



The YWCA in Ventnor



The picture depicts the south elevation of Prospect House near the bottom of the south side of Grove Road. The building just visible to the right is the Masonic Hall, once the *Gaiety* cinema. We do not have a date for this image, but it is probably later 1920s, for the cinema was erected in 1924.

At one time the house provided regular rooms for the YWCA, the Young Women's Christian Association. It appears, ostensibly, to have been a boarding house, but its specific use may also have included being a hostel and club for working women. The movement was founded in Britain in London in 1855, its first hostel opening in 1857 at Ames House on Upper Charlotte Street in the Borough of Camden. In the *Ventnor Red Book* of 1903 and 1908, Prospect House is given as kept by Miss Margaret Gwillam Collins. When she died in March 1930, the *Isle of Wight Mercury* described her as having been 'Superintendent' of the Ventnor branch of the YWCA, with weekly prayer meetings held at Prospect House. She was assisted in her work by Miss Cotton, a Scottish-born relative of the Duchess of Gordon who had spent some of her life in India and in Tasmania, before finally settling in Ventnor. She was described in her *Mercury* obituary of April 1924 as having done much Christian work, including the building of a Mission Hall in Shanklin.

Some of the work engaged in by members of Ventnor's YWCA is illustrated by an account in the local Parish Church Magazine of 1918. On the evening of November 28th, they held a 'Toy or Santa

Claus Social', which involved assembling a collection of 168 toys, scrap-books, handkerchiefs and clothing garments for despatch to workers in Manchester.

Returning to the picture, it is not clear whether Prospect House was still a venue for the YWCA when this image was captured on camera. In Kelly's Directory of 1935-6, the premises are listed as kept by Miss Mary Gurney, but still as a boarding house. Nor do we know when the YWCA rooms first opened here, although, from the 1892 *Ventnor Red Book*, the house was given as in the occupation of Rev. J.N. Rootham who was Baptist Minister in Ventnor for over 25 years.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, with further help from Jill Wearing.



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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