



In May 1891 a talk on Vegetarianism was given at the Friendly Societies Hall in Ventnor High Street (the building now occupied by the British Legion). The report in the County Press noted that the meeting was chaired by Mr Edward Dolby Shelton and that attendance was small. But the interesting thing to read now is that the speakers included two Indian gentlemen, Mr Gandhi and Mr Mazmudar.

M K Gandhi had arrived in England in 1888, aged 18, to study law at University College. One of his first English friends was Josiah Oldfield, a fellow law student and vegetarian, and they shared lodgings in Bayswater, and set up a 'Vegetarian Club'.

On his visit to Ventnor in 1891 Gandhi stayed with Edward Shelton, who was a journalist, and ran a vegetarian boarding house in Madeira Road with his wife Frances.

The photograph here was taken in Portsmouth in May 1891 at a Vegetarian Society meeting of the, which must have been just before or after the talk in Ventnor. Edward Shelton is standing second from the left on the back row in the group here, and seated at the front are (left to right) T. T. Mazmudar, Josiah Oldfield and M. K. Gandhi.

When he visited Ventnor Gandhi was 21 and painfully shy; his autobiography records his embarrassment at the Ventnor meeting, where he was seized with crippling stage fright: *To speak ex tempore would have been out of the question for me. I had therefore written down my speech. I stood up to read it, but could not. My vision became blurred and I trembled, though the speech hardly covered a sheet of foolscap . . . Mazmudar had to read it for me.*

He also gives a rueful account of a walk on Ventnor downs taken with a young lady some three or four years older than him. He describes her as his landlady's daughter, but Edward and Frances Shelton didn't have a daughter, only a son born a year after their marriage in 1885, so she was perhaps a friend of the family:

*My landlady's daughter took me one day to the lovely hills round Ventnor. I was no slow walker, but my companion walked even faster, dragging me after her and chattering say all the time. I responded to her chatter sometimes with a whispered 'yes' or 'no' or at the most 'yes, how beautiful!'. She was flying like a bird whilst I was wondering when I should get back home. We thus reached the top of a hill. How to get down again was the question. In spite of her high-heeled boots this sprightly young lady of twenty-five darted down the hill like an arrow. I was shamefacedly struggling to get down. She stood at the foot smiling and cheering me and offering to come and drag me. How could I be so chicken hearted? With the greatest difficulty, and crawling at intervals, I somehow managed to scramble to the bottom. She loudly laughed 'bravo' and shamed me all the more, as well she might.*

When Gandhi and Josiah Oldfield were sharing in lodgings in Bayswater, they held parties where they served guests with lentil soup, boiled rice and fruit. Oldfield was the editor of the weekly journal *The Vegetarian*, and a facsimile of an early 1890s promotional leaflet for the journal is shown here (the original is too faded to reproduce well). It is tempting to think that Gandhi had a hand in the writing of it!

#### Capital Fun

Call in at every Newsagent's shop you pass and say,

"A 'Vegetarian,' Please,"

And when the boy behind the counter says

"We don't keep it, Sir,"

you can reply,

"What! Not keep **'THE VEGETARIAN!!'** The great paper of the day. Full of Stories Medical Advice, Jokes and News. The paper which tells you how to Marry, live well and save money out of your wages. Why I'm astonished!!!"

Then walk out of the shop indignantly, and then the boy will subside quite overcome.

Lesley Telford, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*. With thanks to Paul Coueslant and other members of Ventnor Heritage Centre Facebook Group. The photograph and the text of the flyer from *The Vegetarian* are from the Vegetarian Society, reproduced with thanks. Quotations here are from *An Autobiography or the story of my experiments with truth*, by M. K. Gandhi (available online).