

In the issue of the Chronicle of 16th September 2021, Colin Beavis recounted the commemorative walk made from Shanklin station to Ventnor station on Friday September 10th 2021. It sought to repeat the walks undertaken by members of the Isle of Wight Railway Enthusiasts Group in 1966, 1967 and 1968. One of the highlights of these earlier walks was the stop-over at Ailsa Craig's Tea Garden opposite Ventnor station in Southgrove Road. In 2021, the tea gardens no longer existed, but the present owner of the property (now called Rose cottage) opened the now private garden so that the walkers could be entertained for tea.

In its day, AILSA CRAIG'S TEA GARDEN was run by Gwen Newnham and family. The picture shows what the Tea Garden



looked like with all the tables and chairs ready for the arrival or departure of another train. The blackboard on the right advertised that *Today's Special was local grown Strawberries and Fresh Cream – 2/- (10 pence!) - Ice Cream 3d extra!*

One of the founding members of the commemorative walks, Derek Gawn, has recently published a book: ***The times they are a-changing.*** It is divided into four sections with the second dealing with the Ventnor line. On page 143 he writes:

'Across the road from the station forecourt, at the point where Mitchell Avenue morphs into Ocean View Road, standing on the southern apex of the combined Grove Road and Southgrove Road junction, was then a quaint tiny tea garden, presumably set up in competition to the, by this time, rather dire station refreshment room. Whether travelling with my parents, my mates, Chas, or Tony Bennett, this invariably demanded a visit between trains to relax in the little garden with a vile coloured 'Hubbly Bubbly', the trendy soft drink of us mid-sixties cool dudes, supplied in a strange twisted glass bottle, and served from a hatch in what was literally a garden shed. This modest seasonal establishment was branded as 'Ailsa Craig', but having no knowledge then of any such named guano-encrusted Firth of Clyde island, but an awareness of the 'Born Free' lioness, Elsa (thence muddled with Ailsa) I had started addressing the very pleasant lady proprietress as Mrs Craig, not yet feeling on good enough terms to call her Ailsa. Stupid boy!'

Gwen Newnham's daughter and Wendy Beavis recall how the Tea Garden was a very busy establishment until the trains stopped coming through to Ventnor after April 1966. It remained open for local trade for quite a few more years, but the business soon became unviable and the tea garden closed in the mid-1970s, although Gwen continued to live at Ailsa Craig until her death in March 2009.

The photograph on the right shows a group of the original walkers at the tea garden from 1966, then all mere youngsters!

With acknowledgement to Derek Gawn for the quotation from the book which is published by Mendip Mule Media.



Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis – photographs supplied by Derek Gawn and Colin Beavis