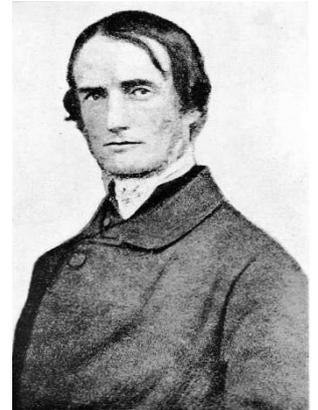


**Albert Street School Part 1: Victorian Schooldays**

According to Fay Brown, the first schoolhouse in Ventnor was founded in the 1820s in Albert Street and it was run by the 'Misses Hadfield'.

Amelia, Frances, Caroline, Julia, Octavia, and Georgina Hadfield were the daughters of a retired silk merchant. The family lived in Ventnor Farm (also known as 'The Manor') behind St Catherine's Church. As was the way of things in those days, the sons of the family went to university before joining the Army, Navy or the Church, while the daughters, denied higher education, made their own 'careers' at home. Amelia and her sisters set up a Sunday School in a property in Albert Street, teaching reading and writing to the poor people of the town who would otherwise have had no education. The sisters were joined by their brother Octavius, whose ill health had prevented him completing his Oxford education, and between them they provided weekday and Sunday classes for children and some adults - children walking from as far as Whitwell to attend the school. Sadly, we have no pictures of the Hadfield sisters, although we have this one of Octavius, who became a missionary and emigrated to New Zealand where he championed the rights of the indigenous Maori people, campaigned steadfastly for state support for all schools, and became the Bishop of Wellington and then the Primate of New Zealand.



In 1837, the year Octavius left Ventnor, the first proper school was built in Albert Street. It cost £720, paid for by John Hambrough of Steephill Castle, who also appointed the Schoolmaster and Schoolmistress.

The school was rebuilt just over 20 years later when it became 'Ventnor National School', shown below. The foundation stone of the new, larger, building was laid in November 1859 by Charlotte Hambrough, whose husband Albert had provided a large contribution to the costs; coins were buried under the foundation stone, but - Ventnor being Ventnor - the I.W. Observer recorded that *On the night of 5 November some miscreant took the liberty of removing the resemblances of Her Majesty to the amount of 3s 9d, leaving a solitary silver groat, which escaped their notice.*

The new school opened in January 1860 with a special service in St Catherine's Church. The building was described as "early gothic, slightly Italianised in some of the details". There were two wings, one for boys and one for girls, with living space in the centre for the master and mistress. It has gone now, but it was next to where Ventnor Medical Centre now stands - flats have been built on the site.



Although schooling was now offered to all Ventnor's children, it was not free; Fay Brown quotes the cost of sending a child to the school as: *Tradesmen's children: 6d a week for one child. Labourers' families: 2d a week for one child, 3d a week for two children, 4d a week for three children.* The education provided was basic, intended for children who were destined to become labourers and domestic servants. An inspection in 1888 said that *Discipline is praiseworthy, writing and arithmetic deserve much credit and Geography is well taught. However Reading and recitation lack expression and intelligence and singing by note did not satisfy the requirements.*

Quotations below are from the School Logs kept by the Head, and give a picture of life at Albert Street School in the nineteenth century:

1865: *Many children did not return to school after the holiday - they went to the Fair at Newport. I must ask the Managers to abolish the holiday on Whit Monday in future.*

1868: *A chimney sweeper came, in a most insulting manner, to complain about boys calling after him in the streets. I was obliged to send for a policeman to put him off the premises.*

1870: *A circus in town thinned the school considerably in the morning, and almost emptied it in the afternoon.*

1898: *Many boys absent, some engaged as errand boys.*

1900: *March 1st. School dismissed early this afternoon on account of the Relief of Ladysmith. Cheers given and National Anthem sung.*

1901: *The school has been badly cleaned lately. Indeed some parts have not been cleaned at all. The desks are thick with dust, the floor is filthy, and the slightest movement raises clouds of dust. . . . I sent for a Manager but unfortunately he could not leave his business.*

1901: *February 1st. School closed pm. Body of Queen Victoria moved from Osborne to London.*

Next week's article describes the school in the years between Queen Victoria's death and the end of the Second World War.

Lesley Telford, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*. Information is from our Archives and from 'A School Scrapbook' by Fay Brown.