

VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 33

JULY 2017

New Website Arrives

The new Society website is now available – at the same address as before: www.ventnorheritage.org.uk. Do pass on the news, especially to visitors or friends and family who don't live locally.

We are adding more pictures to the pages as we continue to scan our collection, and there is also an area on the website – 'Your Stories' – for people to add their own memories and pictures. New exhibitions are featured, as well as details of monthly meetings and other events. Copies of the newsletter will also be available for download.

The new website is designed to work well on smart phones and tablets as well as on computers and laptops, so visitors can easily check it when 'on the move' exploring the Island. Paid for by our Heritage Lottery Funding, it should attract more people to the Museum as well as encouraging interest in the history of our area.

For volunteers, the archive database will soon be available through the website, for remote access as well as in the Heritage Centre.

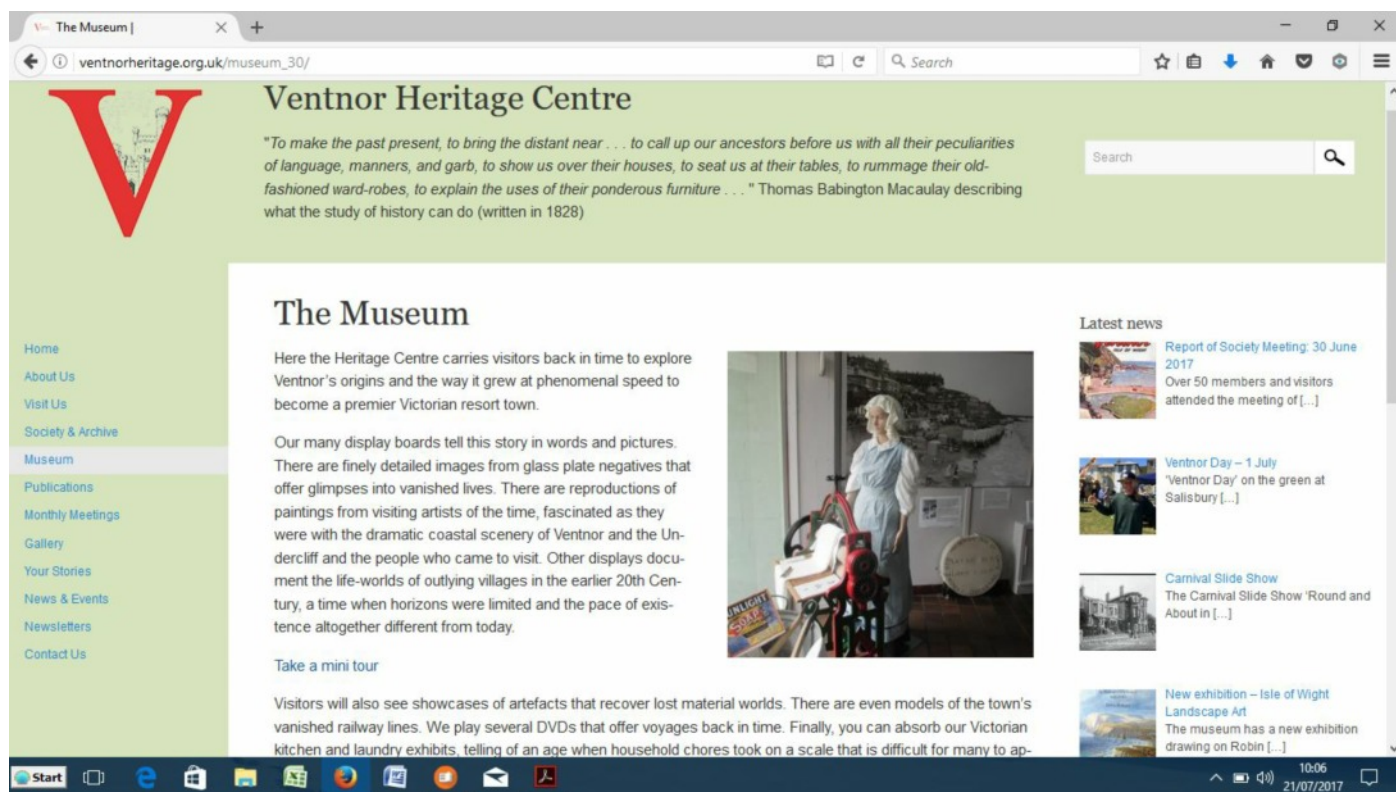
– Lesley Telford



Victorian Kitchen Display

Our new Victorian kitchen tableau continues to develop, with the arrival a few weeks ago of our manikin representing the young daughter of this artisan's household. Remember, for £30 you can become a sponsor of the tableau and have your name recorded on the display.

– Jeffrey Mazo



New Website:



www.ventnorheritage.org.uk



Some of our more robust artefacts from the Second World War were available on the table for people to handle and explore – ration books, notices, a gas mask and an Air Raid Warden’s helmet (which proved popular!).

Below: Chair Leigh Geddes and Deputy Chair Janet Griffin at the V&DLHS stand.



We are once again presenting the Carnival Slide Show, on Monday 7 August at 19:30 at St Catherine's Church on Church Street. This year we are showing 'Round and About in Ventnor', originally compiled by Fay Brown using postcards, photographs of buildings and scenery she took of the surrounding area. All are welcome.

Our Ventnor Fringe event this year is ‘Playing With History’, a collaboration with Ventnor Guitar Group, who will be playing live to accompany archive film of Ventnor and the Island.

The Guitarr Group came about in a surprisingly similar way to our society, which started when a group of Ventnor people attending a series of local history lectures decided they wanted to continue learning, and founded their own Local History Society. The Guitarr Group was originally a 'Guitarr Workshop', a local-council-funded adult education group tutored by local musician Dick Taylor. When the funding ended ten years ago, the members raised money for equipment and hire of practice rooms and have become a popular Ventnor institution, still learning together and attracting new members, as well as forming their own popular local bands.

'Playing with History' will be on Thursday 10 August from 19:30–21:30 at Holy Trinity Church on Trinity Road. Tickets £5 in advance from the Ventnor Exchange, 11 Church Street, or at the door.

Upcoming Society Meetings and Speakers

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	

**Copy Date for Next Issue:
Friday 20 October 2017**

Society Talk: Imperial Exile in Britain: Haile Selassie 1936–1940

On 26 May Keith Bowers described the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's early life until 1936, his four-year exile in Britain after Italy annexed his country, his return home after liberation in 1941, and his rule until he was deposed and executed by communist rebels in 1975.

The emperor spent his four-year exile living in Bath, but in 1938 he spent about a week on the Isle of Wight. He visited Osborne House, where he was shown around by Princess Beatrice (daughter of Queen Victoria); Wooton; Gatcombe House; Shanklin; and Ventnor.

During his stay in Ventnor he enjoyed the pier and esplanade, had tea with Henry De Vere Stacpoole at East Dene, and took a boat trip to Niton. He was given a warm and enthusiastic welcome by the local citizens.

The emperor's relations with the British government during and after his exile were often fraught, but in 1954 he revisited Bath, met Churchill and the Queen, and stayed in Buckingham Palace. He called his home in Addis Ababa 'Fairfield House' after his house in Bath, which is now a museum.

Keith's book *Imperial Exile: Emperor Haile Selassie in Britain 1935–1940* was published by Brown Dog Books in 2016.

– Jeffrey Mazo



The *Waverley* in the Solent. Colin Babb [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Society Talk: The Paddle Steamer *Waverley* – National Icon

On 28 April Chris Phillips spoke about the PS *Waverley*, the last sea-going paddle steamer anywhere in the world, whose upcoming September 2017 sailings in the Solent and around the Isle of Wight would be its 39th visit. An earlier *Waverley* had been lost at Dunkirk in 1940; the current *Waverley* was built by A&J Inglis of Glasgow and launched in October 1946 with a maiden voyage on 16 June 1947. After withdrawal from service by Caledonian McBrayne in 1973, it was sold to the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society for £1. The ship's two-stage refit in 2000 and 2003, funded by a £7 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, was the most complex maritime project in the UK.

– Jeffrey Mazo

Society Talk: The Ventnor Connection

On 30 June V&DLHS Vice-Chair Janet Griffin's talk, entitled 'The Ventnor Connection', focused on her local connections through her husband Ralph's family. The Griffins had been connected to the Ventnor area for over 250 years; Ralph's four-times great-grandfather was baptised at Godshill Church. Janet showed a series of Weller drawings of local village churches from the Museum archives.

In the 1881 Census some of the family lived in Lowtherville Road, and the 1903 Ventnor Red Book included many familiar names on their road. Ralph's grandparents came from the Wandsworth area and opened a Boarding House in Victoria Street, advertised in 1950s editions of the Ventnor Guide.

– Margaret Davidson



Left: Emperor Haile Selassie landing from Spencer's motor boat at Ventnor, assisted by Vivian York. Associated Press photo from the Society Archive.

New Isle of Wight History Books: Industry and Invasion

Two recent books shed light on very different aspects of Island history. David Williams's *Made on the Isle of Wight* is broad in scope, covering over two hundred years first of marine and later automotive and aviation invention, innovation and industry on the Wight. Adrian Searle's *Churchill's Last Wartime Secret* focuses on a single event: a long-rumoured German commando raid on the RAF radar facility in St Lawrence.

Williams provides a wealth of detail on specific Island inventions, companies and individuals but this is more than a laundry list; he weaves these strands together into a coherent picture of industrial development and social context. The book is heavily illustrated. Although little if any of the manufacturing Williams explores was Ventnor-based, some current Ventnorians will have worked in these industries.

Of greater local interest is Searle's attempt to prove, using local oral history and rumour, written records and in particular two second-hand accounts from German soldiers who claim to have taken part, that "there can be little doubt" that a German force landed at St Lawrence to capture radar equipment in summer 1943.

Searle's evidence is suggestive, but not conclusive. In fact, his contrasting of (unfounded) rumours of raids all over Britain to the alleged "raid on the radar" weakens rather than (as he argues) strengthens his case. For those of us

living locally who would like the story to be true, it is necessary to take a particularly critical approach to the evidence – and I think Searle would agree. The story is intriguing, but remains unproven. At this late date, and after Searle's extensive research into British and German sources, it is likely to remain so. Nevertheless this book offers a fascinating and compelling look at a bit of our local history.

– Jeffrey Mazo

David L. Williams, *Made on the Isle of Wight: From Torpedo Boat to Spacecraft* (Stroud: The History Press, 2016). £20.00, 224 pp.

Adrian Searle, *Churchill's Last Wartime Secret: The 1943 German Raid Airbrushed from History* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2016). £19.99; 192 pp.

Heritage Open Days

Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture, bringing together over 2,500 organisations, 5,000 events and 40,000 volunteers. Every year for four days in September, places across the country throw open their doors to celebrate their heritage, community and history.

As part of this festival, the Heritage Museum will be open on Sunday 10 September from 13:30 to 16:30, admission free.

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

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:

'More about the Isolation Hospital and the Globe Hotel', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1320, 27/4/17, p. 8.

'The Bathing Machines of Castle Haven', Lesley Telford, *SWC* no. 1321, 4/5/17, p. 8.

'Wheeler's Bay: "That Which Once Was"', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1322, 11/5/17, p. 8.

'All the Trappings of Conspicuous Wealth', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1323, 18/5/17, p. 8.

'Barney Wild, a Ventnor Character', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1324, 25/5/17, p. 8.

'La Falaise – A Lost Chapter', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1325, 1/6/17, p. 8.

'La Falaise 2: David White Recalls Life there in the 1940s and 1950s', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1326, 8/6/17, p. 8.

'On the Trail of a Pair of Scissors', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1327, 15/6/17, p. 8.

'Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1328, 22/6/17, p. 8.

'Vanished Ventnor: Fairlawn', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1329, 29/6/17, p. 8.

'Fairlawn Rebuilt by Daniel Day and Son', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1330, 6/7/17, p. 8.

'Customer Service in Another Age', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1331, 13/7/17, p. 8.

'Ventnor by Gaslight: "Let there be Light"', *SWC*, no. 1332, 20/7/17, p. 8.

'Ventnor by Gaslight – 1890s High Street', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1333, 27/7/17, p. 8.