



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

James Rousell & Son, Building Contractors



The town of Ventnor grew very rapidly over the second half of the nineteenth century and the building trades grew likewise. Alongside so-called jobbing builders, a number of firms came into being that rather stood the test of time and were responsible for many sizeable building commissions. Among these was James Rousell & Son, established around 1880 and continuing until mid-way through the Second World War. Rousell were responsible for the construction of the new St Alban's Church as well as the new National Provincial Bank on High Street (now Ventnor Arts Club). Some of the pairs of tall late Victorian houses on Alpine Road were erected by Rousell.

James Rousell was a native of Somerset and his wife, Caroline, came from Herefordshire.

They were living at 56 St. Catherine's Street at the time of the 1881 Census, along with Albert aged 4, Caroline aged 2, and George aged 8 months. By the 1891 Census, George seems to have died, but there were two more sons: Charles Henry, aged 8 and Percy William aged 6. Twenty years before, in 1871, James is shown in the Census of that year as a lodger with George Newnham at 6 North Street, his trade given as carpenter and joiner, so he had been in Ventnor some 10 years prior to forming the building business. As time went by, the firm grew such that it had accumulated yards at various locations across the town, including Station yard, Spring Hill, 140 High Street, and 15 North Street.

In 1912, the youngest son, Percy William, joined the business, eventually taking control upon his father's retirement in 1924. He held an Army Commission as Captain, relinquishing it in 1929 upon attaining the age limit. The man on the left of the photo, wearing what appears to be a Norfolk jacket, is thought to be Percy, with several of the firm's workforce alongside. The date is about 1910 and it forms an inset of part of a larger image of that workforce which numbered around 36. In other words, this was an enterprise that provided significant employment for the town.

James Rousell died at Belle Vue Road, Ventnor in 1931 aged 81, his son Percy in Camberwell, South London, in 1961.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files on the Heritage Centre, especially those of the late Fay Brown. Thanks also to Jill Wearing for suggesting the topic and providing additional material.



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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