



The Royal National Hospital Pig



This is a picture found in one of the scrap albums collected by the late Fay Brown and now forming part of the Heritage Centre's collections. The album dates from the 1950s and provides a photographic record of a whole range of hospital life. It may have been put together by a patient, or else a member of staff. The caption on the picture is 'Hospital Pig' and it is recorded as being 12 weeks old and weighing 67 pounds, a little short of 5 stone. It was fed on hospital food waste and it is likely that there was a lot of it, for appetites among sicker patients were invariably poor. E.F. Laidlaw, in *The Story of the Royal National Hospital* (1990), recounts that there was a long history of piggeries in the hospital grounds. Bacon, brawn and lard were obtained from them on a regular basis. Moreover, this proved vital in the later years of the Great War when food supplies became a problem on the Island. The grounds also yielded considerable supplies of vegetables and fruit each year. Poultry were reared as well. According to Laidlaw, these self-sufficient practices continued right up until closure in 1964.

The Hospital Pig was plainly held with some affection among many of the people who lived or worked there, but in Ventnor, piggeries were regarded with ambivalence. The town authorities faced an almost constant litany of complaints about pig-keeping, especially as it emerged as a health resort for the wealthy. There were objections to the 'disagreeable and pestilential miasma' within some of the town's precincts in 1865, for instance, and a call for the peremptory removal of all pigs and pigstyes. However, it is clear that having recourse to law in such cases was problematic. One official remarked that persons could no more be compelled to make away with their pigs than be compelled to do the same with their horses. And it is clear that the odours from stable manure had also brought its share of complaints. The Royal Hotel was cited as a particular problem in 1865, but Mr. Bush, the proprietor, stated that manure was carted away as fast as it accumulated. The hotel reared its own pigs, but the styes were cleaned daily. Some residents objected to the constant squealing from piggeries which occasionally went on all night. By 1876, the Ventnor Local Board seems to have managed to get most styes in the town removed. However, during the Great War, as food supply dwindled, the local authority assented to pig-keeping on a limited scale, including on allotments. Throughout all the disputation over pig-keeping, though, pork butchers and bacon factors in the town like W, Flux at 94 High Street, happily proclaimed that their products came from 'prime Isle of Wight fed pigs'.

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



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.

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