



Pier Street after a snowstorm



A sight to send shivers down your spine. Pier Street under perhaps six inches of snow. This is an image from the Heritage Centre's photo archive and it is marked as either 1947 or 1950. One more clue as to the date is the registration plate of the lorry that is skewed across the road. It is EDL 26 which gives a registration date of 1947. The lorry has the look of a very new vehicle, so it is probably a reasonable surmise that the picture dates from that time. And there will be quite a few Ventnorians alive today who can recall the severity of that 1947 winter. Whilst the Ventnor snowstorm described in the Chronicle article of a year ago was set in the third week of December 1950, the snows of 1947 began in the last week of January. It formed the start of some six weeks or so of exceptionally harsh weather that affected much of North-West Europe. A blocking anticyclone sat over Scandinavia, forcing the regular Atlantic depressions to track south of their usual course, pulling in a strong easterly airflow. Ice floes were seen off the East Anglian coast. In some parts of Britain, there were snowfalls almost daily over the month of February. In a part of County Durham on 14th March, almost seven feet of laying snow was recorded.

The *Isle of Wight Mercury* started to record Ventnor's experience in its issue of Friday 31st January. The editor wrote that 'King Winter' had taken possession with a vengeance at the weekend. And on the Thursday following, residents had awoken to one of the heaviest snowfalls of recent years. In more exposed parts, there were drifts six to eight feet deep, with much of the road out to Wroxall impassable. After the Sunday had ushered in a white countryside, most folk hugged their firesides, with only the younger and hardier venturing out. By later that week, bus services, hitherto intermittent, had been suspended completely. One elderly resident observed that there had been 'nothing like it since 1881'. Despite the efforts of the Town Surveyor's staff to clear roads and pavements, pedestrians began exchanging with each other how many times they had slipped on the icy residues. Households found their domestic cisterns frozen and hydrants were opened up so they could replenish supplies.

As the deep cold continued, the local weather statistics told their own story. From 13th-19th February, the maximum day temperature barely rose above freezing, while night-time minimums sank to 26 degrees Fahrenheit. Not until the middle of March did the freezing conditions start to lift and the thaw begin. By the 18th, the daily maximum had climbed to 50 degrees. Even better, there was sunshine, whereas for most of the preceding weeks, skies had remained doggedly overcast.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, the Isle of Wight Mercury extracts courtesy of the IOW Record Office