



Running Races



The photograph is taken at the bottom of Church Street, Ventnor, at the point where it intersects Pier Street on the left and High Street behind the cameraman. Looking up the street, you can just make out the new Post Office building - on the left side before the tall trees, with its distinctive first floor bays.

It is plainly something of a red letter day for the town, as not only are there quite a lot of spectators behind the runners assembled for the 'off', but there are onlookers in the first-floor windows of several of the buildings. The date is thought to be 1910 and there appear to be just ten entrants, each of them with numbers on the front of their shirts. It is a fair assumption that this a sprint competition over a section of the High Street, probably up to 400 yards. These types of run-off among young men seem to have been quite common in the period, taking place at locations as varied as Ventnor Park and Trinity Road. The men in the photo all look to be relative youngsters, dressed in shirt and shorts and all wearing what could be described as footwear suitable for athletics.

In February 1909, the *Isle of Wight Mercury* ran the story of a rather different race event: a running match between two local men over a distance of 120 yards. It was between James Snudden and Richard Burge and held in Park Avenue. Mr. G. Reed of the Kent Hotel was judge and starter and the event attracted a large crowd. Both men tripped over during the race and then Snudden suffered cramp and failed to finish. The outcome was a severe disappointment for supporters who had anticipated a close finish.

By the 1920s, these kinds of competitive running events appear to have been replaced by the much more challenging annual 'footrace' from the Pier gates, through the town, to the top of St. Boniface Down. Fred Cooper, writing in the 1980s, regarded it as a really hard endurance race, competitors running all the way. The winner raised a Union Jack on the flagpole that marked the end of the race. The event was held each Empire Day, 24th May.

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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