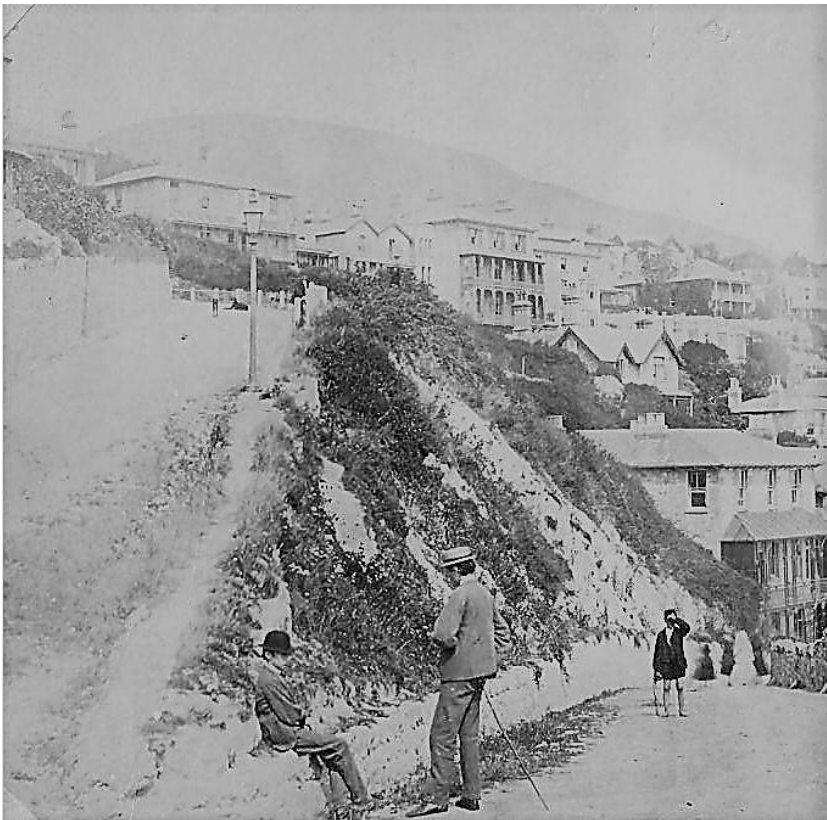




Bath Road Ventnor

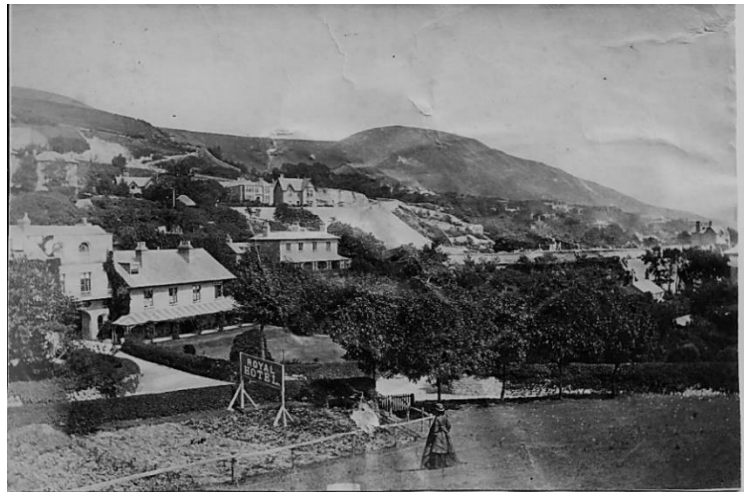


These old photographs give a glimpse of what Ventnor was like 150 years ago. The picture on the left was taken from what is now the entrance to 'La Falaise' car park on the Western Cliffs and shows no buildings in this section of Bath Road itself. However, you can make out the Wellington Hotel (in the centre of the photo) and other buildings both sides of Belgrave Road, and bottom right you can see the western-most buildings on the Esplanade.

This road, which looks like little more than a track, surprisingly had some street lighting (presumably gas), and led from Belgrave Road to the Esplanade. It was named Bath Road and the reason for its name will become clear later.

In 1832, a Coaching Inn (shown below, pictured from its gardens) was opened on the newly-constructed road leading from old St. Lawrence to the growing town of Ventnor. It was situated at (what is now) the junction of Belgrave Road and Zig Zag Road and, at the time of opening, it was called 'Ventnor Hotel'.

For the first twelve years of its life it was managed by Mr John Fisher, and inevitably became known as 'Fishers Hotel'. Its original purpose, amongst other reasons, was for guests to benefit from the 'special climate and fresh air' of Ventnor. Over subsequent years, patrons included many dignitaries and often crowned heads of Europe. It was also a favourite destination for Queen Victoria when she was in residence at Osborne. She would often visit John Hambrough at his newly-completed residence of Steephill Castle, just along the road, taking tea at Fishers Hotel. It wasn't long before the name was changed to 'Royal Hotel' in recognition of the visits of Queen Victoria and it soon became one of the most popular hotels on the Island, and to this day, the Royal Hotel remains a premier hotel after nearly 190 years.



In addition to the 'special climate and fresh air', the hotel was close to the sea and people in those days thought that salt water was a cure for everything from bruises to hysteria. A 'bathhouse' had been constructed at the western end of the esplanade for hotel patrons and the public to enjoy a hot bath, especially after a dip in the sea. The bathhouse remains to this day and is now 'The Spyglass'. Guests would travel down the steep hill from the Hotel to the Bath House and so it became known as **Bath Road** – and it has been called that ever since.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis. Photographs from the author's collection



Ventnor & District Local History Society is a registered charity, working to preserve and record the history of our area and make it available to the public in the Ventnor Heritage Centre.
The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

www.ventnorheritage.org.uk

