



Ventnor West station in 1950



A fine view of Ventnor West station in the summer of 1950, but it is almost as if train operations have already ceased, for there is not a single item of rolling stock in view. The goods yard crane is visible still, along with the goods shed. But the second platform (to the right) is well overgrown with grass and weeds and there does not appear to be anyone waiting on the station, although the deep shadows may be obscuring people from sight. In fact, the portent of closure is not misplaced, for in July of that year, Island railway staff discovered on a visit to Waterloo that steps were already being taken towards the withdrawal of services. There was a heavy backlog of maintenance on the branch and the poor traffic receipts made large-scale expenditure no longer viable. Over winter seasons, it was not unusual for some of the eight daily return services to and from Merstone to run empty of passengers. It was rather a different story in high summer, but even then the passenger numbers on any one train movement rarely breached 100.

The final closure of the branch came on 13th September 1952, the event recorded with some gusto by the *Isle of Wight Mercury*. Hundreds packed Ventnor West station to witness departure of the last train at 7.57 p.m. In the villages of St. Lawrence, Whitwell and Godshill, it seemed as if their entire populations turned out for the farewell. An epitaph exhibited in the train read: 'If half the people who are interested in this line today had been as interested for the past two years, we should not be closing'.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman. The picture forms one of the many recent donations to the Heritage centre from Jill Wearing. The traffic figures and information about maintenance are taken from Peter Paye's fine monograph: *The Ventnor West Branch* (Wild Swan Publications, 1992)



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.

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