

## The Last British Railways Paddle Steamer

*By Keith Spencer (BRS Newsletter February/March 1969)*

With all the modernisation being done by British Rail, it is good to see them preserving a war-veteran – the last coal-fired paddle-steamer in the British Isles, ‘P.S.Ryde’.

The 566 ton Ryde was launched in 1937 and cost the Southern Railway £48,000. She joined similar ships already in service on the Portsmouth-Ryde ferry service. The other vessels were ‘Whippingham’ (built 1930), ‘Southsea’ (1930) and ‘Sandown’ (1934).

In 1940 the Royal Navy took over the vessel and converted it into a minesweeper. For the next five years of World War II, Ryde protected Britain’s coasts as a flak ship and escort vessel. She took part in the Dunkirk retreat and the ‘D-Day’ invasion of Normandy.

After the war she returned to her ferrying in the Spithead. In 1948 two diesel boats started on the service, they were the ‘Brading’ and ‘Southsea’, (the latter replacing the paddle-steamer lost in the war), and a further diesel boat was added in 1951 ‘Shanklin’. They took over most of the work, doing the ferry crossing in two-thirds of the time. ‘Whippingham’ was scrapped in the late ‘50s, but ‘Sandown’ helped the other ships with the peak Summer traffic until 1965 when she was withdrawn and scrapped, leaving the ‘Ryde’ as the only paddle-steamer South of the Humber. Since then all the vessels have lost their buff livery and have been repainted in the ‘modern image’ style, the diesel vessels being slightly modified to accommodate additional seating facilities.

The triple-expansion steam engine uses 7 tons of coal a day to keep the vessel moving at a comfortable 13 knots. Obviously, the running costs are substantially higher than the diesel vessels. British Rail have considered having her converted to oil-firing but due to this involving major alterations the cost would be prohibitive. During September, last, the ‘Ryde’ went to the Pool of London for a war re-union. Her Winter months have been spent at Newhaven, and it has had a Board of Trade inspection passed, so allowing her to add some more return trips to the Island, adding to the 50,000 already completed. For the next two summers she will be working the pier services between Portsmouth and Ryde. Also two excursions are planned; being chartered by the Coastal Cruising Association and the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society on 18<sup>th</sup> June and 7<sup>th</sup> September respectfully (sic). If you are at Portsmouth this Summer, I hope you will have ‘a ryde on the paddle’.

(Keith wishes to acknowledge assistance with information for the above from British Rail Shipping and International Services Division (Portsmouth)).

Further notes by Ken Ricketts 25/03/2018:

Wikipedia article [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PS\\_Ryde](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PS_Ryde)

Sadly, it was recently (February 2018) reported that she was being broken up.