

V&DLHS Receives £31,800 Heritage Lottery Fund Award

On Monday 23 January, the Society was awarded £31,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for our project “Living History – Reviving Ventnor Heritage Centre”. The 18-month project will start in February.

Leigh Geddes, Chair of the Society, said that “the award means that some of our wilder dreams can come true. The Heritage Centre is self-financing, receiving no outside funding, so this generous National Lottery funding means we can invest in technology and training with confidence. We will keep improving the Museum as a fascinating destination for visitors and researchers; we will have a new website. We can engage with a new audience – visitors who don’t know about the Heritage Centre and one-time residents who have moved away – as well as interesting a whole new generation in the fascination of their heritage. We will produce new exhibitions and slide shows, scanning some of our vast collection of local images, and we will invite people in and around Ventnor to add their own stories and pictures to a permanent collection.”

“We can all be volunteers in these new enterprises and it’s more vital than ever that we take them to our hearts, see how good they can be, and enjoy working together to make them a reality. If you are interested in seeing your unique fingerprints all over these new schemes, don’t be shy to ask if you can help: I can guarantee that it won’t be dull.” She noted that a round of applause was due to Society Secretary Lesley Telford and Treasurer Yvonne Hardy, who worked hard for months to make the bid a success.

According to Lesley, “we have always relied on the generosity of our members to sponsor things like exhibition screens and the new railings, but we realised that we had to invest in a new website, computers and scanners for the office and new equipment for the Museum, and needed to find some serious funding from somewhere. So we took the plunge and decided to apply for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.”

“Half way through the process we began to doubt whether it was worth putting in all this effort for something that we might not get, but our good friends on Ventnor Town Council persuaded us that we had a good case, and a good chance of being chosen for an award, so we soldiered on.” Lesley concluded that she nearly didn’t answer the call from an unknown number in late December, thinking it was probably a nuisance call. “Fortunately I picked the phone up, and heard ‘This is the Heritage Lottery Fund Awards Officer...’. What a wonderful Christmas present that was!”

Thanks to National Lottery players, the HLF invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about – from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and



LOTTERY FUNDED

buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. Ventnor Mayor Jason Mack, a Trustee of the Society, said: “We are delighted to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund; this is a real opportunity for us to build on the work and enthusiasm of our volunteers and make the Heritage Centre a jewel in Ventnor’s crown.”

– Jeffrey Mazo

More Stewards Needed

Evelyn Knowles, Volunteer Coordinator, has issued a plea for more volunteer museum stewards for 2017. We especially need someone who can take the Saturday afternoon shift on a regular basis, but we are short of stewards across the board. It’s easy, and a great opportunity to meet people and learn more about the area and the Heritage Centre. If you can’t do it yourself, ask a friend! Or volunteer and work a shift together. Shifts are three hours, morning or afternoon, and involve greeting visitors; selling tickets, publications and souvenirs; and helping answer visitor queries.

Books for Review

We need people to write short reviews of the following books for upcoming issues of the newsletter. In exchange, you get to keep the review copy.

Made on the Isle of Wight: From Torpedo Boat to Spacecraft by David L. Williams

Churchill’s Last Wartime Secret: The 1943 German Raid Airbrushed from History by Adrian Searle (about the raid on St Lawrence)

Please contact the newsletter editor, Jeffrey Mazo (details on back page) or leave a message for him at the Heritage Centre to sign up and get the book. Reviews should be about 200–300 words. The deadline for reviews for the next issue is 21 April.



Museum Volunteers: Delia Studt

Another in our series about ‘backroom volunteers’ who you don’t get to see in the Museum.

Delia Studt was a great help last winter, writing records of the artefacts and archives that were removed from the Museum and stored in the loft. Now she is undertaking the huge task of indexing the 30 photo albums that we inherited from Fay Brown.

First, the photos in each album must be numbered, then anything that Fay has written about them transcribed onto an Excel spreadsheet. If there is nothing from Fay, Delia adds something that describes the photo. The first eight albums have an average content of 95 pictures, so all 30 albums might have a total of about 2,850!

This is a new undertaking and there was much discussion about how it should be done through trial, error and an exchange of views. Delia has been very patient!

– Richard Downing



Delia Studt, V&DLHS Archive volunteer.

Fine Houses and Fair Villas of the East Wight Project

Robin McInnes has asked the V&DLHS to help compile a list of 10–20 buildings in our area that, in our opinion, make a significant contribution to the urban and rural landscapes of our part of the East Wight, including buildings of particular interest but which are not currently ‘Listed’. This is part of a Down to the Coast project intended to create a visual record of the architectural styles of buildings in the East Wight towns, villages and countryside.

The results will be made publicly available through an exhibition to be held in the East Wight in May 2016 and a 16-page full-colour booklet will accompany the exhibition.

The project will be working with selected East Wight schools, including the Island Free School, and pupils will be invited to photograph and write a short description about their favourite building. Prizes will be awarded to pupils who have submitted the best entries and their results will also be displayed at the exhibition in May 2017.

A group of volunteers and officers including Lesley Telford, Michael Freeman, Delia Studt and me is currently working on a list of local buildings to be included, and will research and write descriptions of each building on the final list. Society members are encouraged to send us their suggestions of buildings to include. We may be overlooking something significant!

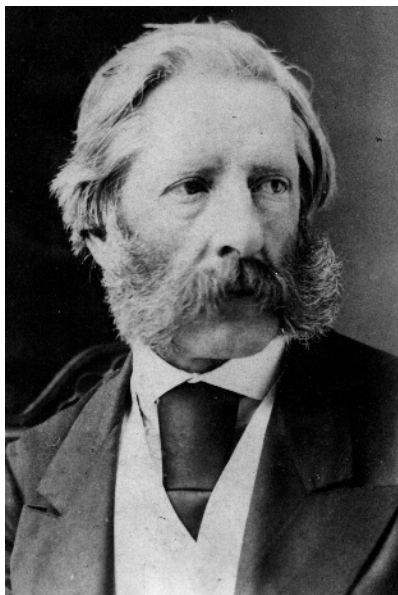
– Jeffrey Mazo

Upcoming Society Meetings and Speakers

27 January	Andy Butler – ‘Extracts from a Naturalist’s Journal’
24 February	Jonathan Collins – ‘Researching British Army Soldiers of the First World War: An Introduction’
31 March	Society AGM followed by presentation to be confirmed
28 April	Chris Phillips – ‘SS <i>Waverley</i> ’
26 May	Janet Griffin – ‘The Ventnor Connection’
30 June	Keith Bowers – ‘Imperial Exile: Haile Sellassie’
28 July	Richard Downing – ‘Ventnor Saved my Life’
August	No meeting
29 September	Roger Silsbury – ‘50 years of Railway Preservation on the Isle of Wight’
27 October	Mei Trow – Title to be confirmed
24 November	Jonathan Collins – ‘Researching Sailors and Royal Marines of the First World War’
December	No meeting

All meetings to be held at 7:30pm in the Masonic Hall, Grove Road, Ventnor, around the corner from the Heritage Centre

**Copy Date for Next Issue
Friday 21 April 2017**



Dr Arthur Hill Hassall. From the Heritage Centre archive.

Society Talk: Why did the Founder of the RNH Leave Town and Why did his Biographer go to Prison?

On 25 November, Dr Paul Bingham spoke to the Society on the biography of Dr Arthur Hill Hassall, who had been a personal hero for some time.

Hassall came to Ventnor in 1866 and founded the Royal National Hospital as a sanatorium in 1887. An expert in chest diseases, Hassall had himself had a severe illness and had to leave his practice. He found Ventnor's climate helped him on the road to recovery. He was a Senior Physician at the Royal Free Hospital as well as a pioneer microscopist with an interest in Basic Sciences, especially freshwater algae. He was notable for his work on drinking water purity and food and drug adulteration.

Hassall may have left Ventnor because he was unable to maintain sufficient income here; he had no family on the Island and he was overly involved in the day-to-day running of the RNH. Possibly he needed a better climate and a change of scenery. He went to France, Switzerland and Italy, where he died in San Remo in 1894.

Hassall's biographer Edwy Godwin Clayton, an analytical chemist, was a friend of Annie Kenney, a suffragette, and a letter from Clayton was found in her possession referring to his part in helping the movement. He was experimenting with bomb making, which of course was illegal, and had told Annie to burn the letter, which she failed to do! He was sentenced to 21 months in prison.

– Margaret Davidson

Society Talk: Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War

On 30 September, Stephen Fisher, a researcher with the Maritime Archaeology Trust in Southampton, spoke on the MAT's project dedicated to investigating, documenting and publicising sunken shipwrecks dating to 1914–1918 along the south coast from Cornwall to Kent. The project runs until 2018, and relies heavily on volunteers for archival research, photography and recording artefacts.

There are over 5,000 wrecks in UK waters dating to the First World War, with 1,100 in the project's study area, of which 620 have been identified in the field. Fisher presented selected case studies of some of the more interesting ones, including the German submarine UB-81 which hit a mine while patrolling to the south of the Isle of Wight, and the SS *Eleanor*, which was sunk with a cargo of depth charges and torpedoes about nine miles off St Catherine's Point, with only one survivor.

Around a dozen of the wrecks are within three miles of Ventnor. The closest, the SS *Polo*, lies only a mile off shore. Carrying coal from Hull to Alexandria, the *Polo* was torpedoed on 2 February 1918; the crew abandoned ship and were picked up by a fishing vessel three hours later. Three lives were lost. A toilet recovered from the *Polo* is on display at the MAT's Sunken Secrets exhibition at Fort Victoria in Yarmouth.

The MAT website at www.forgottenwrecks.org also has other case studies, an interactive map of the wreck sites, 3D models of some of the wrecks and other interesting material.

– Jeffrey Mazo

Society Talk: All Change, Or, History Before Your Very Eyes

On 28 October, Dr Delian Backhouse-Fry from the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeology Society and Southampton University spoke on what the most recent and exciting research on DNA tracing can tell us about human ancestry, evolution and dispersion.

In particular, the discovery in 2008 of a new human species scientists have named the Denisovians (after a Siberian cave where a tooth and finger bone were found) has radically changed our view of humanity's past. Unlike Neanderthals and archaic *Homo sapiens*, everything we know about the Denisovians comes from their DNA rather than their anatomy. They have been called "a genome in search of a fossil record".

Neanderthals, Denisovians, modern humans and perhaps other groups all appear to descend from a species called *Homo heidelbergensis*, which lived in Europe and Africa from 600,000–700,000 years ago. The paleolithic site at Priory Bay near St Helens where hand axes have been found, which used to be considered Neanderthal, is probably *H. Heidelbergensis*.

Modern Europeans and Asians have some Neanderthal DNA, while Africans and Australian Aborigines have none. Europeans, Asians and Melanesians all have some Denisovian DNA. These patterns can help scientists unravel the sequence and timing of human dispersals around the globe, but new discoveries are constantly being made, so the picture is still rather murky. However, it appears that the human story is both older and more complex than we imagined as little as two decades ago.

– Jeffrey Mazo

Notes and Queries

A column devoted to the asking and answering of member's questions about local historical facts and issues.

Q: I've been told that the old canoe lake on the seafront was shaped like a bottle (see photo) because it was sponsored by Burt's Brewery. The Society archives don't shed any light on this. Does anyone have any evidence one way or the other?

– Leigh Geddes

A: We've not been sent any more information, but this fits a common pattern of what folklorists call aetiological legends. For example, my Uni had a building sponsored by Edwin Land, who invented the Polaroid, and people claimed it was designed to look like a camera. The lake story might be true, but the fact that it fits this pattern makes me think it is unlikely to be, in the absence of positive evidence.

– Jeffrey Mazo

Send your queries and replies to jeffreymazo@hotmail.com or by post to the Society address (see back page).

Recent articles from the Society published in the *South Wight Chronicle*

In January 2015, the Editor of the *South Wight Chronicle* asked the Society to take on writing the weekly 'Local History' page. If you have a subject that you think would make an interesting story, please do let us know. The articles published since the last newsletter include:

'Listening to the Enemy: Ventnor's Y Station', Jeffrey Mazo, *SWC*, no. 1292, 29/9/16, p. 12.

'Listening to the Enemy: the Wrens' War in Ventnor', Jeffrey Mazo, *SWC*, no. 1293, 6/10/16, p. 8.

'Ventnor in 1729', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1294, 13/10/16, p. 12.

'October 1987 – Ventnor's Great Storm', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1295, 20/10/16, p. 12.

'Under the Floorboards', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1296, 27/10/16, p. 12.

'Recollections of a Ventnor Childhood 1: The Late 1930s', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1297, 3/11/16, p. 12.

'Recollections of a Ventnor Childhood 2: A young boy's memories of war', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1298, 10/11/16, p. 12.

'The First World War: a Ventnor Soldier on Imperial Service', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1299, 17/11/16, p. 12.

'A World War One Soldier Returns', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1300, 24/11/16, p. 8.

'The Early History of the Undercliff: Part 1', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1301, 1/12/16, p. 12.

'Early History of the Undercliff Part 2: Medieval', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1302, 8/12/16, p. 12.

'Steephill 1: From Cottage to Castle', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1303, 15/12/16, p. 12.

'St Boniface and the Christmas Tree', Jeffrey Mazo, *SWC*, no. 1304, 22/12/16, p. 12.

'Steephill Castle 2 'The Queen of the Undercliff'', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1305, 12/1/17, p. 12.

'Steephill Castle: the American years', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1306, 19/1/17, p. 12.

Nick Medlin

We are sorry to hear that Nick Medlin, who became a member of the Society for the first time last year, has died. The Society send their deepest sympathy to his wife Danni and their family.

New Members

The Society would like to welcome the following new members:

Bernard Schofield, Brixton, London

– Womble Wendy, Membership Secretary

Co-op Members: Support the Heritage Centre

The Co-op Local Community Fund gives 1% of everything members spend on Co-op branded products or services to local causes. If you or your friends are Co-op members, please set up or sign in to your account at www.coop.co.uk and go to 'See causes' under 'Support your Local Community' to select the Ventnor Heritage Centre. Your help is needed, and much appreciated.

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