

ARCADIA

The newsletter of **Ryde District Heritage Centre**

January 2013

The most exciting event of the last couple of months is the unveiling of the ice well, last seen in the mid 1950s. The owner of the arcade, delighted with the reincarnation of the basement as the Heritage Centre, encouraged us to expand even further into part of the cellars we hadn't originally considered. This had to be the location of the ice well, previously known about, but not pinpointed. Once this latest cellar had been cleared of many years of rubbish, at the beginning of October the decision was made to dismantle the wall and expose the ice well.

Brian tells the story: **Well, what a find!**

It was Ryde, rather than Egypt, but I was close to understanding how Howard Carter felt in the Valley of the Kings, when he made a hole in the doorway of a Pharaoh's tomb; however, it was not so much a Tutankhamen moment but more of a Bang-and-peer-in moment, as I removed the top row of bricks in the wall* between the outside world and the secret space behind.

For over half a century the ice-well had been hidden from view, and suddenly, there it was, ten feet away - a small doorway, beyond which lay who knew what?!

After waiting for what seemed ages, the shops in the Arcade above closed for the night, and I commenced dismantling the rest of the wall - slowly, brick by brick, joined with rock-hard cement, it succumbed to my bolster and club hammer.

Finally, with mounting excitement amongst the watching hordes [Tony, Claire and Jeff], the wall was low enough to step over, and we rushed forward to peer into the darkness through the doorway. In the torchlight appeared a large brick cavern with domed ceiling, and five feet below us, an unfathomable depth of dark water - mysterious shapes below its still surface, and strange objects floating thereon. Eventually, the elation having died down, we ascertained that the floating objects were bottles and cans, and the shapes were lengths of sodden timber and piles of brick rubble, presumably thrown into the space by the earlier builders. Measurements were taken with the aid of a length of conduit; these indicated that approximately 3,000 gallons of water, rubble and silt lay in the bottom of the ice-well.

Most of the water was pumped out thanks to Conrad, from Rosemary Vineyard: some has since returned, presumably due to the drain at the base of the ice-well not being sealed. Work will begin in the new year to remove all the water, silt and rubble - it will be checked for treasure on the way out!

The wall was single-brick width, built in the Fifties from re-used original soft bricks. Part of an original 9” wall had been demolished to allow room for a new doorway from the rotunda basement, thus inadvertently exposing the ice-well. The new wall sealed off the ice-well once more, having had its corridor bricked-up decades earlier after falling out of use.



As a result of an article in the Isle of Wight County Press, the following story was received from Anne Grant:

Your story about the rare ice well discovered in Ryde Royal Victoria Arcade has triggered family memories of when and why it was bricked up in the 1950s.

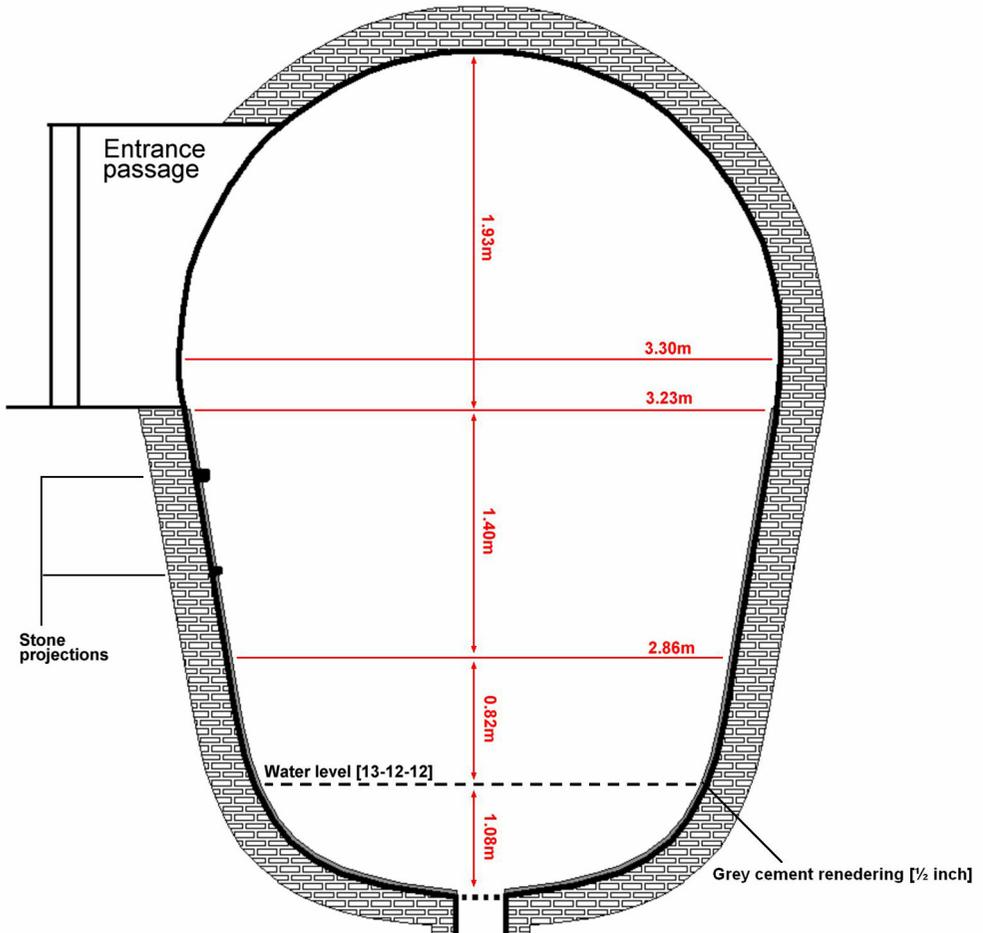
My family was living in Church Lane at the time. My eldest brother Michael was a friend of Michael Lankshear or Mickey as we called him. The two Michaels played a lot together but one fateful night my brother wasn't with Mickey. Instead he was with us. We had all gone to the cinema together. As we returned home after the film, we walked down Church Lane and saw a small gathering of women who lived in Church Lane. They were assembled outside the Arcade basement entrance. The women greeted us with sighs of relief. One woman said to my parents 'Thank goodness your Michael is with you, we wondered if he was down the well too!' The women told my parents that Michael Lankshear had fallen into the well. He had gone into the Arcade exploring on his own. Two men walking up Church Lane heard his cries for help. They went into the Arcade to investigate. One man then ran to the phone box opposite Yelfs Tap pub and called the police to bring a ladder to get the boy out of the well.

My family joined the Church Lane women (Mrs. Beeney, Mrs. Jerram, and Mrs Todd) to wait for Mickey's rescue. Mrs Todd and her family lived in a flat above the Arcade. She had a lampshade shop next to the Church Lane entrance into the Arcade.

Her son Roy had also heard Mickey's cries for help. Until the police arrived, one man hung upside down into the well and held onto Mickey's hands to keep him above water. The second man hung onto the first man's feet to stop him from falling in. The police arrived and hauled Mickey out.

Soon after that the decision was taken to seal up the well so that nothing like it could happen again.

The diagram below has been drawn to scale by Rob Martin, Chair of the Isle of Wight Industrial Archaeology Society. It is hoped to raise sufficient funding to open up the ice well for public viewing in the course of the next few months. If anyone would like to help in any way, please get in touch via the Heritage Centre.



N.B.
 Section below the water line is conjectural, based on prodding with an iron bar.
 Drain is certain to be existing, but dimensions are conjectural.

Dates for the Diary

January 31 - Monthly pub quiz Yelf's 7pm. £3 a head. Raffle.

February 13- HRS AGM and illustrated talk on early Ryde postcards by Terry Nigh. Yelf's 7pm. Members free, small donation asked from non-members. Raffle.

February 28 - pub quiz as above.

March 28 - pub quiz as above

April 10 - Illustrated talk by Brian Puttock. Yelf's 7pm. Members free, small donation asked from non-members. Raffle.

April 25 - pub quiz as above.

May 30 - pub quiz as above.

June 27 - pub quiz as above.

July 25 - pub quiz as above.

August 29 - pub quiz as above.

September 11 - illustrated talk by Tony Gale. Yelf's 7pm. Members free, small donation asked from non-members. Raffle.

September 26 - pub quiz as above.

October 31 - pub quiz as above.

November 13 - Illustrated talk by Mark Earp. Yelf's 7pm. Members free, small donation asked from non-members. Raffle.

November 28 - pub quiz as above.

December 26 - pub quiz as above.

Raffle prize plea

As there are so many events coming up, HRS committee is constantly looking for raffle prizes. If you have anything which you think may be suitable, please bring it into the Heritage Centre. We need prizes suitable for men and women. Many thanks in anticipation.

Newsletter plea: Is there anyone out there who would be willing to take on the newsletter? Please get in touch via RDHC - 01983 717435.

Membership Update

Membership runs from February to February. Members receive free entry to Ryde District Heritage Centre, four talks, four newsletters and 10% discount on Hovertravel. Well worth the money!

As of January 2013, HRS has:

Individual Members - 93
Family Memberships - 55
Corporate Memberships - 17

County Archivist Richard Smout is leading a House History Workshop on Wednesdays, February 27, and March 20 in Ryde District Heritage Centre, from 7pm to 9pm. This is a very popular course, and places are limited, so please book early, to avoid disappointment, on 01983 717435.

HRS committee: January 2013

Chair: Liz Jones

Vice Chair: Brian Harris

Treasurer: Tony Packer

Secretary: Diana Wood

Members: Alan Brading, Sally-Ann Garrett, Wayne Jones, Claire Kay, John King, Linda McArdle, Vic Scovell, Derek Tomlinson

HRS committee has appointed member Judith Lazell as Youth/School liaison, and Gwyneth Byerley as Membership Secretary.

If you would like to contact the committee, please email admin@HistoricRydeSociety.com

Historic Ryde Society, creators of the Ryde District Heritage Centre, Royal Victoria Arcade, Union Street, Ryde. PO33 2LQ tel. 01983 717435 www.HistoricRydeSociety.com

