

CARNIVAL

Carnival is popular all over the world, and Ventnor is no exception.

Ventnor's first carnival in 1889 was a torchlight procession of ladies and gentlemen in fancy dress, followed by a Masquerade Ball. It was such a success that it became an annual event, attracting crowds of thousands.

So each August, the town comes to a standstill to enjoy a parade of music and elaborate costumes with tableaux created by local groups and businesses, and a Carnival Queen chosen for the year and paraded round the town with her retainers.

However there has always been another, more subversive side to 'Carnival'. Those taking part can step outside their day to day lives and turn the world upside down, dressing up, assuming different characters, and poking fun at established order and authority. It is a feast of dressing up, foolery, and music, perhaps best symbolised by the much loved Ventnor Comic Jazz Band.

Here we use some of the photographs from our collection to celebrate the first hundred years of Ventnor Carnival.



1894 – ‘Battle of the Flowers’

We have no photographs of the first Carnivals held in the town, but we do have the ones here of the 'Battle of the Flowers' held in Ventnor during 'Fete Week' in April 1894. A stand was erected opposite the Royal Hotel to accommodate 1500 people and the week was apparently a phenomenal success.

On the evening of the parade the Golf Club held a ball at the Town Hall, and on the Saturday there was a Tennis Tournament and a Cyclists' Masquerade - cyclists parades were a very popular feature of all the fetes and carnivals held at the turn of the century.



Growing up with the Carnival

Children and dressing up go naturally together, and both have always been a popular part of the Carnival. In 1898 *'Children, led by the Ventnor Volunteer Band, processed round the tennis courts and then through the town to collect a basket of sweets'*, and such parades became a regular event.

These photographs show young Violet Leitch growing up. She first sturdily represents her country as Britannia in about 1901, then moves into popular entertainment, and finally, a couple of years later, appears wholeheartedly endorsing tobacco products.



Early 1900s - huge Carnival crowds

In the early 1900s Ventnor Carnival attracted huge crowds. Special trains were laid on to bring visitors into the town, and in 1911 it was estimated that about twelve to thirteen thousand people attended. That year the Carnival featured a giant fish, shown here being drawn along Belgrave Road, past what is now the Wellington Hotel.

On the right a throng of people are moving down Belgrave Road in the other direction, past the Marine Hotel. The flags fluttering above their heads along with the Union Jack are those of Japan, France, and the USA, the allies in the first world war, so this is just before or after the Great War, when there were no carnivals.



Cycle parades

Cycle parades and gymkhanas were hugely popular in the 1900s, perhaps because they were open to everyone to take part; horses, which drew the big tableaux, were expensive, but almost everyone had a bicycle.

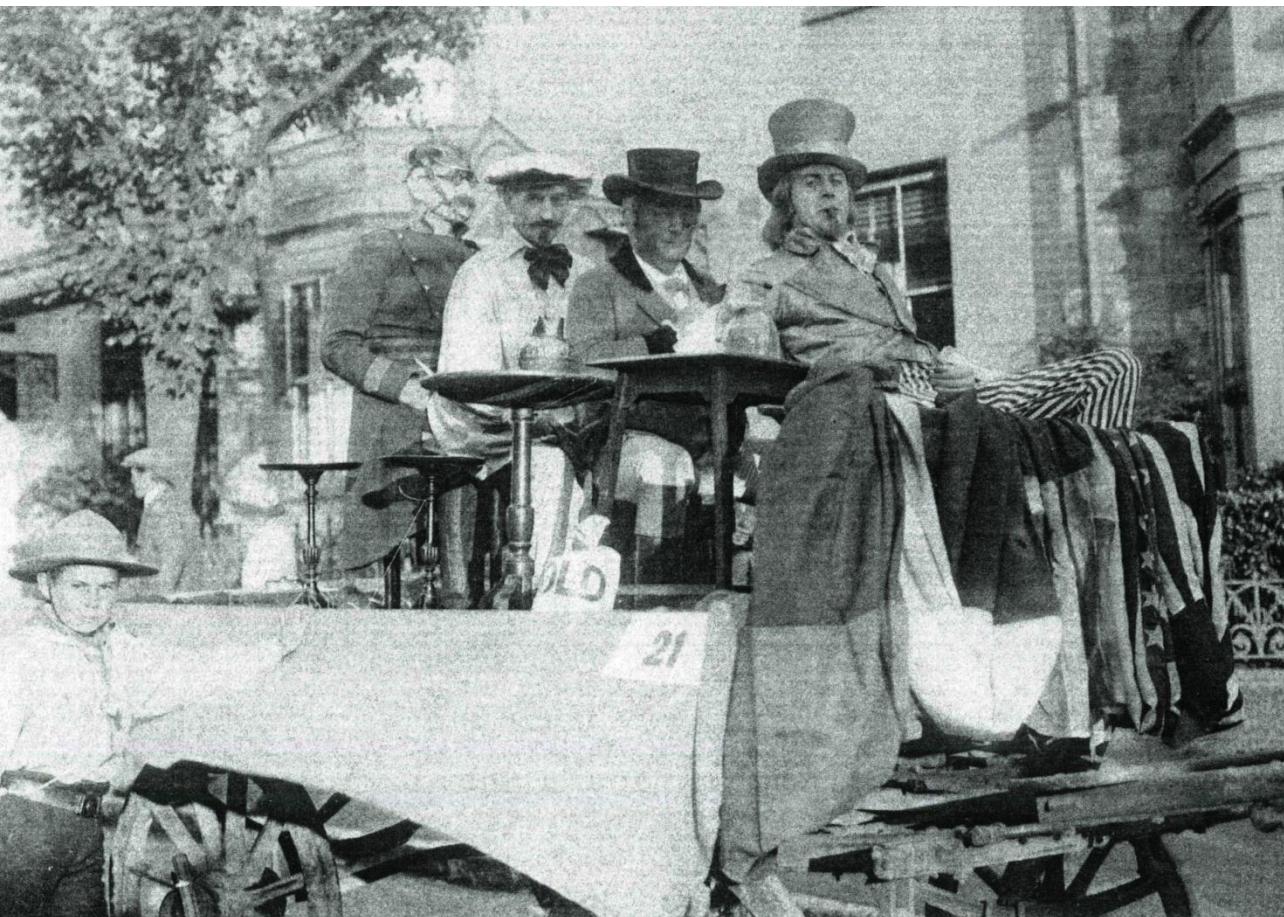
The magnificent costumes in the photographs on the right are from a cycle gymkhana held in 1905 in Ventnor Park, which also featured the parade below, led by an elegant couple beneath a parasol, although the lady looks a little unsteady.



1914-19: war and peace

The Carnival planned for September 1914 was cancelled, and there were no Carnivals during the war.

Carnival returned in 1919 with celebrations of 'Victory', the flags of the victorious allies displayed alongside the Union Jack, and 'Peace', and another cycle parade featuring President Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' proposed to preserve world peace. Sadly, the peace celebrated in 1919 only lasted twenty years. The picture below is harder to understand – perhaps the punitive 1918 peace treaty, with US, England, France and Germany at a table.



1920s – special trains and ‘King Carnival’

The 1920s saw special trains running to Ventnor, bringing thousands into the town, while many more walked from Shanklin and Sandown. In 1922 two visitors arrived by plane to attend the celebrations, making a safe landing in Mr Russell's field at Weeks Farm.

Fairs in Ventnor Park had all the usual attractions - shooting galleries, coconut shies, and, in 1924, 'the Woman with Only a Head'. The grand processions were noisy and popular affairs, as the notice below indicates, led by bands like the Band of the 14/20th Hussars (1924). 'King Carnival' was introduced in 1923, joined in 1926 by a 'Carnival Queen'. By the 1930s the King had gone, but the Queens of course have continued.

Cycle parades still featured, but the one shown below and held in 1919, the year after the Great War ended, was clearly a more anarchic event than the Edwardian parades held a few years earlier.



VENTNOR CARNIVAL,
22, 23, and 24th AUGUST.

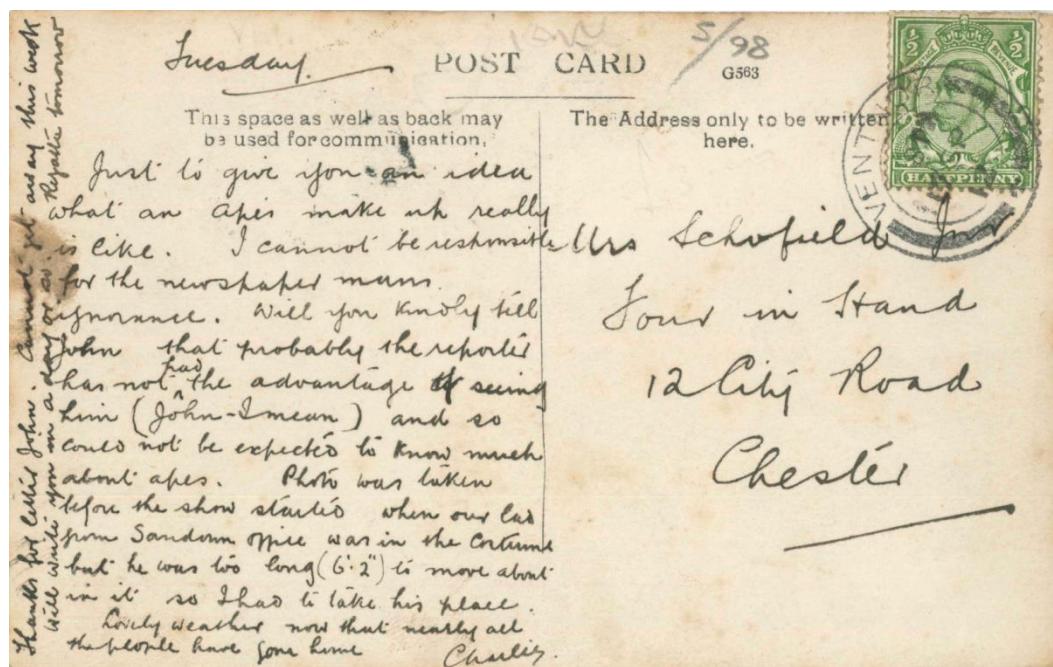
NOTICE is hereby given that at the
request of the ISLE OF WIGHT
CONSTABULARY,
the Sale and use of
BLADDERS in
connection with the
above event will be
absolutely prohibited

The public are requested NOT to
THROW STREAMERS across horses
in the Carnival Procession, in order to
prevent possible accidents.

Postcards from the Carnival

The carnival was so popular with visitors to the Island that postcards were on sale featuring the costumes and the procession so that people could send them to their family at home.

Many of the photographs in this display are taken from these postcards – Fay Brown had a collection of them which she bequeathed to the Society. The messages on the postcards give intriguing – and sometimes mysterious – glimpses into the lives of the senders, like this one sent by ‘Charlie’ on 17 September 1912 to his family in Chester.



*Just to give you an idea what an ape's makeup really is like. I cannot be responsible for the newspaper man's ignorance. Will you kindly tell John that probably the reporter has not had the advantage of seeing him (- John I mean) and so could not be expected to know much about apes. Photo was taken before the show started when our lad from Sandown office was in the costume but he was too long (6 ft 2) to move about in it so I had to take his place. Lovely weather now that nearly all the people have gone home.
Charlie.*

The 1930s

Carnival continued to pull in the crowds – in 1935 over three thousand people attended the 'Battle of the Flowers'; the weather was glorious, and apparently many people came from the mainland for the Carnival and took prizes in the Fancy Dress. In 1936 Sharpes' float was 'Time Flies', with 1836 on one side, 1936 on the other.



In 1939 the Carnival Queen, Gwen Taylor, had been selected, and arrangements were well in hand when on 28th August it was reluctantly decided to abandon the event. Six days later Britain was at war and there were no more Carnivals for ten years.

Don't nag your Heart!
It must be
GENASPRIN
The SAFE Brand

DAILY SKETCH

THURSDAY, AUGUST 21, 1930. Head Office, 200, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1. Phone: Museum 9841.

£250 for First Five in Ebor Handicap.

WAN... 100 PERSONS
(either sex) who have the ambition to earn a nice sum in their spare time. Would you like some crisp £1 notes to spend just as you please? Then, if you are enterprising, you can have the thing you so much want this very Christmas by selling Private Christmas Cards to your friends and acquaintances. This is the way. Address a postcard to us asking for one of the beautiful Sample Books. This book and full particulars will be sent you by return of post quite free of charge. Remuneration most generous, and many valuable prizes in addition. Apply FIRTH, GRAHAM & Co., Ltd. (Dept. F.145), Corporation St., Accrington.

HOLIDAY CROWDS WATCH VENTNOR CARNIVAL



Queer figures.



Holiday crowds at Ventnor watching the Queen of the Carnival pass through the streets yesterday



A pretty Japanese effort in the children's fancy dress parade.



Carnival competitors parading in fancy dress.



A youthful reveller's impersonation of Carnara.



In merry mood and carnival dress.—(Daily Sketch photographs.)

STOP PRESS NEWS

BRITISH FAMILY IN CAR CRASH
Members of a British family whose name is given as Banna were injured when their motor-car struck the parapet of the bridge over the river Varone at Antibes, France, yesterday, and crashed into the stream.
Mr. Banna and his wife received head injuries and their niece a fractured collar-bone. They are in hospital. Their two children escaped.

Printed and Published by The DAILY SKETCH and SUNDAY GRAPHIC, Ltd., 200, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and Withy Grove, Manchester.—THURSDAY, AUGUST 21, 1930.

1949 Carnival returns after the war

There were no Carnivals during the 1939-45 war, or immediately afterwards. Ventnor had been on the front line, with the town under frequent attack by raiders aiming for the radar station on the downs, and it took time for the town to recover. But in 1949 a group of local people calling themselves 'The Wardens' set out to revive the event and organised the first post-war Carnival.

Iris Woodford won a prize for her demurely glamorous 'Powder Puff' costume, and there was an emphasis on family life with the Upper Ventnor float 'The Snow Queen' filled with children. The 1950s were around the corner, and lorries were starting to pull the floats, but the Marshalls, shown here in Dudley Road, were of course still on horseback.



'Nova Espero' - New Hope

The popular and symbolic centrepiece of the 1949 carnival parade was 'Nova Espero' ('New Hope' in Esperanto) the 20 ft boat built by brothers Colin and Stan Smith who sailed across the Atlantic in her from Canada earlier that year. Photos show their triumphal arrival in Yarmouth in June, preparing for the Carnival parade, Colin on the Esplanade with Council Leader, and eager autograph hunters along the Carnival route.



The Smith brothers cross the Atlantic

Colin and Stan Smith trained in Canada as RAF pilots during the second world war. After the war, they both worked at Saunders Roe in Cowes, until the summer of 1949 when they returned to Canada, built the 'Nova Espero' (Esperanto for 'New Hope') and sailed it back to England across the Atlantic. These are Colin's words.

"She was a half decked boat, twenty foot long, We designed her on the way across on the Aquitania. I'd been doing design work down at Saunders Roe. Stan had as well. We'd get down in our cabin and work on it, and the lines were all ready by the time we got to the other side. She was a tough little boat, clinker built and a hundred weight of cast iron ballast on the keel underneath.

We tried to figure out what we needed. Sponsorship, we'd never heard of that. We had lockers along the side of the boat and got loads of ships biscuits, far more than we needed, I suppose, and tinned stuff and powdered milk and lots of sugar. Couldn't do without that. We had twenty eight gallons of water I think. We had no bunks, just sleeping bags, laid out on the cabin floor. I'd say we were probably wet most of the time.

We had some pretty nasty weather at times. We had a little portable radio we hoped to get time checks or weather checks or something like that. Didn't get a peep out of it from the time we left so we dropped it over the side and that was that. We had a little yacht sextant, and an aircraft compass which wasn't actually mounted in the boat at all - we used to carry it around with us. We were concerned when the weather got nasty and it did at times too. We had a little loose primus stove we used to hold between our knees, and a little pressure cooker. We used that a lot.

We didn't do too bad you know."

(This extract is reproduced with thanks from 'Yarmouth and Thorley Voices' <http://voices.onthewight.com/>)

The 1950s – peace and nostalgia

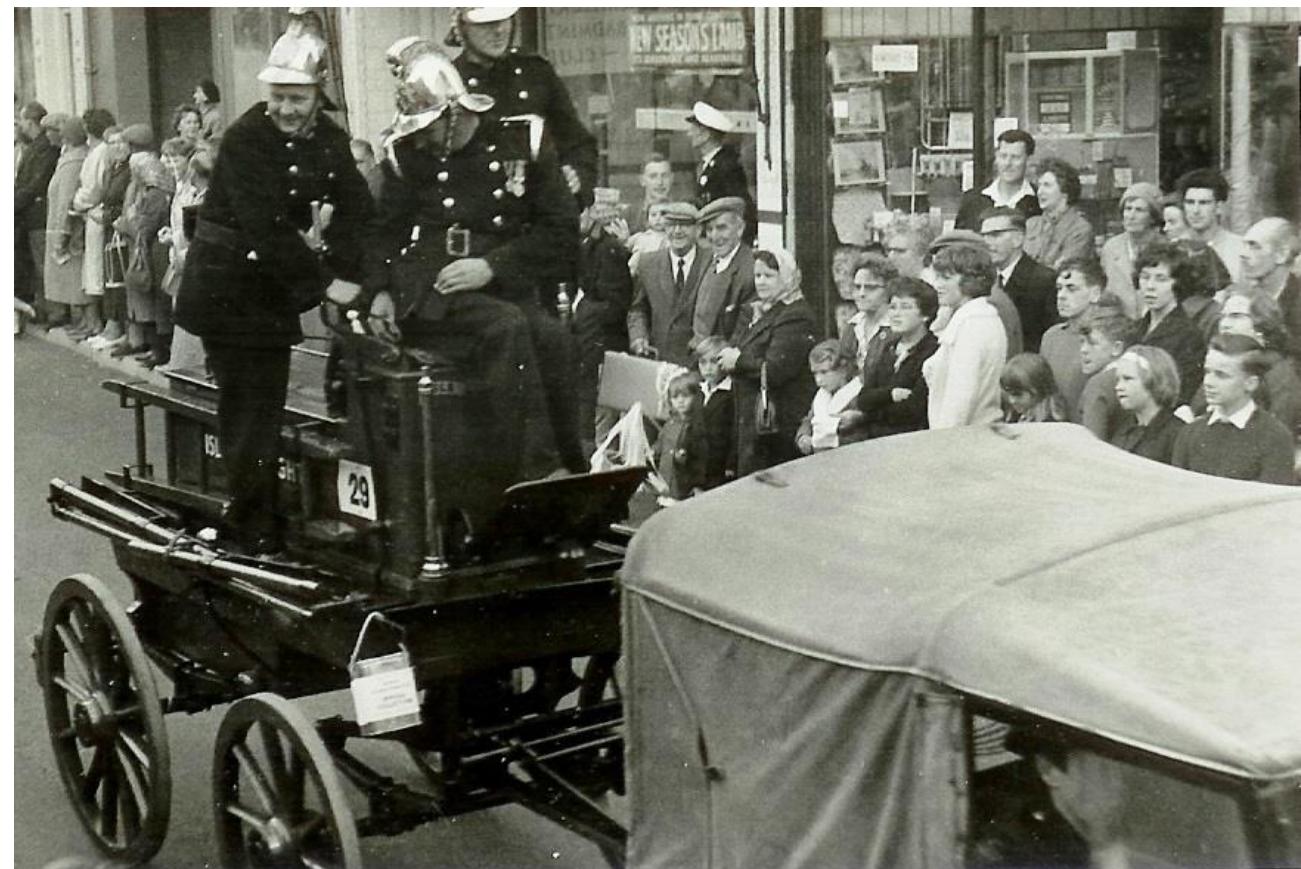
Ventnor Carnivals in the early 1950s seem to have delighted in the traditional. The ballet Swan Lake, Robin Hood and his merry men, Sir Walter Raleigh throwing down his cloak for Queen Elizabeth – and, summing it all up, the Sharpes' float in 1951 entitled 'Those were the Days'.



The 1960s 'You don't see sights like this every day!'

The Ventnor Fire Brigade used to put in an entry to the procession every year. – they always had a Green Goddess at the front and a proper Fire Engine at the back, so if a call out occurred they could get away easily. In 1964 their float had the firemen dressed as Swan Lake Ballerinas and – yes, there was a call out!

One visitor was heard to say to his wife 'Let's come to Ventnor again tomorrow, we don't see sights like this every day!'



Clockwise from above:
Ventnor Fire Brigade
in 1963; Ventnor Fire
Brigade in 1964;
Skimbo leading the
Jazz band in 1961.

The 1950s – back to normal

Ventnor celebrated the return to normal life, with big crowds in the park and at the cricket ground and along the route of the procession, the 'Mystery Man' competition and the Dagenham Girl Pipers marching the streets of Ventnor. There was lots of sunshine, lots of rain, and, of course, dressing up for all ages.



The Mystery Man.

Can you recognise "Mr. Ventnor," the Carnival mystery man? Challenge him correctly with your Carnival programme in your hand. "Mr. Ventnor," who will be mingling with the Carnival crowds will hand 10/6 to the first person giving him the following correct challenge: "You are 'Mr. Ventnor.' I claim the Wardens' Carnival Prize." Make sure you get the challenge correct and don't be put off. Keep trying.



Carnival politics

Current political events often featured in the Carnival, and the photograph on the right, dating from about 1910, features the message 'Votes for Women', and appears to be a serious tribute to the women's suffrage campaign.

A event now largely forgotten in this country was the subject of Crinages' float in the 1951 Carnival: the Persian Oil Crisis of June that year, and the 'Bedside Conference' which President Dr Mossadeq had held with British and American politicians, as described in this contemporary report in an Australian newspaper.



PERSIA HAS JOLT FOR RUSSIA - PAGE II

LOCAL AGENTS FOR THE TOYNES ROTARY CLOTH LINE HOISTS Stan Newton's

THE BARRIER MINER

Registered G.P.O. Sydney. [61th Year of Publication] Telephone 423

Vol. LXIV—No. 17,491 This newspaper is a subscriber to the Australian Associated Press which provides the Central News of 100 words Broken Hill, Saturday, June 23, 1951. Price 3d.

PERSIAN DISPUTE MOVING TO CRISIS

London, June 22.—Anglo-Iranian Oil Company officials in Persia have decided to defy the first direct order they receive from the take-over commission.

Masters of tankers have been ordered by the company to refuse to sign Persian Government receipt forms for oil from the Abadan refinery. The last to refuse was Captain G. C. Dobson, of the tanker British Admiral.

Persia has retaliated by refusing to issue clearance papers to the ships. It is believed the receipt controversy will bring about a shutdown.

Authoritative sources in London said tonight that no receipts would be given to the Persian Government.

A "Daily Mail" correspondent said if the dispute were not settled quickly Abadan Harbor would soon be cluttered with tankers. Movement of tankers thither was planned six months in advance and a delay of even a day would throw the loading organisation into chaos.

U.S. Uneasy

In the United States the

PREMIER'S BEDSIDE MEETING ON OIL

THE PERSIAN PREMIER (Dr. Mossadeq) sits up in bed to discuss the oil problem with the US Ambassador in Tehran (Dr. Henry Gray)—right. Radio pic-

Local Butter Shortage

Horsepower

The early Carnivals used horsepower, which caused problems on Ventnor's hills. A plan to extend the procession to the Esplanade had to be abandoned.

Although gradually lorries and tractors took over, many of the pictures in this exhibition show that the floats well into the 1950s were still pulled by horses (although only part of the horse may be visible in the photograph, as in this one from 1951!).



Swinging 60s and outrageous 70s

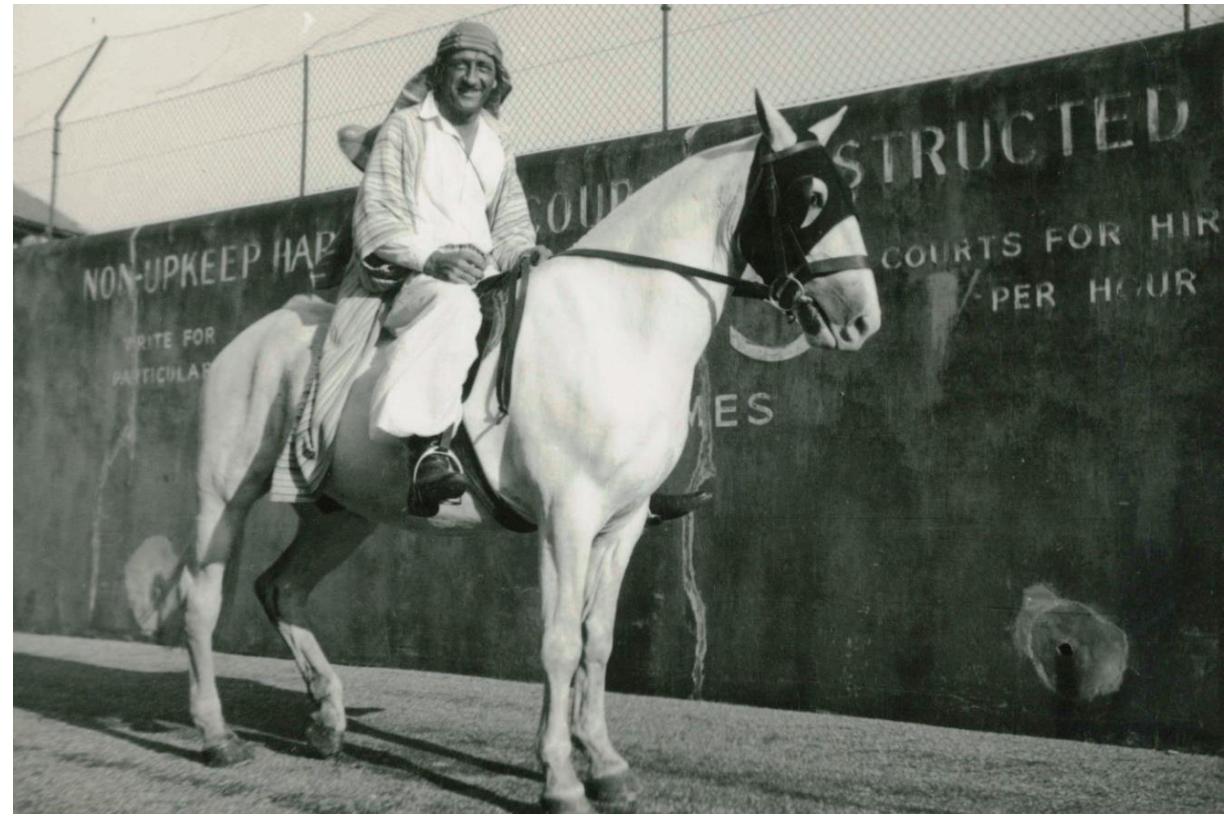
Society was changing and so was the Carnival, as these pictures show.

The Lambretta below, shown here displayed in front of Ventnor Pier, has a good story. It was obtained at cost price from Newport for the carnival raffle by Joan Mew and her sister Vera. They sold tickets wherever they could, and recall selling what was the winning ticket to a man at the Agricultural Fair. He was only over on the Island for a couple of days, working for the Potato Marketing Board, and bought just that one ticket.



TV arrives in the Carnival

The Beverley Hillbillies (1956), Lawrence of Arabia posing in front of the tennis courts that used to be at the top of Dudley Road, The Railway Children recreated by the Ventnor Professional and Business Association, and the well known 'Bisto' advert.



The Ventnor Jazz Band

In 1884 it was reported that *“The Town band was followed in the parade by the ‘Mop brigade’, led by ‘Major’ Francis, mounted on a hobbyhorse”*. They carried household mops, and went through a series of military exercises in Ventnor Park, *“creating much amusement by their grotesque dress”*.

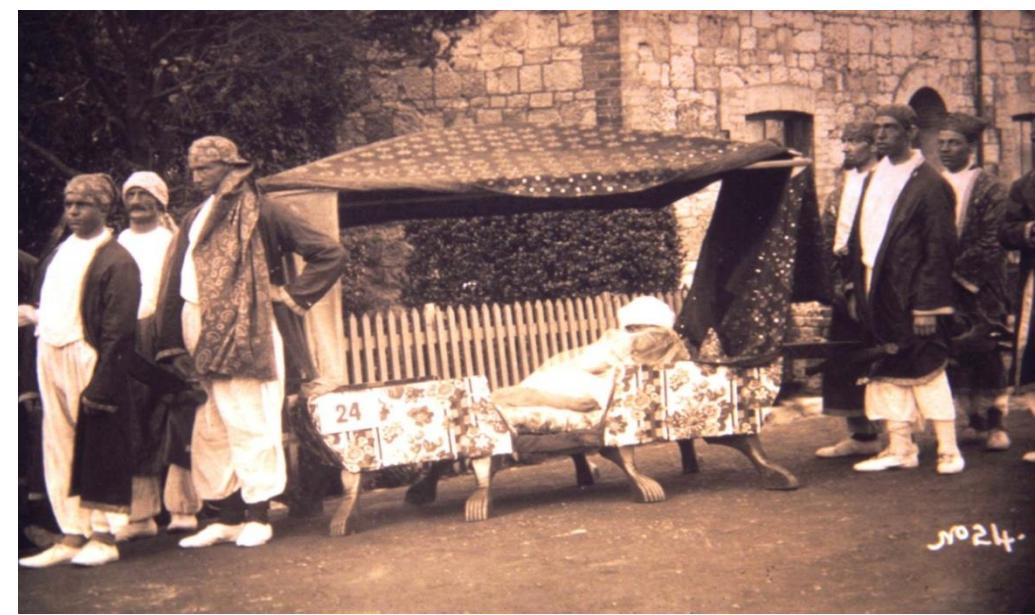
By 1909, this comic role had been taken on by the Ventnor Comic Jazz Band, which has featured somewhere in almost every subsequent Carnival. Below left: two of the old Mop Brigade (wearing uniform) on either side of the Jazz Band: Harry Humphries on the left and Percy Humphries on the right.

In 1952, the Band was led by ‘Stick Twister Jim White (Skimbo)’, whose father had been part of the Mop Brigade. Skimbo got through at least three maces during his time leading the band – his first one last seen hanging from telephone wires in Union Street, Ryde. *(Clockwise, from top: 1961, 1912, 1919)*



Carnival spirit - long may it continue!

Finally, a selection of photographs that need no explanation other than the title above. We were spoilt for choice – so this is just a random collection over the years. It's all really an excuse to dress up and have a good time. Long may it continue!



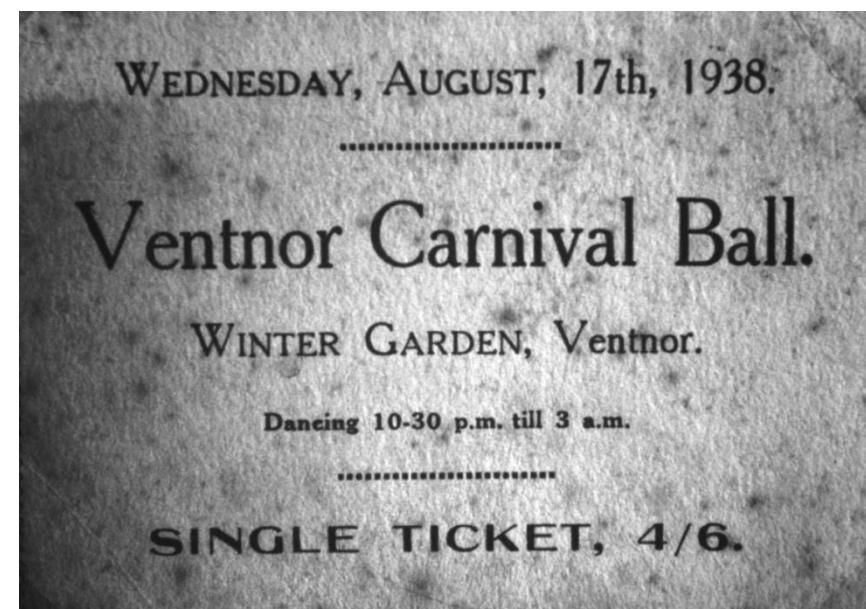
The Carnival Ball



The photograph here is of Mrs Wills (wife of Willie Wills, baker) who won the 'Best Costume' prize at the Carnival Ball 1919.

The Carnival Ball, usually fancy dress, was a central part of the Carnival, and very popular. In 1933 four hundred and fifty people paid for admission, which made dancing difficult with the limited space in the town hall.

In 1936 the Ball was held at the new Winter Gardens and again the following year when it was compulsory to wear evening or fancy dress, and music was from the popular Dagenham Girl Pipers, Ventnor Town Band and the Sandown-Shanklin Military Bands.



Final page – credits, and other events