

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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John Harrington's "ARAB" Bicycle

In the 1870s John Harrington was building The 'Arab' bicycle at his bicycle works in Union Road, Ryde. The 'Arab' was a High Wheel Bicycle. This type of bicycle, also sometimes referred to as The Penny Farthing consisted of a small rear wheel and a large front wheel which pivoted on a simple tubular frame, both wheels had tyres of rubber.

The advantage of the large front wheel was the distance that could be achieved with a single rotation of the fixed pedals. The High Wheel Bicycle proved very popular among young men of wealth and reached the peak of its popularity during the decade of the 1880s.



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The Most Perfect and Elegant Machine yet constructed.

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SPECIAL FEATURES
Patent Hollow Steel Fork.
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An absolutely safe tire,
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In three forms, to suit all Machines
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"ARAB" BICYCLE WORKS
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WORDING FROM AN ADVERT IN STURMEY'S
INDISPENSIBLE BICYCLISTS HANDBOOK
OF 1879

Because the rider sat high above the centre of gravity, if the front wheel should be stopped suddenly by hitting a stone, bump in the road or other obstruction, the entire machine turned forward on the front axle, and the rider, with his legs trapped under the handlebars, was dropped forward on to his head!

Over the years John Harrington put his name to several dozens of patents mostly to do with bicycle construction. He eventually moved his business from Ryde to Coventry although some castors and castor bowls continued to be made in Ryde by 'Harrington Patents Limited' in a workshop situated between the old St James' Place and Garfield Road. A liquidation sale of stock and machinery on Friday 13th July 1900 ended the Harrington connection with Ryde completely.

Various sources were used to compile this article: an article by Patrick Nott on the Isle of Wight Industrial Archaeology Society website <http://www.iwias.org.uk/>, Myths & Milestones in Bicycle Evolution by William Hudson <http://www.jimlangley.net/ride/bicyclehistorywh.html> and the Pedalling History Bicycle Museum website <http://www.pedalinghistory.com/PHhistory.html>



The Stage Coach in Ryde

Imagine walking down a quiet street in Ryde on a sunny day, and seeing through the open doorway in the gloom of an old garage, the red and black paintwork and green upholstery of the coach of Mr Vanner's ancestors, who had carried out the business of coaching for more than one hundred years. Joy Mason wrote the story of this encounter in a magazine in the seventies; the page was found amongst some old papers, and passed on to RSHG. Unfortunately, the coach has gone and the garage has been pulled down, but the story lives on. For the benefit of readers of this newsletter, the rest of her story has been re-written below.

The coach was the "Civility" built by R B Chiverton of Newport, to the order of Abraham Vanner. It made two trips daily from Ryde to Newport and back until 1890, when the coming of the railways lessened the value of the coach. "Civility" stood at the Lion Hotel on the corner of Garfield Road, and collected her passengers. When fully loaded, about 16 people would have climbed aboard. (Although the photograph is not the Civility, you can see what a loaded coach might have looked like). You can imagine the pleasure of bowling along the quiet country lanes with just the jingle of the harness and crack of the whip, the fragrance of dog roses and honeysuckle from the hedges untainted by petrol fumes.



A Broderick postcard of a coach outside Haylands Chapel about 1906

The first stop from Ryde was the toll gate over the brook which formed the boundary between the Brigstock and Fleming estates, just before reaching Binstead. Here passengers would be collected, and next some would be dropped off at the Sloop Inn at Wootton. This hostelry was then tenanted by the Vanner family, and if the load was light, the two lead horses were uncoupled and stabled until the return journey.

One dark night, the coach from Newport rolled in to the Sloop as usual, the two horses led out and the ostler handed the reins to the driver. Off they went with a clatter of hooves but it was not until they reached New Shute Copse, where you now turn down to Fishbourne, that the driver noticed that the lead bars were swinging – the ostler had forgotten to hatch on the traces. The horses knew what was expected of them, and it was just as well, for it was one of those days when everyone had been drinking heavily.

Old Uncle Vanner eventually passed the Sloop Inn over to his daughter who married Fred Purkis. They had two sons, Albert and Fred, and these two men also drove the "Civility" on her daily trips keeping up the tradition of the family.

Mr Vanner's Grandfather was apparently quite a character. One day he was driving along his usual route to Newport, when Queen Victoria's outriders signalled to him to pull to one side as her Majesty was to pass that way. But Mr Vanner refused to stop; he whipped his horses and drove on. Later, he was ordered to Osborne House to account for his behaviour, but as he was a man who never worried about anything, and took things in his stride, he was not unduly impressed. When asked why he had ignored the command, he simply answered in his quiet Island manner but with tongue in cheek, "Well my horses were so fresh I could do nothing with them".

The Stage Coach in Ryde Cont.

He then tendered his apologies which were somewhat reservedly accepted.

As the railways became more efficient and the roads improved, the tourist trade increased, and the Vanner business with it. They ran excursions by horse drawn charabancs, which seated 20 people along the sea route to Ventnor, and to Carisbrooke Castle and the watercress beds which were then quite famous. During the summer season, the long journey to Alum Bay must have been a full day trip, stopping at the Eight Bells in Carisbrooke there and back to change horses and for refreshment.

So the years rolled by until transition from horse to motor cars effectively put an end to the horse drawn coach business. Some were laid up at Stonepitts Farm, and some at a coach house at Union Lane, but the day arrived when both horse and coaches were sold off. Like so many treasures of those days, they went for a mere song, the prices paid for them at the sale being from five to ten shillings each, one purchaser being so disinterested, he left his purchase in a nearby field to rot away.

It was just luck the "Civility" was spared this fate. It was stored in the Union Lane Coach House until 1929, when in conjunction with the excitement of the Schneider Trophy air race, the County Press needed a gimmick for advertising. Mr Vanner was asked if he still had an old coach. "Yes, and harness too", he replied, "but no horses."

That difficulty was overcome by Mr William Moul, who at the time provided horses for the Territorial Army's gun carriages. Four were chosen, the old harness cleaned and polished, and "Civility" came out of her long retirement to travel once more her familiar routes with young Les Moul (of Rosemary Stables in Ryde) taking the reins at only 10 years of age. How different from "Civility's" early travels, for now there were cars of all kinds speeding by, and even the odd aeroplane overhead, contrasting to the passengers who for this special occasion were dressed in costumes of the period.

Eventually, Mr Vanner retired, and the old coach stood for many years in the back of the garage, her interior used to store pots of paint. Is she still at home on the Island? We would like to hear from anyone who knows her current resting place. Who knows what use she may be put to next.

Source: Joy Mason. Written up by Sally-Ann Garrett.

Further research by Sally-Ann Garrett:

Census research found two men called Abraham Vanner - one was born between 1836 and 1839, and another born between 1806 and 1810. On the 1841 census, Abraham the older is listed as a coachman in Hill Street, Ryde, and Abraham the younger, aged 6, is living with his father Henry, a coachman, in Dover Street. On the 1851 census, Abraham Vanner, the younger, was a stable helper to William Thomas a coachman in Marylebone, London, and Abraham the older was an Agricultural Labourer in Coppid Hall.

A Vanner family, found on the 1861 census lived at 30 Newport Road, and Abraham aged 26 was said to be a Mariner. On the 1871 census, Abraham Vanner the older, aged 65, was an Inn Keeper at Wootton and the younger, aged 30 was a servant at 8 Newport Street, Ryde. In 1881, Abraham the younger was a lodger at 19 Newport Street, and listed as a sailor. Further research found that Abraham the older died in 1874, and Abraham the younger in 1881.



Ryde Carriers

Carriers plied their trade around the Island for many years. They transported, delivered, collected, bought and sold, and would take passengers to and from wherever they wanted to go. A customer would indicate that they needed a carrier's service by post (a more regular and reliable service in those days!), by word of mouth or by "The Flag" which was the more usual method. Because a carrier had a regular route, and passed at regular times, a flag made of a stick and a rag, or piece of cloth would be attached to the front gate, stuck in the hedge or left at the end of the lane leading to the customer's house. If two carriers passed along the same route, each would have his own specific coloured flag. In the early days horses pulled the vans. The journey could be very uncomfortable with passengers often having to help push the van up a hill come rain or shine. However, for many it was the only way to travel. With the coming of motor transport the journey might have become more comfortable, but there were still times when a little help was needed on steep roads.

The carrier trade around Ryde started much later than that to and from Newport, as it was far less important. In the 1850s Ryde as a town was already established and thriving with its own trade and shops. People did not need to travel to Newport to market their goods or obtain supplies like those in more rural communities, while merchandise from the growing port of Ryde was generally carried by larger hauliers such as Curtiss and Pickfords and the new Ryde to Newport railway.

Carriers in the Ryde area started by operating more local services from the villages of Bembridge, St. Helens, Seaview and Nettlestone; around 1850 there were only a couple of services operating between Newport and Ryde. George Beazley was one; he operated a route from the Rose and Crown, St. Thomas's Square, Newport, to Ryde. A Mr Vanner also operated along this route using the Rose and Crown. Few other carriers are recorded following this route until the turn of the century when a Mr Tutton left daily from 160 High Street, Ryde, to the Rose and Crown.

Some of the carriers recorded operating on the east of the Island through Ryde and the local villages include:

1871 - William Jacob from Bembridge to Ryde on Tuesdays and Fridays.

1892 - Robert Bloomfield covered this route daily, except Wednesdays which was early closing day in Ryde.

1879 - Mr Spragge operated from Seaview to Ryde daily, and in 1892 Frank Edmunds also covered this route.

1892 - Leonard Cook travelled from Ryde to Seaview and Springvale.

1890 to 1914 Edward, and then Edmond Dallimore, operated from Ryde to St. Helens and Nettlestone using the Black Horse and the Castle Hotel in Ryde.

1890 to 1920 - Henry Adams, later trading as the Adams Brothers, Grocers, of 3 High Street, Ryde, combined his grocery deliveries with general carrier work in the Ryde, Brading, Sandown and Shanklin areas leaving at 10am on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

1900 to 1920 - Watson Brothers advertised as "agents for parcels" and provided a daily service between Ryde, Nettlestone and Seaview. Before World War One, George Young also covered this route.

The route between Seaview, St. Helens and Ryde was covered before World War One by Leonard Dyer using the Castle Hotel as his base. William Harvey also ran a daily service. Henry Burden started before the war and continued afterwards trading as Burden and Coombes. Arthur Orchard operated between Ryde, Brading and Bembridge from the mid 1920's but sold out to Gerald Price in 1930.

The trade between Ryde and Newport started to increase after the First World War, and some returning soldiers invested their gratuities in the new motor transport which was becoming more reliable and efficient. Derek Sprake in "Put out the Flag" acknowledges the role Ford vans played in the Carrier's trade; the Model T becoming the standard one-ton vehicle used by many carriers.

Walter Dimond was operating the Ryde to Newport route about 1924 and the Millmore family also ran a regular service in the 1920s. Martin Millmore ran his business from the corner of West Street and Green Street. However, in the 1920s he sold his business to Christopher Matthews, an ex-Regimental Sergeant Major in the Army, who built up a successful trade between the wars. He, like other Ryde Carriers often had to park to the side of the Church in St Thomas's Square as it was full of rival carriers.

Chris died in 1946, and his son Leonard Matthews, who had been a driver in the Far East during World War Two, took over the business trading as C G Matthews & Son. He drove daily to Newport; one of his regular calls being Quarr Abbey where he delivered the fish he had collected from the railway station. An important part of his business was delivering building supplies for Duke Brothers Builders Merchants who did not have their own transport.

Ryde Carriers cont.

Due to his deteriorating health, Leonard began to concentrate on more local furniture deliveries, much of which was for Dibbens of Ryde. His light brown van becoming a familiar sight in the town. In 1963 he sold the business to Dibbens, who at that time were buying out several of the Island carriers, chiefly to acquire the coveted 'A' licences which had been introduced by the Road Traffic Act of 1933.

The carrier trade started to decline during the 1930s when legislation was introduced to protect and control the transport service. Competition from regular bus services helped end the passenger service the Carrier had provided for many years. Later legislation prevented unregistered operators from carrying people, finally making the carrier service unviable. After the Second World War transport and railway services were nationalised delivering the final blow to the carrier's trade, which reached its unavoidable end in the 1960s.

Sources: "Put out the Flag", Derek Sprake, 1993.

The Paul Family Owners of Ryde's first motor coach company

The Isle of Wight County Press dated 1st February 1930 reported the death of Mr Harry Paul, aged 78, who for many years had been a well-known businessman in Ryde. Mr Paul had started in business on his own as a haulage contractor and Post Master. Before the introduction of the steam roller, he had supplied a team of horses for pulling the old-fashioned road roller in the town, while for tourists he provided wagonettes and brakes for touring the Island.

His son, also Harry, joined him in the business. While serving in France during the First World War he became interested in the new motor transport when he was posted to one of the newly formed Tank Corps, delivering ammunition to the front line. Being shrewd businessmen, they saw the wisdom of adapting to the new mechanical transport, and quickly introduced charabancs and motor vans into their own business.

When Harry senior died in 1930, his son continued to run the business, and encouraged by his wife, established himself as the owner of Ryde's first motor coach firm running many excursions around the Island. Harry junior died in 1968, aged 80, leaving two daughters and two sons. They are both buried in Ryde Cemetery.



Harry Paul, died 27th January 1930.



Harry Paul, junior, died 10th August 1968.

Edward T Ward – Cycle Maker

Mr Edward Tom Ward first set up his bicycle making business in Ryde around 1878 when he was in his mid 20s. He and his wife Eleanor lived in Monkton Street and eventually they had 6 children; 4 boys and 2 girls. By 1901 Edward was employing two of his sons, Edmund and Edgar, in his manufacturing business.



Mr Ward was a pioneer of cycling on the Island. He was one of the first members of the Vectis Cycling Club and an original member of the Cyclists Corps which was attached to Princess Beatrice's Isle of Wight Rifles before the First World War.

By 1910 the business, Edmund Ward & Co., had expanded to include Cycle makers and agents, motor engineers and a domestic machinery depot, and it developed into a flourishing motor and charabanc trade.

As a young man Edward Ward was a chorister at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Nelson Street and later at Garfield Road Church. In later life his main recreation was a small sailing boat and he took part in races of the old Amateur Sailing Club, whose headquarters were on the pier. He was also one of the oldest members of the Conservative Club. He was a kind and genial man with many friends in and around Ryde.

He died at the age of 86 years, on 12th December 1938, at 43 Melville Street, Ryde, after a long illness. His wife Eleanor predeceased him by 22 years. Two of his sons also predeceased him: Corporal Edgar Ward of the Machine Gun Corps died at Passendale on 21st September 1917 aged 33 years; he is buried in the New Irish Farm Cemetery in Belgium and Edmund Ward died in Ryde in 1924 aged 45 years after a long illness.

Based on research by Ann and Les Barrett and written up by Janette Gregson.

Frederick William Chessell - Death of a Veteran Taxi Driver

Mr Frederick William Chessell, of 10 Cross Street, Eastfield, Ryde, died on 5th September 1963 aged 87 years. Just 16 days previously he and his wife had celebrated the 65th anniversary of their marriage at St John's Church, Ryde. Mr Chessell was born at St. Helens and spent his whole life in the district.

He drove some of the Island's first motor taxis and was employed by one taxi firm for more than 40 years. During the Second World War he drove for the War Department at Puckpool Park. He worked at Messrs. Parkes' cycle business in John Street until a year before his death.

Mrs Chessell lived for another 8 years and died in 1971 aged 95.

They are buried together in Ryde Cemetery. Plot: OPC 1 448 Map Ref: RSHG 001 A2/B2

Dates for your Diary

Members Meeting

The Ryde Social Heritage Group AGM and next members' meeting will be held on Saturday 13th October 2007 at 10:30am at the George Street Centre, Ryde.

Derek Warman will give a talk on Michael Maybrick and other musicians of Ryde.

October Newsletter

The next newsletter will be published on 13th October 2007. Please send any items for inclusion to the Editor by 1st September 2007.

