

## **Gardens and Landscapes of West Ryde**

It is planned to stage an Isle of Wight Gardens Trust walk as part of the Isle of Wight Walking Festival this May 8<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm. The walk will have a duration of between 2.5 and 3 hours. The walk will show how Ryde developed from farmland, woodland and commons into the largest town on the Island and how it coped with the increase of inhabitants and with the large number of burials.

The walk will start at St Thomas church. Built in 1719 by Thomas Player, the main Ryde landowner, St Thomas was a privately-owned Anglican chapel in a rural location to serve the then two small villages: the fishing village of Lower Ryde and the hilltop farming community of Upper Ryde. With the growth in Ryde's popularity as a seaside resort for holidays, residence and retirement, starting in 1780, Thomas Player's son William, laid out what is now Union Street to link the two villages. St Thomas at the heart of the expansion was soon too small and was rebuilt in 1827. Three more Anglican churches were built in the 1840s and in 1872 All Saints was consecrated as the new main parish church – a sign of the prosperity and pride of what had become a considerable town.

St Thomas church has a churchyard, but with the growth of Ryde in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this and the few other churchyards soon became overcrowded. In 1840 William Player's son George donated land for a burial ground. Ryde Cemetery opened in 1842. It is the oldest municipal cemetery on the Island. The prosperity of many local trades people and businessmen can be seen from the considerable number of imposing and elaborate stone memorials. Some of the wealthiest families purchased sufficient space for the construction of family vaults. The Cemetery was extended in 1862 when two central chapels were built. The existing chapel was converted to a mortuary and a lodge was also built. The Cemetery was extended again in 1881 taking the area to its present extent of 12 acres. Ryde Cemetery is now home to a huge variety of plants, some planted, but many self-seeded. Some of the trees are more than 150 years old surviving from the original planting scheme. The Isle of Wight Gardens Trust surveyed all the mature trees in the Cemetery in 1999.

In addition to the building of churches and the Cemetery the walk will also explore how houses and gardens, schools, parks and open spaces were developed for the needs of the increased number of residents. In the 20<sup>th</sup> C much of the increased population was housed by urban extension to the west of Ryde. Some of this area shows how existing natural features such as streams, woodland and trees have been carefully incorporated into the new development. This includes some of the oldest trees on the Island.

For further details please contact walk leader Mike Dawson: [mike.dawson@mcrobie.org.uk](mailto:mike.dawson@mcrobie.org.uk).