

# INTRODUCTION

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## PREFACE

One of the main aims of this little collection of essays is to encourage and stimulate its readers into taking a greater interest in the wealth of science, engineering and technology that is to be found in the history and industrial archaeology of the Isle of Wight. Another is to endeavor to keep alive the names and, where possible, something of the character of at least some of those, usually individuals, who have lived and worked on the Island in these fields by recounting just a few of the numerous stories that are behind their great achievements.

Inevitably, the choice of what has been included, or for that matter left out, has had to be to a very large extent random. It has in cases been made to allow a wide breath of subjects to be covered. Neither commercial success nor technological significance have been necessarily considered as main criteria when making the selection. There is so much to be told that in the limited space available it is only possible to write a short essay on each individual or activity included. In order to help those who may wish to follow up and study further any particular topic or person, a comprehensive bibliography and reference section has been included.

The definite boundary provided by the sea around the Isle of Wight, together with the size of the county and until recently its stable population compared with many places, makes it an ideal place for a study of the kind resulting in this book. There is, however, an unfortunate truth about any enclosed community: it assumes everybody knows what has and is going on. As a result even after a single generation much will have been lost to history. This is certainly the case with the Isle of Wight. For instance, between 1895 and 1919 the Island was home to the world's premier earthquake observatory at Shide, but by the 1960s only a bare handful had any idea of where it was and even less knew who had established it yet alone the role the founder and his Japanese wife had played in the community.

The Isle of Wight is fortunate in having an *Industrial Archaeology Society*, an extremely lively branch of the *Historical Association*, a welcoming *Record Office*, plus *Local Heritage Groups* in many of its towns and villages. There is also a well placed central *County Museum* at Newport as well as the independent and Island focused *Carisbrooke Castle Museum*, founded by Princess Beatrice the youngest daughter of Queen Victoria, and housed in her old home inside the castle. All encourage the serious enquirer, whether expert or novice.

Permission is given for copying and the reproduction of reasonable length quotations from this work on the condition that sources are duly acknowledged. However, as these essays were originally made available and circulated in order to raise the profile and when possible funds for local Isle of Wight societies; it is hope that those using '*Some Isle of Wight Inventors and Inventions: Stories of Local Technology*' will bear this in mind.

If any increased awareness and interest, in what has often been a neglected part of the Isle of Wight's historical past, is stimulated during the reading of just one of the essays included in this book, then the endeavour expended in producing it will not have been in vain, for it will have achieved one of the author's major goals. Enjoy reading what follows – but at the same time please ask the question posed below - for it may, as it has for me, give much pleasure in the recounting.

**Do I have a story worth telling  
that could die with me  
and my generation?**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude and thanks must be expressed to all who have over many years and in so countless ways contributed to the production of these essays. They have made available source material, offered invaluable advice and helpful suggestions, read numerous drafts and assisted in countless other practical ways. Each in his or her own way, and perhaps even unknowingly, has given something that has been even more precious - their encouragement - it has much appreciated.

Several stories in the text have come to light 'out of the blue'. A chance conversation or an unexpected reference in an article, newspaper or magazine has led to their discovery and I am indebted to those who have brought them to my attention over many a year. Who, for instance, would have expected that a pencilled name - *Mark Kershaw* - on a title page of scientific paper archived by the British Library would lead to the discovery of the pseudonym under which *Professor John Milne*, the internationally respected seismologist then living and working at Shide near Newport was writing popular travel stories and even pseudo science-fiction selling on the W. H. Smith station bookstall throughout the country. The finding of a patented perpetual motion machine by *George Singleton Hill* in 1858 came from following up a chance reference found in the local Record Office to a patent for the '*improvements to pneumatic and hydraulic mill machinery*'. *George Singleton Hill* ran the 'new' steam mills in Green Street Ryde at the time of his patent.

The text would also have been impossible to write without the professional support and guidance from the staff of the *IW County Record Office* at Newport, the *British Library* and those of the Isle of Wight Libraries together with their colleagues at the *Portsmouth Central Library*. The *Museum at Carisbrooke Castle* and a number of *Island Heritage and History Centres* have also been most generous in providing material and access to their archives. The watchful eyes of *local historians* on the venture has also had immense value not only in providing additional information but in checking for accuracy; so too for the same reasons have members of the *Isle of Wight Industrial Archaeology Society*. I trust that in all cases where necessary permission has been given by authors or societies to reproduce specific items, it has been duly acknowledged either in the text or in the bibliography and the references provided for each item. However, should there be any material used without due acknowledgement or perhaps the wrong credit given, please accept my sincere apology for the omission or error. Every effort will be made to include the correct source in any future revisions. The references in the Bibliography have been included with the hope of encouraging readers to undertake further study and bring their attention to other works dealing in greater depth with other specific aspects of the history of Isle of Wight technology.

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In concluding this section on acknowledgements, the author's thanks must be warmly given to you the reader for any 'book', be it electronic or printed, that is never read is a worthless artefact no matter what great pearls of wisdom it may contain. Thank you for your time and interest. I hope you thoroughly enjoy this collection of Isle of Wight essays and stories about local inventors, their inventions and the technologies that I have been able to include in this book.

## THE AUTHOR



Patrick Nott was born in December 1936 and spent his school years in the south Lincolnshire market and industrial town of Grantham during and in the years just after the Second World War. He first visited the Isle of Wight during the summer of 1949, and from then on regularly spent holidays with relatives at Ryde. From his university days, first at Queen Mary College in London, then at King's College Cambridge and in early employment the Island was to become increasingly a second home for him. Towards the end of the 1960's he finally moved to live and work fulltime on the Island. Trained as a physicist, for many years until his retirement, he taught mathematics, physics and other engineering sciences in the Engineering Department of what has now become the *Isle of Wight College*, then it was known as the *IW Technical College*.

Having to decide between studying physics or history in the sixth form, forced history to be kept as a hobby interest and physics to be chosen as the career subject. The choice was no doubt much influenced by attending the same school at which Isaac Newton was educated, *The King's School Grantham*, and being a teenager at the start of the period that Harold Wilson, as prime minister, was described as that of '*the white hot heat of the technical revolution*'. However the early fascination with history continued and gave the opportunity for him to specialise in the development of science and technology. In recent years this pastime has become more and more concentrated on the Isle of Wight and in particular the Island's industrial heritage and archaeology.

In the years leading up to 1980 he co-authored with Leslie Herbert-Gustar a biography, published both in Britain and Japan, of *John Milne, the Father of Modern Seismology*, who lived and worked at the then world famous earthquake observatory in Shide from 1895 to 1913.

The inserted photograph, taken in the late 70's shows the author with Leslie Herbert-Gustar on his right. Between them is one of the Milne memorial trees given to the Island from the grounds of Tokyo University and planted by the Japanese Ambassador. It is on the bank of the river opposite the site of the old Shide Hill House, Newport.



For many years the author has been slowly compiling what he hopes will become an authoritative work on the history of Isle of Wight science, engineering and technology, its inventors and their inventions. It has so far resulted, amongst other things, in this section of his website '*Some Isle of Wight Inventors and Inventions – Stories of Local Technology*'.

Around 1980 Patrick Nott became a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). His fascination with their long and diverse history as a worshipping group on the Island has led to the production of an e-book, on disc, entitled '*The First 350 Years in Newport and the Isle of Wight – A History of Local Quakerism from 1657*'. It is also attached to this website as a pdf file. His interest in the work and lives of some of the many Island hymn writers may well lead to another writing project in the near future.

Before becoming a Quaker he was for some twenty-five years an Anglican Reader and has the unique distinction of being, as far as it is known, the only person to have officiated at services and preached in the churches in which both Robert Hooke and Isaac Newton were baptised. He therefore feels he has to stand aside in any of the Hooke / Newton controversy! See the essay '*Genius Brother of Newport Grocer*' in the main text.

Besides relevant local groups and societies, Patrick Nott has long been a member of the Institute of Physics History Group, the British Society for the History of Science and the national Association for Industrial Archaeology. It is this background, knowledge and experience that has stimulated and influenced the compilation and writing of '*Some Isle of Wight Inventor and Inventions – Stories of Local Technology*'. It also accounts for any, bias, unusual style and the specific choice of topics that are included in this work.

*Patrick Nott*

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## UNITS AND MEASUREMENTS USED

Generally, for descriptions of equipment and the like in the main text the units used at the time of construction or development have been kept. This means that in quite a number of cases they are in imperial not metric measurements. By leaving them in their original form, it has reduced the number of brackets and other insertions that have had to be made. It also may help to provide a greater sense of history. However, listed below are a number of imperial to metric and visa versa conversions should the reader wish to transpose the figures given. In addition and included below are some conversions from the old pound, shilling and pence system – £ s d – which has also been used in the text where appropriate.

<b><u>Imperial to Metric</u></b>		<b><u>Metric to Imperial</u></b>	
1 inch	25.4 millimetres		
1 foot	0.305 metres	1 metre	3.28 feet
1 yard	0.914 metres	1 metre	1.09 yards
1 mile	1.61 kilometres	1 kilometre	0.622 miles
1 sq inch	645 sq millimetres		
1 sq foot	0.0929 sq metres	1 sq metre	10.8 sq feet
1 acres	0.405 hectares	1 hectare	2.47 acres
1 sq mile	259 hectares		
1 gallon	4.55 litres	1 litre	2.20 gallons
1 cu yard	0.765 cu metres	1 cu metre	1.31 cu yards
1 lb (pound)	0.454 kilogram	1 kilogram	2.20 lbs
1 ton	1.016 tonne		
1 horsepower	0.746 kilowatts	1 kilowatt	1.34 horsepower
550 ft lbs/second			
1 psi or lb/sq ins	0.0690 bar	1 bar	14.5 psi or lb/sq inch
		760 mm Hg	1.00 atmosphere
£1	100p		
1/- or shilling	5p (new) pence	£1	20/- or shillings
			240d or (old) pence

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