision of resources.



As well as the work involved in Ryde Cemetery the Group researched and produced a Ryde Heritage Audio Trail which was launched in May 2010. The Audio Trail was produced as part of the Living Links Project which covered Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and encouraged groups to tell the stories of their area using information found in local archives. RSHG volunteers spent two years working on the project – carrying out research and working out the route of the trail which covers Lind Street, St Thomas' Square, Union Street, The Esplanade and St Thomas' Street. Along the route are a number of stopping points where audio files can be listened to (or text files read) that tell some of the history of that part of the town. The audio files were professionally produced by a company called ATS Heritage and sound fantastic!

In the past 10 years Ryde Social Heritage Group has built up an excellent reputation for producing quality exhibitions and material relating to the history of Ryde. In May 2009 the group organised and hosted Ryde History Week in St Thomas' Heritage Centre. Sixteen other local groups participated in the event and there were over 1000 visitors during the course of the week. We are invited to give talks at many venues. Several exhibitions are displayed in Ryde Library throughout the year and these are popular with visitors as well as locals. Recent exhibitions include, Famous Homes and People of Ryde, Shops and Businesses, Ryde Pubs, Schools, Sport and Ryde Worldwide.

When the Group was formed training in recording people's memories was given and for 10 years local residents have been encouraged to share their memories of Ryde. The Group now has an extensive archive of assorted memories of the town in both audio and written format. Members participate in all aspects of the Group's work from transcribing headstones, carrying out research, typing up material, producing articles, publications and exhibition materials, and supporting the Group by attending meetings. Ryde Social Heritage Group's website, www.rshg.org.uk, contains maps, records, photographs and much more. It (this website) is often cited as an example of 'best practice' for other local history groups wanting to set up their own websites. Through the website the group receives enquiries from all over the world and has helped many people with their family history research into their ancestors from Ryde.

The initial project of recording information from the headstones in Ryde Cemetery is ongoing and still a few years away from completion (about three-quarters of the cemetery has been transcribed in the decade by a small group of dedicated volunteers). In addition the Group is now tackling Binstead Cemetery, St Thomas' Churchyard Ryde, St John's Church burial ground Ryde, and Ashey Cemetery. The RSHG website contains over 12,000 records of individuals from Ryde.

HELPING PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD

Here are just a few of the comments, stories and memories from people Ryde Social Heritage Group has helped.



The Nag's Head

It was in back in 2005 when Stuart Grant got in touch from Malawi, wanting to know about his grandfather, George Neston Grant. Two years later, with progress in mapping and transcribing, Ryde Social Heritage Group was able to give him answers. Stuart's reply read: "I like to believe that I'm an old cynic but I downloaded the pictures of the grave and the two narratives and it brought a lump to the throat and some wateriness round the eyes."

He reminisced that his grandmum and dad used to work in the Nag's Head pub in Ryde, his nan liking a nip of whisky, "Just to steady my hand, boy." But she savoured even more, the container of cold tea she secreted beneath the bar, topping up her glass with it if she was bought a 'nip' and pocketing the cash.

In March 2009 Gina wrote: "I wish to thank Ryde Social Heritage Group for providing photographs of my great-grandfather, Colonel Malcolm Furlong and his brother Ernest O'Beirne Furlong. Without your efforts I would still be searching and to actually see the graves in photograph form has been very emotional for me. I hope to one day visit these graves and perhaps visit you with a hope of finding out a little more of both Malcolm and Ernest Furlong. Cheers from Gina Francis (nee Furlong) in Melbourne Australia."

In 2008 we were contacted by Bill McGill who said, "Thank you so much for all the information about R A Cooke. I now have a great story of this amazing family of British Army Bandmasters, all from Ryde, to pass on to my grandchildren."



Grandchildren of R A Cooke,
Ryde Canoe Lake 1920



Frank Nash

Following an enquiry from Joy Newman we researched Frank Nash who had a fried fish shop in the High Street. Many of our members remembered his shop. An interesting fact from his obituary of 1977 is that he belonged to the Ryde Coronation Lodge of the Loyal Order of Moose.

We have recently been helping Louise Matthews of Portsmouth regarding her relatives, Mabel Matthews, Charles Leal and Evelyn May Jolliffe. Mabel's husband owned the Steam Bakery at St Helen's around 1911.

B. MATTHEWS,
BAKER AND CONFECTIONER,
THE STEAM BAKERY,
ST. HELENS, I.W.

Bride, Birthday and Christening Cakes made to Order.
Muffins and Crumpets Daily. Teas and Refreshments Provided.

Earlier this year we had an enquiry from Thomas Waterworth of Cornwall which meant researching parish registers from 1765 and 1787. We found information about his family members which were spread across the whole Island. He was very grateful for all our help.

Within the last few weeks we have again had to look at very early records of marriage and baptism for Julie Doyle, from Santa Monica, California who has Griffin relatives from Ryde. She is another very appreciative enquirer.

Information supplied by Len Wise great grandson of James and Rose Mantle: He was a Mariner who arrived on the Island in 1885 to marry Rose Charlo a mariner's daughter. He was born 27 June 1864 in Derbyshire.



James Mantle



Information from Richard Walton: The photo shows Samuel Gardner along with Agnes Barkam nee Silvester, and a younger Winifred Walton. They were cousins. Samuel was born in Southampton in 1867/8 the younger son of George Gardner, a cabinet maker, and his wife Margaret.

In 1884 he joined the Kings Royal Rifle Corps and served in Burma and India where he was awarded the India General Service medal with the Lushai bar.

On the 22 April 1894 he married Amy Morris Allen in St Nicholas Church, Plumstead.

Australian Marc Dimmick is a descendant of the Dimmick family who had several Nursery and Garden businesses in nineteenth century Ryde. Marc shared with us a transcript of the autobiography handwritten by Charles Dimmick for the benefit of his descendants. Marc was pleased with the help he received from the RSHG website and Research team. In 2011 members of Ryde Social Heritage Group met Marc and his wife when they visited Ryde.



During the summer of 2011 we were contacted by Joy McPherson, also of Australia, a descendant of Arthur Knott (Stanley), who was proprietor of the Ryde Esplanade Hotel for a time. Joy found she had many relatives resident in Ryde around 1891 - 1923. We exchanged research and Joy was pleased to have made contact with us. She hopes to visit Ryde one day.

"You have no idea how much it meant to me to see my great grandfather's grave. I likely will never get to England. I wish my mother was alive to have seen this picture. Thank you so much for all your hard work. Margaret Brick."

Margaret has since sent Ryde Social Heritage Group this photograph of her great grandfather.

