



Steephill from the Air



This fine aerial view, probably dating from the 1930s, has the famous Castle at its centre, Ventnor West railway station upper left, with Castle Road extending above it. Moving right across the picture is Park Avenue with its line of detached residences and, opposite, Ventnor Park itself, the main park walkway just visible.



Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the Castle came to be renowned for the luxuriance of its gardens, filled with exotic plantings. Royalty were among regular visitors, keen to see the giant fig trees in the fruit garden, the tender vines that seemed rampant, and the kitchen gardens that were astonishingly productive. By the time this picture was taken, the trees in the garden had matured very considerably to form almost a forest canopy, while the fruit and vegetable gardens, along with the ornamental walks, had become shadows of what they once were. The Steephill Castle estate was no longer in the ownership of wealthy entrepreneurs who had the resources to employ garden staff on a large scale. By 1930, it was in the hands of the Friendship Holidays Association and largely operating 'hand-to-mouth'. After use as a school during the Second World War, it slowly became derelict and was demolished in the 1960s.

Ventnor West station had already suffered that fate, closing to all traffic in 1952. Indeed, this 1930s photo shows a complete absence of rolling stock at the site. One can idly speculate that, had the railway branch remained open and the Castle survived the 1960s, the whole compendium might now be among the Island's star visitor destinations.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



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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