



Ventnor Fire Brigade – The Early Years: 1847 to 1923

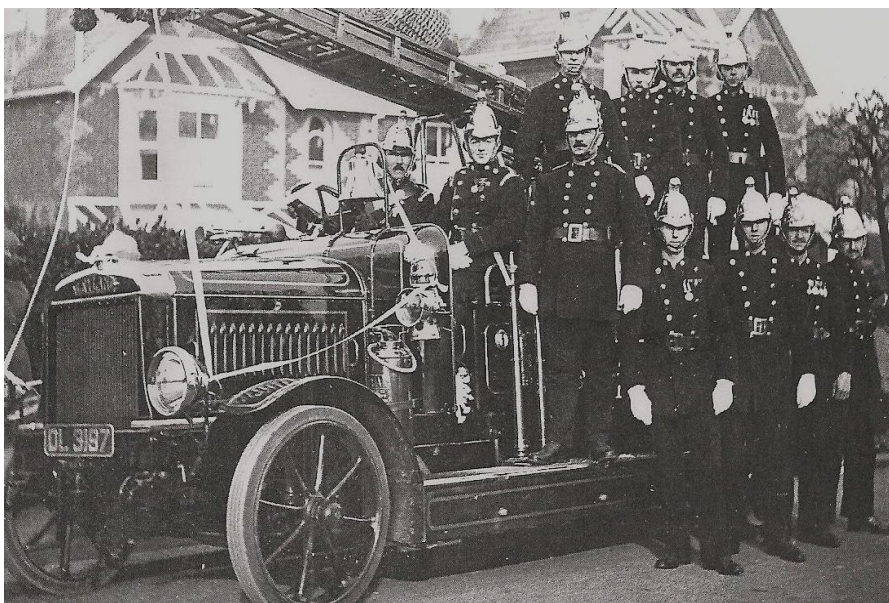
During the early 19th century, Ventnor grew rapidly from a mill and a few other buildings to hundreds of properties and in fact, it was a severe fire at the Mill in 1847 that prompted the creation of a local fire brigade. The town's Improvement Committee decided to take action and purchased 30 buckets and 2 ladders so that they would be better prepared for any future incidents!

Things stayed that way for another 29 years until the town's Local Board obtained a horse-drawn hand pump in 1876 which was manned by a dozen volunteers. (You can see the twelve firemen and the support staff necessary to maintain the equipment and horses in a state of readiness 24 hours a day). This new pump was in constant use but it really came into its own on November 22nd 1902 when a large fire broke out at the Star Inn and mill at Niton at about 5 o'clock in the morning. A horseman was despatched immediately to alert the fire brigade at Ventnor while the proprietor and many villagers tried to control the outbreak with buckets of water. The Ventnor crew arrived at 7.30, but were unable to prevent the pub being completely destroyed. However, the action of the firemen and their equipment saved several nearby buildings.



In 1910 the Local Board (now called Ventnor Urban District Council) bought 2 more horse-drawn pumps, one equipped with a telescopic fire escape which could extend to 50 feet. At this time there were 24 volunteer firemen manning these pumps who were called to action by a bell mounted on top of the fire station, which was then in Market Street.

The year 1923 saw the arrival at Ventnor of the Island's first motorised engine costing the princely sum of £1,581 – a lot of money at the time. The new engine, registered DL3197, was a 48hp Leyland with a 40-gallon water tank and the capacity to deliver 400gpm. It was originally delivered with solid rubber tyres much to the discomfort of the crew, but later, the wheels were upgraded to include pneumatic tyres giving a much smoother ride. Upon delivery of the new engine, the Ventnor brigade were considered to be '*at the highest level of fire-fighting on the Island and the excellence of the firemen was beyond praise*'. This faithful old engine remained in service until 1947.



This adjacent photograph, taken on February 27th 1924, shows Ventnor's first motorised fire engine, complete with white ribbons, and its crew immaculately turned out, for the wedding of one of their colleagues, Charlie Coleman.

The driver is Capt. Bob Spencer and seated next to him is 1st Officer Tom Pearson. Standing next to Tom are Walt Butt, with Charlie Whiteman, Alf Beavis, Jo Jacobs & Bart Brown on the road. Standing at the back are (L to R), Sooty Humphries, Doughy Baker, Larky Howell & Fred Richards.