



The Bible Christian Church was founded in the West Country in the early 1800s and spread to the Isle of Wight; where, in Apse Heath, Arreton and other rural areas old chapels can still be seen bearing the name *Bible Christian*. The movement was popular among farm labourers, although perhaps not with the established church: Samuel Wilberforce, the vicar of Brighstone, is said to have urged that Bible Christians should lose their jobs and be turned out from their cottages.

The Bible Christians often used women preachers, and the Isle of Wight became a stronghold largely due to the inspirational teachings of Mary Toms, who was invited by Farmer Drudge to preach at Ventnor in his house in Longdown in 1823. In his old age Mary's husband described her visit to Ventnor thus: *She preached there and a Mr and Mrs Groves who kept the only hotel in Ventnor, Griffin the Miller and Caws who kept the Crab and Lobster were very kind to her. Ventnor then consisted of the Farm, the Crab and Lobster Old Inn, Groves's Hotel, the Mill and the Miller's home.*



In 1843 the Bible Christian *Bethesda Chapel* was built in St Catherine Street, but the congregation continued to grow and in 1879 the *Victoria Street Chapel*, designed by Edgar Harvey, who was later to create the Ventnor Cascade, was opened. An impressive building in the Gothic style of architecture with white brick facings mixed with red, it could accommodate 300 people in the ground floor chapel. The basement contained a schoolroom and two 'tenement rooms', sometimes described as an adjoining cottage, as in this description from 1897: *The present chapel is a lofty building, furnished with a good organ... The whole pile makes a fine block - chapel, schoolroom underneath, and cottage adjoining.*



In the early 1900s the Bible Christians amalgamated with the Methodists, and this photograph from 1910 shows a Methodist Outing about to set off from outside the chapel, which was a centre of activities organised for children and young people.

In 1945 the two Methodist chapels in Ventnor were united, both congregations using the Methodist church in the High Street (the building later used by the Boxing Club). The organ and memorial stones were moved there from the Victoria Street chapel, which was renamed

the Victoria Hall, and was used for Sunday School and Youth Group functions: in 1951 the Methodist Sunday School, Senior Youth Group, and the Boys Club were all based there. When the old building was eventually sold to the IOW County Council it became Ventnor Youth Centre. Ventnor Town Council renamed it Ventnor Central in 2019 using it for community events.