

BEYOND THE GRAVES

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MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS

Arthur Williams

In the Summer of 1955 after returning from a school trip to Germany I fell into conversation with Sonner Cotton who was hiring out the rowing boats at Ryde Canoe Lake. This proved to be the beginning of a part time job and a long friendship which continued, despite the disparity in ages, until his death. At this time there were four types of boat for hire and they were looked after by Joe Reeves (motor boats), Hirst Linington (paddle boats), Sonner Cotton (rowing boats) and "Uncle" Bill Drysdale who was an employee and looked after the canoes. On one side of the café was a ticket office manned by Ben Willett who seldom took off his tweed jacket except on extremely hot days and was never to be seen without his flat cap. All the other boatmen and soon myself wore white covered peaked caps. They were all great characters with tales to tell about old Ryde and their WW1 service.



Arthur Williams

I was soon joined by some of my school mates Bob Wealthy, Johnny Young and Jim Hayden who also helped Maurice Oakham with his boats at Ryde Pavilion slipway when the tide was in. In the evenings when the holiday makers were having their evening meals we all went rowing on the lake using the bigger double thwarted boats which had better oars and tended to be in better condition.

All the boats were named, my favourite being "Win". She was over 50 years old at the time, built to be sea going and was the fastest boat on the lake having very long oars with curved blades. If the tide was still in when we finished for the evening Bob and I would beg a boat from Maurice Oakham and row out round the end of the Pier.



"Uncle" Bill Drysdale
with his dog Sandy

During the winter months we took to spending our Saturday mornings and Christmas holidays at the boat store off Westhill Road where we learned all aspects of boat maintenance from Sonner and Joe and one year we built a canoe from scratch. A useful trick we were shown during the winter was that coins could be found on the beach perched on little piles of sand after there had been a strong NE wind.

Back then in Summer, Ryde was a very busy holiday destination and boating was very popular especially the first two weeks in August when often every boat was in use. Factories and indeed whole towns closed down and you knew that one week every visitor seemed to be from Wales while another they were from Yorkshire or Lancashire.

In 1958 I ended up on larger stretches of water when I joined BP as a navigating apprentice but still helped out with the boats when on leave.



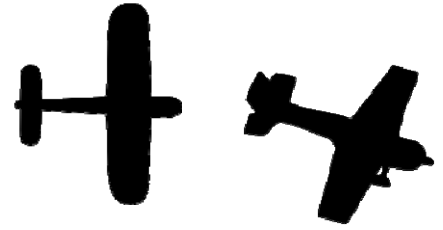
Joe Reeves with the motor boats

WHAT THE KIDS DID

During the war we spent many hours looking for and collecting shrapnel. We also collected scrap paper for the war effort but, before handing it in, I would take all the stamps off the salvage paper; this formed the basis for my own stamp collection!

I remember one day a single German plane flew low over Marlborough Road; so low the pilot could clearly be seen in the cockpit. I waved to the pilot and he waved back.

Derek Strong



Children in Wartime
Free image from edu website

One of our main activities as children during the war was finding and collecting shrapnel. Shrapnel was fragments of bombs, shells, bullets etc. We had quite a good selection and to find a nose cone of a shell was really something. Some boys had bits of aeroplanes, and one particular boy, Norman "Gandy" Lacey, had a large tail piece. We could look at it but not touch!

Jack Southcott

On our way to school after a night raid, it was fun to find shrapnel – bits of exploded shells or the casing of incendiary bombs and their tail fins. I still have some jagged lumps of shrapnel enclosed in an old leather tobacco pouch, with a yellowing piece of paper on which my mother had written "The Blitz 1940, Shrapnel picked up after Air Raids".

Derek Warman

Another event, probably after the war started, was my toy bomb, bought from Woolworths. It comprised two halves secured with a string noose. Between the two halves one could put a cap. It was not long before I put in two caps, then three, however with four the caps did not go bang. Too much cushioning, probably, so the next idea was to go upstairs and drop it out of the lavatory window, this produced a satisfactory bang. Then caps and pocket money ran out!

Raymond Southwell

One of my earliest memories is when Hazlewood was bombed and I must have been 3 or 4. I was walking along Cross Street with an "auntie" and we were outside Hansford's when the windows blew out. I was hit by flying glass on my head, face and chest, (I still have little scars today.) I was taken to "Gurd's" in Melville Street which was like a working man's cafe and sat up on the counter. I remember my Mum came running in crying (someone had obviously been sent to fetch her from our home in Nelson Street). She had her apron on and her hair in rollers. They took me to the Tower in George Street which must have been part of the hospital then. My most vivid memory from this incident is the blue corduroy hat I was wearing because I was told it had saved my head from a bad injury.

Poppy Higgin

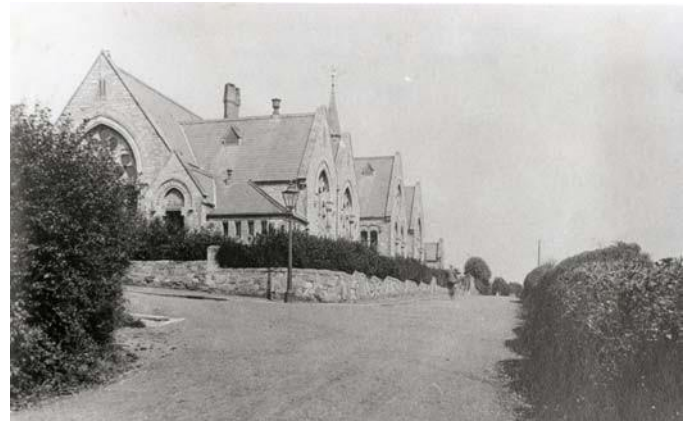
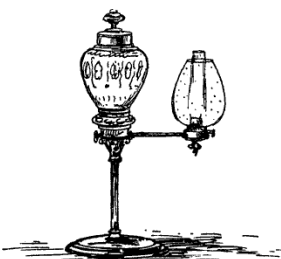
The headmistress (of *Bettesworth Road School*) lived in Church Street, about four houses down from Jennings, the grocery and bakery store, I think her name was Miss Sprack and she wore red flannel 'knickers'!

Janice Page

*How did she know that? Maybe this snippet from **Derek Warman** provides the answer!*

The school building was lit by gaslight – electricity had not yet reached Ryde County Junior School! In the winter, each morning, one of the teachers would climb onto a chair or desk and, with a lighted match, turn on the gas taps and light the mantles.

No trousers for the ladies in those days, and you would look. Wouldn't you?



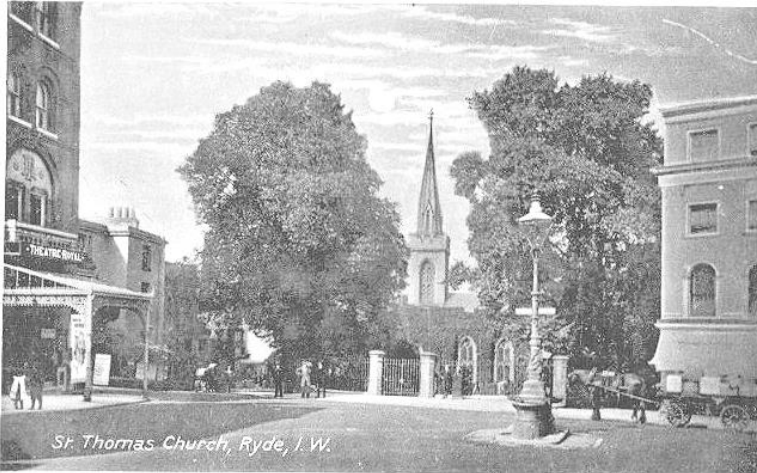
Bettesworth Road School circa 1920

CAN YOU SING MY GAL?

Sheila Strickland nee Kenward and her cousin Hazel nee Bartlett

Sheila lived in Ryde and sang in the St Thomas' Church choir as a young girl and through into her teens. She recalls one Sunday her Mum was ill and she went to the church to say Mum would not be able to come to sing in the choir that day. Mr Wheeler, the fresh fish man, asked Sheila "Can you sing my gal?" and that's how she joined the choir.

Hazel, Sheila's cousin from London, came to stay and was asked to ring the church bell, then come in and pump the organ, watching the little weight mechanism go up and down to tell when to pump the bellows more. Being (sometimes) a naughty 12 year old, Hazel would pump the bellows faster so the choir had to speed up their singing to keep in time or accidentally forget to start the bellows again so the organ would make a droning sound!



Mr Launder was the organist. Half way through the service he would hand round "Nippets", little sugar sweets, to the choir members. When Sheila's Grandma heard about it she was horrified!

"Mrs Brigstocke was a lovely lady who bought me a hat for the celebration of the Festival of Britain", (*as Sheila didn't have a 'good enough' hat!*). It came from the hat shop in Cross Street called "Elizabeths".



Interior looking east before the closure of 1959
Image from the book *St Thomas' Church*
by Jack Wheeler 1975

In June 2011 Sheila visited St Thomas' Heritage Centre and recalled her memories of days singing in the choir. Cousin Hazel, who hadn't seen inside St Thomas' since her youth, recently visited the Island and RSHG arranged for them both to visit the church. Hazel added her own story to our archives.

The photograph shows them reminiscing and sharing memories on 16 September 2011.



Hazel, left, and Sheila, right at St Thomas'

AFTER THE FOWLERS FIRE



Entries in the Fire Brigade Report Saturday 12 January 1991

22.19 Call to Fowlers, Union Street, Ryde

22.51 Three floors used as a department store well alight, front and rear, all floors.

23.35 Range of 2, 3 and 4 storey buildings, approximately 40 x 30m severely damaged by fire. Fire surrounded.

23.36 All persons accounted for.

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The article about Fowlers after the fire
has been withdrawn

Given time we may fill this space with another article

THE LITTLE THINGS WE REMEMBER



Fishing at Appley Beach

After digging about 140 worms, we would then walk out to the sands head, as far out as you could go at low tide. Father would choose a spot to lay out the trot, taking into consideration things like a clean, sandy and firm sea bottom, tide run direction and the amount of seaweed lying about. Seaweed encouraged small crabs and periwinkles which would either eat the bait or cover it so that the fish could not see it.

Two of us would proceed to lay out the trot and anchor it down whilst the other started to bait up the hooks. This done we would take a bearing as to its position and proceed inshore where we would have to dig another 140 worms ready for the next tide!

Jack Southcott

Games we played

In the Autumn of course there was the game of "Conkers" because the Horse Chestnuts – the conkers – were ripe on the trees. Other crazes were making bows and arrows, making and flying kites, playing marbles, whip and tops, skating on the ice in winter, football, cricket and making go-carts with discarded pram wheels. We also made up a "Boneshaker" bike from all sorts of parts taken from the local tip and rode it to Angels Copse.

Jack Southcott

Schooldays

My name is really Nora but when I was born my Mum and Dad hadn't decided on a name so the nurses nicknamed me Poppy as it was Poppy Day and it stuck. Of course at school I had to be called by my proper name and if I meet someone from all those years ago they will still call me Nora.

I went to Gassiot Girls School and when I was 10, I got "The Hon. Mrs Wilson-Heathcote's Prize for Conduct and Good Manners." It was a copy of Kingsley's "The Water Babies," and I still have it. I was also very proud to play Topsy from "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in a school performance when I was 9 or 10. I remember I wore a little red and white dress, had my face blackened and my hair was all tied up in rags. The Isle of Wight Times wrote "it was an excellent performance by Nora Lakeman as Topsy, Joy Storey as Miss Ophelia and June Williams as Little Eva," (there were only the three of us in!)

Poppy Higgin



An illustration of Topsy (1888)

Doctor's Antics

When Dr Sim called to see my grandmother, rather than walk round to the main door at the side of the house, he would just climb through a large window, into what we called the little room, which looked out onto the front garden! Dr Thomas Sim had a surgery in John Street, Ryde and was a much liked and respected gentleman.

Mrs Day, (Stephen's mother)

(Stephen Day's great grandmother lived until just a few weeks before her 97th birthday.)

She was only the grave digger's daughter ...

...but she had some interesting tales to tell.



One chilly afternoon an elderly lady drove her mobility scooter inside the North Chapel at Ryde Cemetery and while Ann looked up information about her family I made her a cup of tea and she chatted happily about her childhood. She had lived with her Mum, Dad and several brothers and sisters in Albert Street. Her father worked on the roads but was also the relief grave digger. She and some of the other children used to go with Dad when he had a grave to dig, watch him, and play around in the cemetery. When the funeral procession started to arrive they all had to hide in the hedge with the shovel and Dad would have a bottle of cold tea. Often there were very posh people attending. When the mourners had all gone, out came Dad and the children and they watched him fill in the hole and played a bit more. Dad had served in the First World War but would never speak of it. Although the lady we spoke to was just too young to serve in the Second World War, all her older siblings did.

Kate MacDonell

THE JOY OF BEER! *Anthony Roe*



The Flat Iron, The Strand

My father was a brewer by trade and my family moved to the Isle of Wight where he took up a position at the Mew Langton Brewery in Newport. In July 1971 my father and mother, Gerry and Pauline Roe, took over the running of the Lake Superior in Marlborough Road until January 1975.

I was raised in Arthur Street and remember the King Arthur as a child until we moved to the Lake Superior.

After my parents divorced I remained with my mother and we stayed with friends who ran The Wellington on Ryde Esplanade and the Flat Iron on the corner of East Street and The Strand.

Now that I have two teenage daughters, I walk around Ryde with them and amaze them with stories about pubs I used to visit with my parents and when I discovered the Joy of Beer!



Lake Superior, Marlborough Road



The Wellington, Ryde Esplanade



King Arthur, Arthur Street

Tony Gale's new book – out now

Published in September 2011, the book has 32 pages and lists all of the pubs past and present in the town of Ryde with a little history on each of them, with some illustrations.

A bargain at £3, it will sell out fast! To buy your copy please contact Tony or any RSHG committee member.

