



# BEYOND THE GRAVES

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## RYDE SOCIAL HERITAGE GROUP

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### About us

Membership is free 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.

### Website

[www.rshg.org.uk](http://www.rshg.org.uk)

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## STORIES FROM THE PAST

### James Leonard Fry 1854 - 1897

Tragic death at Queen Victoria's Jubilee Parade preparations

James Leonard Fry joined the Royal Navy as a boy cadet at the age of 18. He served for 20 years and rose to the position of Captain of the Turret, instructing other ratings in the art of gunnery. Having left the Navy, James Leonard worked as a porter at Jupes the ironmongers shop in Union Street, Ryde run by Mr Alfred E. Jupe. To celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee visit in 1897, James and another man called Gimblett were asked to put up flags and bunting outside the shop. The balcony they were standing on collapsed and they both fell to the ground. The unfortunate James was killed but the other fellow survived. The bunting already put up was removed as a mark of respect for James. He was only 42 years old.

When Queen Victoria's carriage slowly passed down the street during the Jubilee parade, she asked why the solitary shop was not decorated. On discovering the tragic events, she gave £10 to the family of James. A letter was sent to the Mayor of Ryde from Osborne on 30 July 1897 –

"Dear Mr Mayor, the queen was greatly concerned to hear of the sad accident that occurred yesterday at Ryde during the preparation of the decorations by which a man named James Fry unfortunately lost his life and another man injured. Her Majesty asks you to convey her sincere sympathy to Fry's widow and family in their sudden bereavement and trouble and further commands me to ask you to be good enough to hand Mrs Fry the enclosed £10 as it may possibly be of some help to her at this time.

I also enclose £5 which the Queen thinks may be of assistance to the other poor fellow who was injured"

The letter and £10 were personally delivered to Emma Caroline Fry, James's widow, at her home in Arthur Street.

A report of the funeral of James Leonard was printed in the County Press.

"The funeral of the poor man who was killed took place at the Cemetery on Saturday. Deceased being a naval pensioner the bier was drawn by four coast-guardsmen, and the Union Jack was used as a pall. The Rev W. R. A. Budd, Bible Christian minister of East Cowes, officiated. Mr and Mrs Jupe were amongst those present, who included representatives of the Bible Christians, Congregationalists and Railway Mission. The Rev W. R. A. Budd gave a short address on the uncertainty of life, and contended that deceased had met his death in the discharge of duty. A floral tribute was sent by the mayor and inhabitants with deep regret and sympathy.

We are glad to hear that the young man Gimblett is progressing satisfactorily. He was sufficiently well on Monday to be removed to his home."



James Leonard Fry

James Leonard Fry is buried in an unmarked grave in Ryde Cemetery. Thanks to Pat Southcott, great granddaughter of James Leonard Fry, for the information and photographs.



James, seated centre, in uniform with fellow sailors in Corfu

**MORE STORIES FROM THE PAST**

**Richard Francis Stickland 1903 - 1940**  
**Killed in Bombing Raid**



RAF Airframe fitter, Richard Stickland, died when a German bomber crew, looking for the railway track near Queensferry, Chester instead dropped their bomb on the part of the community sheltering women and children evacuated from the city.

Mr Stickland and his family had been at their nearby home sheltering in the lounge after hearing the air raid siren on 30 August 1940. Although some distance from where the bomb hit, they were still close enough for shrapnel to tear through their house.

Richard was killed outright and his 8 year old son, Ray Stickland, lost his right leg in the blast.

Ironically, Richard had been given an extra day home leave from RAF Sealand on the fateful day. Ray, who now lives in Ryde, was initially taken to the first aid tent where he could hear them saying his leg was just literally hanging on by the skin and the other leg was badly damaged too.

His mother was uninjured apart from the emotional scars she was to bear for the rest of her life. Ray was transferred to hospital and was unable to attend his fathers funeral but part of him was there – his right leg. It is buried in the grave with Richard Stickland in Ryde Cemetery.

Richard Francis Stickland was born in Ryde in 1903, son of Francis Henry and Bessie nee Feaver.

**Edwin Philip Topp 1889 - 1952**  
**Former Bowls Champion**

Former England Bowls Champion, Edwin Philip Topp, died age 62 at a local nursing home on 12th March 1952. He lived on the island all his life and had a business in Ryde as a confectioner and newsagent. He was the organist at the Primitive Methodist Church, High Street and when the Methodists united, at Garfield Road Church until ill health caused his retirement.

The Isle of Wight County Press reported his sporting achievements.

"In the sphere of bowls he won an unrivalled reputation for an Island player. In a memorable final he beat his opponent by 21 shots to 8. The next year he was selected for the England trials match but illness robbed him of his chance of playing for his country and the probability of a successful international career, as in the opinion of many experienced judges he was one of the most brilliant bowlers the game has known. The truer the green the more clearly was his skill demonstrated. He first represented the Island in 1923, and he continued as a county player until 1950."

Mr Topp became the only Island player ever to have won the English Bowling Association singles title in 1931. Apart from the playing skill which gained him many championship awards, he served the local club as Hon. Secretary. A few years before the war he was responsible for starting the indoor bowling rink at Edward Street, Ryde where novices were introduced to the game during the winter. Mr Topp was also an enthusiastic member of Ryde Harriers.

He is buried in Ryde Cemetery with his only son, Norman Edwin who was killed during WW2 aged 18, and his wife Evelyn May.





NEWS FROM RYDE SOCIAL HERITAGE GROUP

**RSHG Website – Extremely popular**

The new website [www.rshg.org.uk](http://www.rshg.org.uk) launched in March is proving a great success with over 220,000 hits in April and May alone.

Figures for the two months show 227,000 page and file hits were made by 8200 users accessing the website. Visitors to the website, with its large and ever growing database of historical records and stories, are from all parts of the world including Asia, North and South America, the Middle East, Australasia, Japan and countries across Europe.

Here are a few of the quotes from the guestbook:-

"It is superb and so interesting. I liked the photo too of Ryde as I have never been there. Keep up the good work."

"It is excellent. Lots of information very clearly set out and easy to access."

"Congratulations on a wonderful site. I haven't found any of my lot yet, but maybe in the future. Well done, easy to use, clear and valuable info."

Please visit the site regularly for the latest news and stories from Ryde Social Heritage Group.

**Local History Week – A Great Success**

Over 400 people visited our exhibition in Union Street (the old Post Office) during local history week in May. On display were maps of Ryde Cemetery showing the on-going mapping and transcription work, photographs, stories showing the research carried out so far and the study of flora and fauna that live in Ryde Cemetery.

Many people shared their family stories and memories with the volunteers from the group, including our front page story from Pat.

More than fifty people took part in two evening walks in the Cemetery, each lasting for an hour and a half, to listen to the stories of the people buried in a selection of about twenty graves.

The tour took the groups from the Old Parish Cemetery in the south east corner, via the Old Cemetery, the Catholic portion, to the New Cemetery as far as Pellhurst Road, and back via other parts of the Old Cemetery.

**Family History Workshop**

As part of Adult Learners Week which coincided with the Local History Week, a "Family History for Beginners" workshop was held on 20th May from 10:30am to 12:30pm. Sally-Ann gave an informative presentation on how to start researching, the type of records available and some of the pitfalls to avoid when starting out. A demonstration and practical session on accessing records on line followed.

Everyone agreed the workshop was a useful start to what can become a full time hobby but the two hours was not long enough and some of the group asked for further workshops to be held in the future.



**Butterfly Walk**

The Cemetery is home to a variety of insects, including moths and butterflies.

A Butterfly walk was held on Saturday 1st July, when Richard Smout led a small but very enthusiastic group pointing out butterflies on the wing, their habitats and the range of plants that provide food for caterpillars, and nectar for adult butterflies.

A check list had been prepared, and eventually five species of butterflies were noted: Meadow Brown, Comma, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral and Large Skipper as well as a Yellow Shell moth, a damsel fly, many Hover flies and Bees, and an extraordinary pink grasshopper.

If there is sufficient interest, this event may be repeated again this summer. Photos from the day will be shown on the website.

Many thanks to Richard for his time and expertise.

### National Federation of Cemetery Friends

Sally-Ann and Janette were invited to attend the NFoCF AGM in London on 10th June 2006, hosted by the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery at the St Antony and St Silas Community hall in Nunhead, London.

They travelled to London the night before and stayed in a hotel in West Dulwich. On the A-Z map it looked like a short walk to Nunhead and the weather was already warm and sunny when they set off after breakfast at 8:30am.

"It soon began to get hotter and hotter. We realised, too late, the walk was going to take longer than we anticipated" said Janette.

Only one taxi passed by and didn't stop for them. It was 9.45am before the hot, tired and thirsty travellers reached the hall. After a warm welcome and cool drink, Sally-Ann and Janette set up a display about Ryde Social Heritage Group. Travelling by public transport, only a small proportion of the material we have gathered could be carried but people were soon interested and talking. There were groups of cemetery friends from all over the country attending and many had interesting displays.

The proceedings started at 10am and Ron Woolacott, chairman of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, officially welcomed everyone. At 10:30am buses took the groups to Nunhead Cemetery for a guided tour lasting about two hours.

### Here is the report from Janette and Sally-Ann

"You never know what to expect when visiting a cemetery as each one is unique. We thought Nunhead Cemetery was a delight although perhaps not everyone would agree. Over the years it has become very overgrown (at least the area that we visited is so) and has become a wildlife haven and a pleasant place for the locals to walk (with or without dogs). Tim, our cemetery guide, explained that FONC only clear graves if they are of significant people. They prefer to keep the cemetery as a nature reserve. It was wonderful to be able to stand and listen to bird song in the middle of beautiful woodland, just a few minutes walk from a busy city street.

Much research has been carried out by FONC and booklets have been produced for sale about the history of the cemetery and the lives of some of the notable people buried there. The tour took us to the catacombs which consist of three large underground rooms with shelves for the coffins. We had to use our imagination for this bit as we could only stand on top of the catacombs which were sealed some time ago after some incidents of vandalism and grave robbing.

The tour then took us up the hill and along well maintained and easy to navigate paths where some of the wealthier people are buried and therefore have some of the most impressive memorials. From the top of the hill we could just glimpse St Paul's Cathedral through a gap that had been cut in the trees. Tim told us that when the cemetery was first established there were few trees and the view of the city was uninterrupted.

Finally our tour took us to the chapel, which had been vandalised in the 1970s in an arson attack which destroyed the roof. At the chapel, which has a central octagonal room, we were able to go up a tiny spiral stone staircase to the viewing platform where we could again glimpse views of the City; the London Eye and the Post Office Tower could be seen from the top. We were also taken down to the crypt and shown where the coffins had been stored. Because of the previous vandalism, in wet weather rain pours into the crypt and it's dark and damp down there with some interesting fungi growing out of the coffins!

At the end of the cemetery tour there was an opportunity to purchase some of the publications produced by FONC (Sally-Ann can make these available for others to read) before we were bussed back to the Community Centre for lunch. FONC laid on a wonderful spread of food for us, and we were able to enjoy it sitting in the sun (or shade) in the pleasant garden of the Community Centre. This also gave us an opportunity to talk to people from other groups.

At 1:30pm the AGM started. It was very well organised and kept on schedule by the committee members, the Chairman Arthur Tait, Secretary Gwyneth Stokes and the Treasurer Ian Simpson. This small and hardworking committee give a lot of support to Friends of Cemetery groups around the country. By 4pm with the official business over, everyone started to pack up their displays and head home."

Sally-Ann and Janette travelled back with John Ash who lives on the island but is a member of a friends group from a small London cemetery. John gives a lot of support and advice to local people setting up new Friends of Cemetery groups.

Thanks to National Federation of Cemetery Friends for a well run event and to the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery for their hospitality.





## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Next Members Meeting

With the ever increasing numbers of members it has been decided to hold members meetings quarterly in January, April, July and October 2007 and to set up smaller working sub-groups that will meet regularly and allow members to participate in activities to achieve the aims of Ryde Social Heritage Group.

The sub-groups so far are:

- **Transcribing** - lead by Janette
- **Publications** - lead by Matt Bell
- **Natural History** - lead by Sally-Ann
- **Mapping** - lead by David Earle
- **Research** - leader to be arranged
- **Fund raising** - leader to be arranged

If you would like to be involved with any of these groups please contact the committee for more details.

The next members meeting will be on 9th September 2006 at 10:30am at the George Street Centre. The main agenda items will be the arrangements for the AGM and updates from the sub-groups. We also need to set the rules for governing meetings.

### AGM

Ryde Social Heritage Group will hold their AGM on 11th November 2006 at 10:30am at the George Street Centre, Ryde.

The new constitution will be discussed, and hopefully adopted, and officers will be elected. Ballot papers will be distributed to the members in advance of the meeting to allow postal voting to be carried out if required.

### Ryde Cemetery Walks

There will be a cemetery walk during Ryde Arts Festival in July. The evening walk will take place on 14th July at 7:00pm. This walk is a repeat of the successful walks done in May. The tour will take about an hour and a half and visit about 20 selected graves.

Come along and find out more about the lives of the people buried in Ryde Cemetery.

Meet just inside the gates at the West Street entrance. To book a place on the walk either use the "Contact us" page on the RSHG website, [www.rshg.org.uk](http://www.rshg.org.uk), and tell us your name, how many people want to do the walk and leave a phone number so we can contact you if we need to make any changes or contact Sally-Ann Garrett on 812323, evenings.

The sad story of Mary Ann Maxwell from the ISLE OF WIGHT OBSERVER 12 July 1884

### SHOCKING DEATH BY BURNING – A reprehensible practice

On Saturday morning a shocking accident occurred at The Bracken, Partlands Avenue, the residence of Mr H. R. JAMES. It appears that the cook, **Mary Ann MAXWELL**, arose to light the kitchen fire about half-past seven in the morning. She was a trifle late, and doubtless with the object of hurrying up the kitchen fire and making it burn brisker, poured some paraffin oil from a large can upon the fire. Whether the blaze thereby created caused her to drop the can is not known. At all events its contents exploded, scattering paraffin all over the unfortunate domestic and the kitchen. The poor woman's clothing was soon in a blaze, and her agonised cries soon brought her master on the scene, who extinguished the flames by wrapping his dressing gown round her and pouring water over her. In doing this he received severe burns upon his foot, hand, and head. After swathing the poor woman in oil and cotton wool, he had her removed to the Infirmary, where death terminated her sufferings by the evening.

An inquest was held at the Infirmary on Monday afternoon, before Mr F. BLAKE, coroner. The jury, of which Mr E. BRIGGS was the foreman, having reviewed the body, the following evidence was taken:

Henry Ridley JAMES, whose foot and hand were bandaged, deposed "I live at The Bracken, Partlands Avenue. The deceased was my cook. About half-past seven on Saturday morning I was awake by the sounds of a dull explosion and the fall of some tin utensil on the kitchen floor, followed by cries of distress. I rushed down to the kitchen. I found the kitchen a mass of flames, and the deceased was walking up and down the kitchen in flames from head to foot. I had my dressing gown over my arm (I did not stop to put it on), and this I threw round her and wrapped her in it. That extinguished the flames round her body. I poured water over the rest of her body. I then called loudly for scissors and cotton wool. The housemaid next came down and I sent her for a carriage to take deceased to the Infirmary. Deceased was removed there. Further service came before that, and her clothes were cut off, and she was covered with cotton wool and oil as well as we could do it. She was perfectly conscious. She tried to speak, but the only thing she said was "I hope you are not angry with me". After she was attended to I returned to the kitchen with water to extinguish the flames. I found on the upper part of the hot plate a portion of a paraffin tin; the other part was on the floor of the kitchen. She had evidently been pouring paraffin on the fire, and the can had burst, saturating her and everything else with lighted paraffin. I should think she poured the paraffin on the fire to make it burn up, I was not a witness of that, but I should think that was the case. There was a piece of linoleum in front of the fire and that was covered with paraffin. The kitchen carpet was saturated with it also and burning. Deceased had been with me about three years. I never knew she so used paraffin but it seems it was often done. Other people in the town, it seems, so use it; it is a quick fire lighter. I should think there was a gallon of paraffin in the can, and it had burst, sending the paraffin over everything. My injuries are from putting out the flames."

The Coroner said he thought very great credit was due to Mr JAMES for the promptitude he displayed. He was sure nothing could have been done quicker.

Mr JAMES – "I should think it was all over in a minute."

Mr John Walker HOPKINS, house surgeon at the Royal I.W. Infirmary, deposed "Deceased was brought to the Infirmary about eight o'clock on Saturday morning. She was extremely burned all over the body except a small portion of the chest and back. The clothes had been burnt and cut off her. She was conscious but very much exhausted and in a state of collapse. She could not talk owing to her mouth having been burnt. Some of the paraffin had got into her mouth. She was in such a state that I was morally certain she would die when I first saw her. She died about quarter past eight in the evening. She died of congestion of the lungs and brains, owing to the burns. She did not die of the shock. The face was burned, and a good part of the hair burned off too."

The Coroner said although there were no witnesses of the sad occurrence, there could be no doubt the accident occurred in the manner which had been described by Mr JAMES, and that the deceased, for some reason or other, was trying to make the fire burn brisker by pouring on paraffin, a most reprehensible practice, which he could hardly believe was general.

A jurymen thought deceased must have put the can on the hot plate. It could not have exploded through simply pouring some on the fire.

Mr JAMES thought the plate, as the fire was just lit, could hardly have been hot.

The Coroner said there was no doubt as to there having been an explosion of the can, which must have been an accident.

A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

Moral of this tale—NEVER NEVER pour flammable liquid on open fires or BBQ's.  
The consequences are tragic.

Thanks to Ann and Les Barrett, members of RSHG, for their hard work researching the stories.  
If you have a story to tell about your ancestors we want to hear from you.  
Contact us via the website or email the Newsletter Editor— [carol@cstrong.freemove.co.uk](mailto:carol@cstrong.freemove.co.uk)