

STOP 4 – MID UNION STREET

You should be standing outside Yelf's Hotel.

Look up at the facades of the buildings around you. There are many interesting features all along the street. In the 1830s, Robert Yelf and Gloster Sheridan were vying for trade in Union Street. Yelf's Hotel was built around 1801, and Sheridan's Boarding House soon after. Sheridan's is the lower building opposite Yelf's Hotel, currently Ladbrokes. In Sheridan's time, this was the gable end of the house. The building, which still exists, stretches back towards Union Road. It had extensive gardens with an open view down towards the sea. In 1832, Gloster Sheridan published a guidebook in which he states:

“The admirable situation of the house commands the most extensive and interesting views...The utmost attention is paid to the comfort of the inmates...and the house is peculiarly adapted for the comfort and accommodation of passengers waiting to embark at Spithead or the Motherbank for India, or other parts.”

Robert Yelf proved the better businessman as Gloster Sheridan went bankrupt and left the island. Robert Yelf then bought Sheridan's Hotel and turned it into an annexe of Yelf's which it remains today.



Walk on to the Royal Victoria Arcade where the pinch points mark a crossing in the road and stop there. Look up at the crest of Princess Victoria. This building was completed a year before Victoria became Queen, and this crest is quite rare. There are also two pineapples, one above each side door, which are a symbol of welcome. If you look inside the building, you will see at the rear an original stained glass window with the initials PV, for Princess Victoria.

The Royal Victoria Arcade, founded by a local surgeon, William Houghton Banks, was opened with great ceremony on July 1st 1836. Fanny Oglander, writing to her brother the previous month, says: *“Several lodges of Freemasons are to attend and three Bands of music are engaged...”* The Lodges came from as far afield as Paris and Scotland! The Freemasons' report relates:

“The procession assembled at the Pier Hotel, whence they proceeded, headed by a band of martial music, to the Arcade; they then passed through the Avenue and round the Rotunda, passing through a double column of ladies.”

That evening, about eighty dined at the Pier Hotel (at the land end of the pier, but sadly demolished in 1931) where a toast was raised to:

“Mrs Banks and the ladies of the Isle of Wight”. Then followed a rousing chorus of ‘Here’s a Health to all Good Lasses’.

Trades carried on in the arcade include lapidary, turtle soup maker, wax flower modeller, parasol and umbrella maker, importer of Italian and marble sculpture, tobacconist, milliner, photographer, draper, dressmaker, bookseller and stationer....

Cross the road at the dropped kerbs. Walk on for about thirty metres and stop to look back at Regina House, No. 60 Union Street, built in 1865, with the statues on the roof and sunflowers above the door and windows. You’ll learn more about this building at Stop 5.



A little further down the street is Number 15, the colonnaded Orrery and this is the next stop.

Image of Royal Victoria Arcade courtesy Roy Brinton, Image of Regina House by Janette Gregson