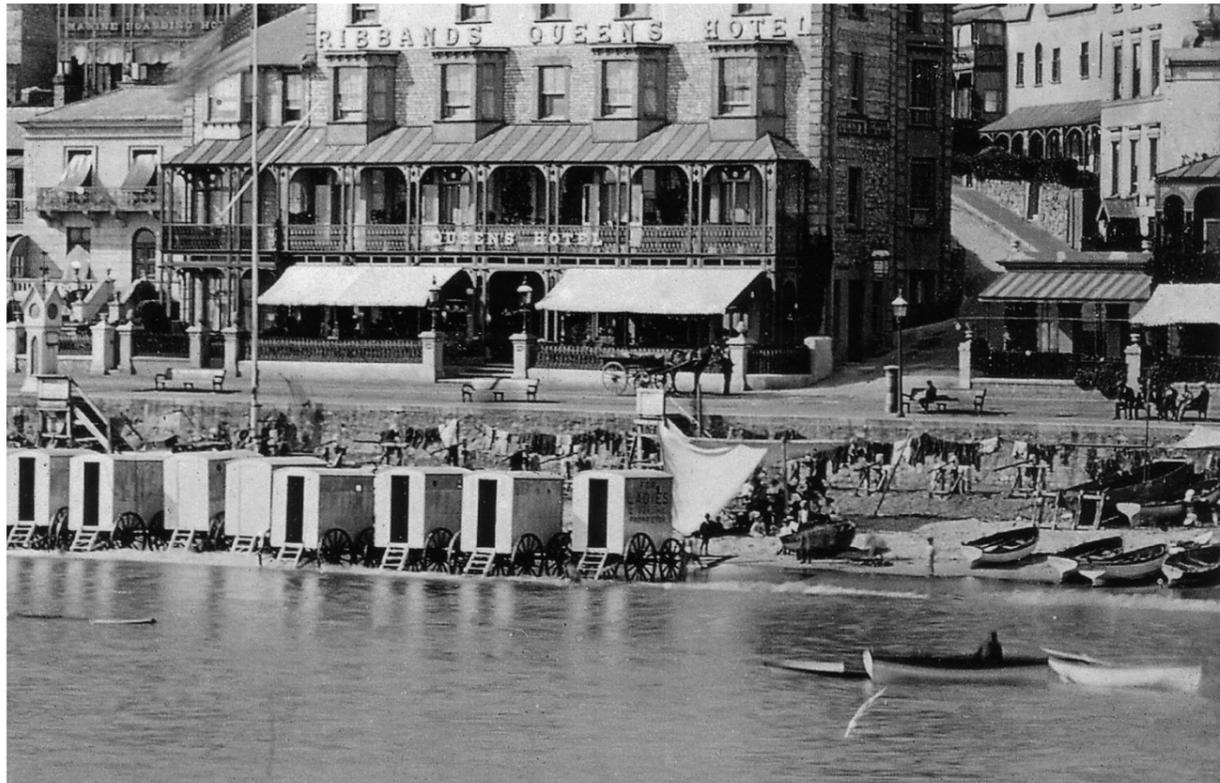


If you arrived by steamer on a fine day in the mid-1890s, this is the sight that would have greeted you as you disembarked and began to walk down the pier. Ventnor's rising terraces, facing nearly due south, could almost be mistaken for a resort on Italy's Amalfi coast. Indeed, some visitors called it England's *Positano*.



Ventnor around 1830 was a remote fishing settlement, a few cottages located mainly above the beach, a couple of inns and two farms. They were set within the spectacular coastal scenery of the Undercliff. About this time, an eminent physician, upon exploring the vicinity, registered that it might be an ideal place of winter residence for chesty invalids, especially for sufferers of consumption (tuberculosis). When he published his view, the area began rapidly to be transformed into a winter sanatorium. Over some thirty or forty years, a building boom brought into being the resort we know today.



Here you see the beach and the pier on a calm sunny day in the mid-1890s. Bathing machines are lined up awaiting custom. Ribband's Queen's Hotel has sun awnings out across its courtyard garden and the twin-funnelled paddle steamer, Dandie Dinmont, is just leaving the pier on an excursion. After the railway came to Ventnor in 1866, Ventnor slowly turned into a vibrant summer resort, complementing its existing attractions as a famous winter retreat for invalids.

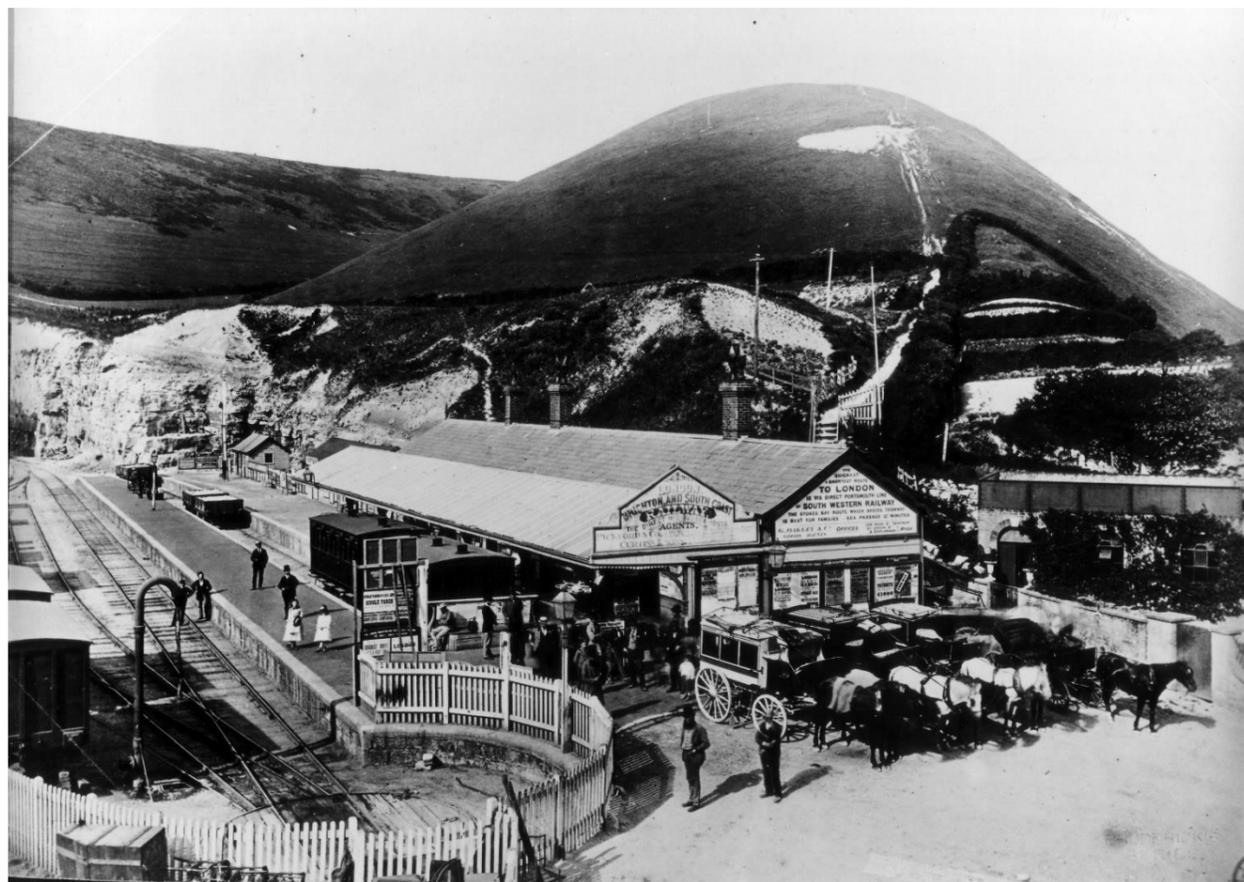


The Undercliff is some seven miles in length and at its western end is Blackgang, once among the foremost spectacles of this coast. It was a deep, shadowy ravine (a chine) that held endless fascination for Victorians. Today, it has all but disappeared, the result of severe coastal recession. Today's Blackgang theme park gives little idea of the dramatic spectacle that was once found here.

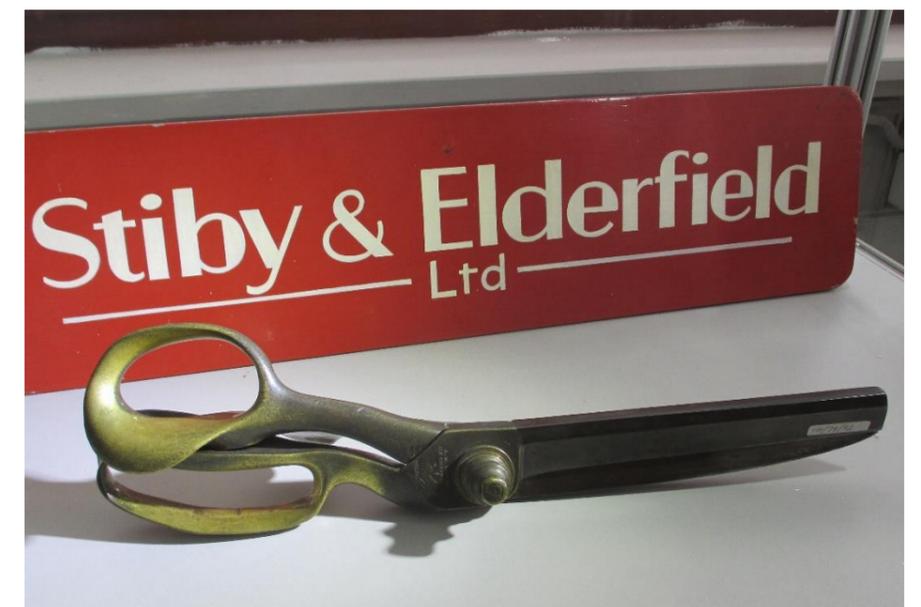
The south coast of the Island ('the back of Wight') can experience treacherous seas. This pair of engravings depicts the moment when the West Indiaman *Clarendon* foundered in a severe storm off Blackgang in October 1836 with heavy loss of life. The vessel was driven broadside on to the beach below the chine and quickly broke up.



Ventnor by 1900 had two railway stations, the first in the large sandstone quarry at the top of Grove Road (left picture) and the second behind Steephill Castle close to the end of Park Avenue (right picture). Both were termini, one for the line from Ryde via Sandown and Shanklin, the other a branch from the Newport-Sandown line at Merstone. The left image shows the station for the line from Ryde about 1870. The right image shows that for the branch from Merstone in 1932.



The museum has a varied collection of artefacts on display. The picture upper right shows the military despatch case that belonged to General Sir James Willoughby Gordon of Niton Undercliff, dating from the early 1800s. The picture below it is a pair of tailor's shears used by a high class Ventnor outfitter in the Victorian era.





Among some of the static exhibits in the museum is this part recreation of a late Victorian kitchen of a type that would have been found in an artisan household in the Longdown district of Ventnor. It has been 'furnished' with objects mostly lent by local residents.



There are two model railways in the museum. One is in 00 gauge and depicts the main Ventnor station, the terminus of the line from Ryde via Sandown and Shanklin. The other is in N gauge and shows the branch line from Merstone that terminated at Ventnor West (formerly Ventnor town).