



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Ventnor Fire Brigade – 1924 to 1947



Not long after delivery of their new Leyland engine (DL3197) in 1923, the brigade was called to a large fire in a shop called "The Toy Box" in Ventnor High Street on January 4th 1924. Thanks to the response speed that the new equipment provided, the firemen rescued two people from the roof of the shop thanks, in part, to the mounted ladder included as standard equipment.

In 1925, Newport still had horse-drawn engines and when a fire broke out at the Vectis Stone site on St. George's Down, near Newport, the Ventnor crew responded in their motor powered engine and arrived at the outbreak before the Newport crews arrived in their horse-drawn engine! During the 1920s and the 1930s, the Ventnor brigade attended many serious fires at places like Luccombe Country House between Bonchurch and Shanklin, Week Farmhouse and barns along the Whitwell Road, the Royal Hotel garage and Drakes clothes shop in Ventnor High Street. On many occasions, the Ventnor firemen were discussed at council meetings where it was said 'Ventnor has the highest level of fire fighting on the Island and the excellence of the firemen was beyond praise'.



When war broke out in 1939, Ventnor Fire Brigade consisted of eight firemen (pictured, left, outside their new fire station in South Street), with a further sixteen volunteer firemen and two women messengers.

During the war the firemen wore steel helmets (commonly called "tin hats"), similar to those worn by the military. 1st Officer Tom Pearson (my Grandad) can be seen in the front row with shoulder epaulettes and a white band on his tin hat.

At this time, the Ventnor brigade were equipped with two fire engines and six trailer pumps.

During the war, the administration of the Ventnor brigade was taken over by the National Fire Service and became part of region 14

where it remained until 1946, when control was returned to the VUDC. At the end of the war there were twelve firemen with one engine. (*DL3197 – still going strong!*) In 1948 the Ventnor Fire brigade was taken over by the Isle of Wight County Council to become part of the Isle of Wight Fire Brigade controlled from the Newport headquarters.

List of Officers in Charge of the Ventnor Fire Station up to the year 2000:

- 1876 – 1881 **Captain J Frampton**
- 1881 – 1896 **Captain F Rennick**
- 1896 – 1899 **Captain J Baker**
- 1899 – 1922 **Captain W G Pearson**
- 1922 – 1941 **Captain C Coleman**
- 1941 – 1946 **Captain P R Spencer**
- 1946 – 1948 **Sub-Officer M Wheeler**
- 1948 – 1965 **Station Officer G Pitts**
- 1965 – 1984 **Station Officer R Bates**
- 1984 – 2000 **Station Officer B Burden**

Major incidents in the Ventnor area since 1950:

- 1951 - 55 High Street Ventnor and St. Lawrence Hall Hotel
- 1952 – Nutkins Country House at Niton
- 1962 – Dakota crash on St. Boniface Down
- 1967 – Bonchurch Manor
- 1978 – Ventnor Town Hall
- 1983 – The Beach Hotel on the Esplanade
- 1984 – The Royal Sandrock Hotel at St Lawrence
- 1984 – Man trapped down well in "the Grove" in Grove Road
- 1985 – Ventnor Pier
- 1988 – King Charles I Hotel

Colin Beavis, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*. Photograph from Society archives (Grateful thanks to Brian Burden (Station Officer from 1984 to 2000) who supplied me with most of this information.)



Ventnor & District Local History Society is a registered charity, working to preserve and record the history of our area and make it available to the public in the Ventnor Heritage Centre.
 The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

www.ventnorheritage.org.uk / telephone 855407
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