



Ventnor's Old Parsonage or Vicarage



This is the building that once stood on the site of the present Winter Gardens in Ventnor. It was erected in the late 1830s, around the same time as St. Catherine's Church, part of the benefaction of the Hambrough family of Steephill Castle that also helped to build Albert Street School.

This image dates from about 1900 and it was clearly an impressive structure, built of the local greensand, with stone mullions on the ground floor, a projecting porch and extensively gabled roof. However, this is not wholly the building as first erected. According to one authority, the rear foundations of that Parsonage were repeatedly undermined by water seeping from the mill-pond and from the stream that fed the mill and the nearby waterfall. It was allegedly in part a ruin by 1878. The Reverend W.W. Willan thereupon re-built the property on new foundations, the cost met by gifts from personal friends and from parish funds. When the original building had started to decay, the incumbent at the time chose to reside instead at the Clarendon Boarding House on Grove Road.

Even earlier, it seems that incumbents had, at times, forsaken the Parsonage, for in October 1862 an advertisement in the London *Times* states that it was to let furnished for either six or twelve months. Listed as comprising three sitting rooms, four bedrooms, a dressing room, as well as quarters for servants, the rental was £130 for the six winter months or £210 for a full year, an excellent cook included. References were required, with applications to be made to 'F.M., Grand Pump-room Library, Bath', or Mr. Spary at the Post Office on Ventnor High Street. It may be that the fame of Ventnor's salubrious winter climate had grown in such a way that the attraction of letting the property grew in turn, especially given its commanding position on the eastern cliffs above the Bay. The fact that enquiries could be made in Bath marks out the social sphere in which Ventnor was by then figuring, a feature reinforced by the advert appearing in the *Times* newspaper.

In June 1991, the late Fay Brown made contact with the eldest daughter of the Reverend Colquhoun who was incumbent in the early 20th Century. She recalled how they had coal fires in every room and how, during storms, the whole building shook. Her father's study was packed with books, many bought from Knight's Library in the town. The extensive garden grounds were mostly surrounded by tall hedges and contained many tamarisk trees with pink flowers.

In 1929, the Parsonage was vacated altogether owing to the high costs of repairs and was bought by Ventnor Urban District Council. A programme of refurbishment for public use was started, the upper floor remodelled as a refreshment area and the ground floor arranged for reading, games and for music. A competition was held that December to select a new name for the building and it became the 'Winter Gardens'. After a few years had passed, the Council had a change of mind as to the building's usage and proposed that it be turned into Council Offices. Townspeople were dismayed by this news and made vigorous protests. It was then that ideas were advanced for a stylish new pavilion, following the example of a number of other seaside resorts at the time. In due course, a grand 'art deco' style building arose on the site, the structure that remains to this day, even if the verticality of its glazed staircase tower has been rather spoilt by infill towards the base.