

Richard Roach Pittis

1911 census – Holme, Guyers Road, Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight

<i>Richard Roach Pittis</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>Solicitor</i>	<i>Newport, Isle of Wight</i>
Nina Marie Peveril Pittis	Wife	35		Bedford Square, London
Margaret Rebecca Walcroft	Servant	26	Cook Domestic	Abingdon, Berkshire
Emelie Cachelin	Servant	20	Lady's Maid Domestic	Switzerland

Isle of Wight Country Press – 19 July 1913

DEATH OF R. R. PITTIS, J.P.

GREAT LOSS TO THE COMMUNITY.

Death has been terribly busy of late in robbing the Island of some of its best-known sons. To-day we have with unfeigned and deep regret to record the death of Mr. Richard Roach Pittis, J.P., solicitor of Newport, who passed away, after a long illness on Monday morning. The deceased gentleman had had somewhat serious attacks of failing health for some time, but lately, to the great joy of his host of friends, he had seemed much better and more like his old, vigorous self. But latterly the old symptoms returned again, though Mr. Pittis battled with characteristic courage and sense of duty against them until the very last. As late as Thursday he was in his office, but on that day he was obliged to take to his bed and sank into unconsciousness, from which he never really rallied, but, in spite of all medical skill and devoted nursing could do, passed away as stated. It is impossible to imagine one whose passing could create a greater gap in the community than that of the subject of this notice. On the writer, who was favoured with only occasional opportunities of judging of his powers and character, though the opportunities have extended over a period of 30 years, he impressed himself as a strong, sunny nature, veiled at first by reserve, but capable of adamant friendship, one into whose keeping you could commit your most vital interests and rest calmly confident that all was well, because they were in the keeping of a man of conspicuous ability, ripe experience, sound judgement, unswerving rectitude, and highest nobility of character. Hence it is that to-day the Island is intensely poorer by the death of Mr. Roach Pittis, and many a heart is saddened with a poignant sense of personal and irreparable loss.

The late Mr. Richard Roach Pittis, who was in his 62nd year, was a native of the Island capital, and was always proud of his birth-place. He was a member of a very old and highly esteemed Island family, having been the elder son of the late Mr. Richard Pittis, of Newport, and a cousin of Ald. Francis Pittis, J.P. He owed his attachment for the legal profession to his uncle, Mr. James Alfred Pittis, who for years practised as a solicitor at offices in Lugley-street, Newport, immediately opposite those which have been occupied for so many years by Mr. Roach Pittis. It was in the office of his uncle that the late Mr. Roach Pittis, after being educated at Southampton College, served his articles and laid the foundation of a very highly successful professional career. In 1873, when 21 years of age, Mr. Roach Pittis started in practice as a solicitor, having offices at first in Holyrood-street, from which he ultimately removed to his present quarters. A sound lawyer in every sense of the term, Mr. Pittis won the confidence of all with whom he was brought into contact in business and every other matter, and he secured an ever-increasing *clientele* until he had built up what was reputed to be the largest and most influential practice in the Island. He formerly had an office at Ryde as well as at Newport and Cowes. He was remarkably successful in actions which were fought in the Courts on his advice. One notable local action in which his clients were successful at Winchester was that of Shepard Bros. v the Newport Corporation, which related to the dispute over the building of that firm's riverside store near The Ark, in which, it will be remembered, Messrs. Shepard were successful. He was successfully prominent in the promotion and incorporation of many local and Island trading companies, and also of some on the mainland, and acted as solicitor to many of them. He was one of the founders and first directors of the County Press Company, and on the death of Col. Archibald Clarke, many years ago,

he succeeded to the chairmanship of that Company, a position which he held until his death with marked ability and distinction. He was also a director, among others, of the Freshwater Water Company and of Reads, Ltd., Newport. He was greatly esteemed by the members of the local legal profession, which he honoured and adorned, and this was evidenced by the fact that he was the first president of the I.W. Law Society. He was also a member of the Incorporated Law Society.

For some three years the late Mr. Pittis very capably discharged the duties of Official Receiver in Bankruptcy, having succeeded his old friend Mr. Samuel Wheeler in that responsible office.

Of a retiring disposition, he had a natural shrinking from public life throughout his career, and this alone prevented him from attaining the highest position in public affairs, for he was offered the Mayoralty of his native town on more than one occasion. However, in spite of this predominating characteristic, he rendered considerable and conspicuously capable public service for many years in his younger days. In 1881 he succeeded the late Mr. James Eldridge as Town Clerk of Newport, the duties of which responsible position he discharged with consummate skill and marked ability for between six and seven years. He held that position during the particularly interesting and memorable time of Queen Victoria's first Jubilee, the arrangements for the fitting local celebrations and commemoration of which afforded scope for the exercise of Mr. Pittis's powers as a born organiser, and splendidly did he discharge them, as the conspicuous success of those eventful proceedings convincingly proved. It will be remembered that on that occasion the late Mr. Pittis's uncle, Sir Francis Pittis, was Mayor, and received the honour of knighthood at the hands of her late Majesty, to whom Mr. Roach Pittis, as Town Clerk, had the honour of presentation. After the Jubilee Mr. Pittis resigned the office owing to increasing duties, but on the lamented death of his successor in that office, the late Mr. Arthur Sotheron Estcourt, Mr. Roach Pittis temporarily gave his services to the town as Town Clerk until the appointment of the late Mr. H. R. Hooper. He was subsequently for some time a member of the County Council, his great popularity with all classes being attested by the fact that though a staunch Unionist fighting a Liberal stronghold, as it then was regarded, in the South-East Division of the borough, he defeated a strong opponent by about two to one. In those days his sound advice and desire to further the best interests of the community were most helpful in the counsels of our County Parliament, and the assistance which he gave to Mr. Robey F. Eldridge and the Technical Education Committee in establishing a worthy centre for technical education for the county in the Institute now used as a Secondary-school at Newport, was most valuable. He also served with others on a committee appointed to consider the question of a new scheme of electoral divisions, but through it has been vigorously tackled on more than one occasion since, that problem still awaits a satisfactory solution.

Whilst Town Clerk, the late Mr. Pittis also discharged the responsible duties of Clerk of the Peace for the Island, prior to the separation of the Island from Hampshire for administrative purpose. Mr. Pittis was also one of the oldest members of the Borough Bench, where his great legal knowledge and sound judgment were of the greatest value in the administration of justice. The Borough Bench has suffered heavily during the past year by the death of members, Mr. Pittis being the sixth magistrate who has passed away within a year. The late Mr. Roach Pittis was a member of the newly-appointed Advisory Committee for the appointment of new borough justices.

Ever anxious to elevate the educational and intellectual life of those among whom he lived, he applied himself with a particularly generous devotion to promoting the welfare of the Newport Literary Society, of which he was president for the long period of 36 years. It was in 1877 that he was unanimously elected to succeed the late Rev. J. Morrison Newland in the presidency of that splendid Society, which was started only the year before in the premises at the back of the Congregational Church. Under the ever-advancing popularity of Mr. Roach Pittis's presidency, the Society continued to grow until at length the premises were found insufficient to accommodate the increasing membership, and the existing premises were secured. Still the Society continued to flourish under its devoted President's excellent guidance, and extensive alterations and additions have been carried out which have resulted in firmly establishing the Society in the proud position which it occupies as the oldest Society of its kind in the town. Throughout all those years the late Mr. Pittis spared neither

personal effort nor the help of his purse to secure the successful working of the Society for the intellectual improvement of the young people of the town and district, and the Society remains a splendid monument of the wise guidance and generous help of his long and keenly enthusiastic presidency.

He was a member and officer of the old Newport Debating Society, rendering it able service in its palmy days. Naturally shrinking from public positions, he did not take a prominent part in the popular "open" debates of the Society, but he often contributed to the ordinary discussions, and his views, thoughtfully arrived at and forcefully expressed, always carried great weight with the members.

He took a great interest in the ancient archives of the borough, and during his Town Clerkship he extracted many curious quotations from the old records, and these formed the basis of several interesting articles contributed to the *County Press* by the late Rev. E. Boucher James, when vicar of Carisbrooke.

He was one of the four editors of the *Island Quarterly*, his colleagues being Mr. S. Wheeler, Dr. Dabbs, and Mr. T. Lee. It will be noticed that the last-named alone survives of that old editorial quaternion. The magazine was started in 1877, and, though "brief life was here its portion," it was the means of bringing together and presenting to its readers some good literary work in the course of its one year's existence. Mr. Roach Pittis contributed to its pages a valuable paper on "The Necessity for Public Prosecutors." The article attracted much attention at the time, and it is interesting to note that the reform of legal procedure which was so powerfully advocated in that paper has been an accomplished fact for some years past, the office of Public Prosecutor being filled at the present time by one whose name is familiar to our readers as a former brilliant barrister on the Western Circuit – Sir Charles Mathews. In the same magazine Mr. Pittis figured in a "debate" on the Female Suffrage question. He championed the cause of women in this matter on the lines set forth in his opening sentences. "Woman Suffrage," he said, "is not claimed as a concession, but as a right, neither opposed to common-sense nor inconsistent with women's recognised sphere. It is not suggested that certain members of the community should exercise the franchise because they are not to be *excluded* from the voting-list because they are women." We have reason to believe that though

[the following lines have been obscured in the original copy.]

He was a member as well as trustee and solicitor of the Albany Lodge of Freemasons, and he was a valued supporter of local Friendly Society work, being an honorary member of the Earl Yarborough Lodge of Oddfellows and other societies. He was also solicitor to the Oddfellows. His kind-hearted nature made him a constant and generous supporter of hospital, public nursing, and kindred work, and he was a life governor of the Royal I.W. County Hospital and the National Hospital for Consumption at St. Lawrence.

In many other directions the late Mr. Pittis worked splendidly for the public weal. He was a trustee and former secretary of the Old Blue-school charity, and a representative on the management under the new scheme for the administration of this useful charity. A true patriot and supporter of the Volunteer movement, he served as a Volunteer for some time in his younger days. He was a member of the I.W. County Club and of the Royal I.W. Agricultural Society, having for many years acted as auditor of the latter Society.

A strong Unionist, he held his political views in moderation, and he was a valued supporter of the funds of the Island and local Conservative Associations.

In private life he was a fine type of an English gentleman, always kindly and courteous, and though of a reserved nature he made a host of friends, who found his friendship true and constant. Of him it may in truth be said that he had no enemies.

Since his death the borough flag has been flying at half-mast over the Guildhall, the flag at the

Recreation-ground has been at half-mast, and mourning shutters have been up at the premises of the Newport Literary Society, whilst the Parish-church knell was tolled on the day of his death.

The late Mr. Roach Pittis married his second wife some three years ago, and the deepest sympathy of the community is with her and his other relatives in the heavy loss which they have sustained.

Mr. Charles Seymour Pittis, son of the late Mr. Roach Pittis's only brother, Mr. Seymour Pittis, has been serving his articles under his late uncle at the Newport offices with a view to qualifying as a solicitor and thus ensuring continuity of the association with that business of a name so deservedly esteemed and honoured as Pittis.

THE FUNERAL

-took place yesterday amid universal manifestations of sorrow in the native town of the deceased gentleman, and in the presence of an assemblage thoroughly representative of all classes in the Island. The first part of the service took place at the Parish-church, Newport, the clergy present being the Rev. Canon Clement Smith, M.V.O. (chaplain to the King), the Vicar of Newport (Rev. H. Edmund Sharpe), Rev. J. L. Spratt, and the Rev. C. W. Combs, and there was a large congregation. The cortege was met at the west door by the clergy and choir and whilst the congregation were assembling the organist, Mr. J. H. Jackson touchingly played "In Memoriam," a composition of his own, "Death of Ase" (Grieg), and "Prelude in E minor" (Chopin): The Rev. J. L. Spratt read the opening sentences of the Burial Office. The personal mourners were: Mrs. R. Roach Pittis (widow), Mrs. G. A. Scott (sister-in-law), Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Pittis (brother and sister-in-law), Mr. C. Pittis (nephew), Ald. Ernest Groves, J.P., Mr. Leonard Groves, Mr. Edward W. Way, Mr. John Roach, Mr. A. P. Scott, Mrs. Buchanan (sister-in-law), Mr. Buchanan, Mr. G. A. Scott, Dr. Underhill, Dr. Raymond, Mr. Geo Long (managing clerk, executor, and trustee), Major H. J. Way, V.D., Ald. F. Templeman Mew, J.P., Mr. Ernest C. Langton, T.C., Mr. G. Fletcher Jones, Mr. R. Braxton Perres, Major W. T. Arnell, J.P., Mr. Edward Wilson, Mr. Roy J. Eldridge (representing his father, Mr. Robey F. Eldridge, J.P., a relative and old friend of deceased, who was unavoidably prevented by indisposition from attending), Dr. Thompson, Messrs. J. H. Black, W. Westmore, W. Upward, and Lockley (office staff), Messrs. G. H. Brown, H. C. Norris, and L. F. Phillips (former members of the office staff), household servants and other employees, Mr. Simmonds (former coachman), Mr. and Mrs. W. Wickens and Miss Cull (former employees). Mrs. Roach Pittis's motor-car also followed in the procession, which was joined in Lugley-street by members of the I.W. Law Society, the members present including Messrs. John Fardell (President and Clerk of the County Justices), James Eldridge (Clerk of the Newport Borough Justices), F. A. Joyce (Deputy Coroner), John Marsh, A. W. Drew, B. B. Beckingsale, James C. W. Damant, T. Ross Pratt, H. J. Jacobs, E. Parker, Adrian Jerome, H. E. Stratton, G. F. S. Stratton, and Hugh Gramshaw. Members of the Society who were unavoidably prevented from attending were Messrs. Robey F. Eldridge, J.P., Charles G. Vincent, A. Dashwood, H. A. Matthews, H. Pleydell Wilton, W. H. P. F. Thirkell, E. R. Ratcliffe, and W. J. Bailey. The following members of the Albany Lodge of Freemasons were drawn up on either side of the western entrance to the church and followed the members of the Law Society up the nave: W.Bros. Hubert G. Groundsell, I.P.M., C. T. Allee, P.M., P.P.S.G.D., D. S. Pring, P.M., P.P.G.D.C., G. A. Brannon, P.M., P.P.S.G.D.Tres., H. W. Horan, P.M., P.P.S.G.D.Secy., Frank King, P.M., D.C., and E. F. King, P.M., and Brothers Ernest F. Wray, J. W., Walter W. Odell, N. Mursell, E. J. Wray, Frank Yelf, F. Burton, W. C. Black, F. Morgan, A. H. Dockrill, A. Mearman, W. C. H. Eyles, and E. Huxham. Others present included the Mayor (Mr. F. E. Witcher), Mr. Robert Pinnock, J.P., Ald. J. Thomas, J.P., Ald. R. Bird Cheverton, J.P., and Mrs. Cheverton, Mr. G. B. Purkis, J.P., Mr. J. W. Stanley, J.P., Ald. W. J. Whittington, J.P., and Mrs. Whittington, Mr. Edward Morris, J.P., Mr. A. J. Snellgrove, J.P., Mr. J. C. Millgate, J.P., Ald. Chas. Webb, Councillors E. J. Gunner, A. E. Harvey (Deputy Mayor), W. J. Rugg (chairman of the Conservative and Unionist Club), T. Hobb, C.C., G. H. Yelf, J. H. Deacon, G. Steel, C.C., W. Godwin, and S. C. Wadham; Professor Milne, D.Sc., Mr. Frank King (vice-president), Messrs. W. H. Tilley, E. O. White, J. Way, H. F. Scott (members of the committee), and Messrs. Alex Smith, and S. F. Holmes (hon. sec.), of the Newport Literary Society; Messrs. S. J. Hinds (vice-president), W. G. Purkis (captain), A. Chappell (oldest member), and P. E. Shields (hon. treasurer), of

the Newport Rowing Club. The I.W. County Press Company was represented by Messrs. W. Hammond Riddett, J.P., and Michael Maybrick, J.P. (directors), Mr. G. A. Brannon (managing director), Mr. W. H. Dann (editor). The Oddfellows were represented by Bros. H. Prouten, Geo. Morris, W. Wells, A. Spanner, Chas. Steel (permanent sec.), J. B. Alderslade (Prov. C.S.), L. Jordan, C.C., and T. P. Whiston; and the Foresters by Bro. E. J. Mills S.C.R. and trustee.

[only principal mourners transcribed]

The Literary Society's premises were closed during the funeral, and mourning shutters and drawn blinds were seen on every hand as the cortege proceeded through the town to the Newport Cemetery, where the interment took place in the family burial-ground. The brick grave was lined with evergreen. The service at the graveside was concluded by the Vicar of Newport. The plain oak coffin, with raised lid, bore the inscription:-

RICHARD ROACH PITTIS
Died 14th July, 1913,
Aged 61

On the head of the coffin was a large pillow of beautiful white stocks, lilies-of-the-valley, and white carnations, with the name "Nina" in large script letters picked out in red flowers, across the cushion, this being the exquisitely touching floral tribute from Mrs. Roach Pittis, and the coffin was strewn with lovely white lilies by the sorrowing widow after it had been lowered into the grave. On the foot of the coffin was a beautiful floral anchor from the deceased gentleman's sister, Miss Ada Pittis, inscribed "In ever-loving memory of the best and dearest of brothers, from his heart-broken sister."

The funeral arrangements were carried out by Mr. Charles Webb, in conjunction with Messrs. Damp.

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The Globe – 14 October 1913

FEAR OF PREMATURE BURIAL.

Mr. Richard Roach Pittis, of Newport, Isle of Wight, solicitor, who died July 14 last, aged 61 years, leaving £60,192, directed that, prior to his funeral, his medical man should pierce the brachial artery in his arm to ascertain whether or not life be extinct.

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