



Rayner's Temperance, Family and Commercial Hotel – part one



Had you walked southward along the north side of Victoria Street in Ventnor in the 1890s, this is the building that your eye would have alighted upon as you approached the site now filled by the wide forecourt and elongate twin-storey edifice that once formed Leslie's Motors. Here you would have found a classic set of late-nineteenth century facades, with bay fronts, verandah, decorative wrought ironwork and magnificent entrance lanterns. This was Rayner's celebrated Temperance Hotel. It came into being through the enterprise of Henry Edward Rayner and his wife Caroline, both of them Ventnor-born. Henry began working life as a dairyman and 'cow keeper', but later became a lodging house keeper and then a hotel proprietor. The image above probably shows the hotel frontage around 1900. By this time, the business had expanded to comprise a whole sequence of adjoining properties on Victoria Street, with the fine three-storey building to the right added at the close of the 1870s. When Henry died in 1925, the *Isle of Wight Mercury* described him as a 'sound and lovable character' and 'hardworking'. The newspaper went on to remark how he practically built Rayner's Hotel himself.

The publication, *Industrial Great Britain* (1894), described the hotel as having over 50 bedrooms and included various handsome and spacious reception rooms. There were sets of private apartments or suites for families, as well as more standard accommodation for commercial men. Outside, there were lawns and a summer house, a kitchen garden, a greenhouse and a fowl house. A piece of waste ground east of Devonshire Terrace had been made into tennis courts for visitors in 1890. In sum, the 1894 publication was confident in describing the hotel as 'a home away from home', to be recommended to the most fastidious of travellers. When the business came up for sale in 1919, the kitchen was described as 22ft 10in by 16ft 9in and 12 feet high, with skylights to aid ventilation. Within it was an 11-ft long *Dow's Patent Range*, as well as a 10-burner gas stove. It must have needed a small army of cooks and kitchen maids to service it.

The story to be continued in next week's issue.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre.



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