

# Ventnor and District Local History Society

NEWSLETTER 25

September 2014

## FAY BROWN'S COLLECTION

In May this year the Society, and Ventnor as a whole, was saddened by the death of Fay Brown, our Secretary and Researcher for many years.

Comments from local people mourned the loss not just of Fay, but of her invaluable knowledge of Ventnor and its history. One message on [On the Wight](#) summed it up: "I will always cherish sitting in her upstairs 'office' marvelling at her terrific filing system (no computer!). It never took her more than a minute to find anything from the many thousands of items in her archive." We are therefore delighted to let you know that Fay bequeathed to us her 'Indexed Card Information Files' which she had built up over many years researching local history. These are now housed in the Museum, where they are available for research alongside our own extensive archive.

We would like to spread the word that Fay's records are still available, so please pass the message on that research enquiries are always welcome, and although the Museum is only open to visitors on Saturday mornings over the winter, we can respond at any time to email enquiries sent to [ventnorheritage@btconnect.com](mailto:ventnorheritage@btconnect.com)



## AN AUTUMN VISIT?

The recent Heritage open afternoon was a great success with 52 visitors who were very complimentary about the displays, and there was a "real buzz" about the place.

We would love to see a few more members visiting the Museum. We are all guilty of "going to do things" only to find that the Summer has gone, so if you get a chance do come and see this year's interesting exhibitions which include 'Transports of Delight', 'In Memory of World War 1' and 'Ventnor People'. Now that the season is over, we are only open weekdays (mornings only) until the end of October, but we are always open Saturday mornings, 10-12.30, throughout the year, and would be very pleased to see you then.

Margaret (D) and Anne

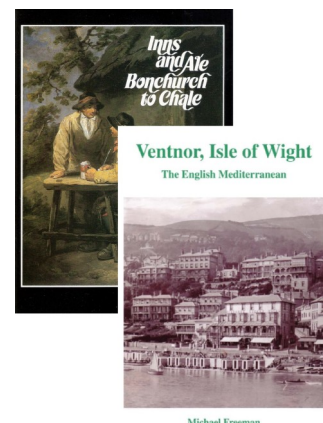
## **Ventnor, Isle of Wight - The English Mediterranean** by Michael Freeman

"Ventnor hangs upon the side of a steep hill, and here and there it clings and scrambles, is propped up and terraced, like one of the bright faced little towns that look down on the Mediterranean". Henry James's words introduce Michael Freeman's blend of guide book and local history, published by the Society. A second edition, with minor updates, has now been printed (£9.50 from the Museum, £10.70 by post including p & p).

## **Inns and Ale, Bonchurch to Chale** by Vincent Chambers

This 'History of Drinking Houses and Coaching Inns in and Around Ventnor, Isle of Wight' has fascinating historical detail of some of the pubs and inns around the town (£1 from the museum or by post at £2.20 including post and packing).

See a full list of our publications at [www.ventnorheritage.org.uk/Museum/Publications.htm](http://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk/Museum/Publications.htm)



## MUSEUM PIECES

Most of Fay Brown's records, files, albums, photographs etc. have been transferred to the Museum. This was a huge task which really amounted to clearing two whole rooms of her house. Somehow we have managed to accommodate these vital records, something I, for one, did not think possible. However, by clearing every unnecessary shelf and corner of items which had accumulated over the years and were not part of the Museum archive, it has been achieved. Thanks to those who helped.

Roger Silsbury and I were pleased to put on a 'Carnival Film Show' in the Masonic Hall to commemorate Ventnor's 125th Carnival. Originally, this was to be given by Fay and myself. It all went very well and we had an audience of over 70.

We are pleased to welcome Lesley Telford as our new secretary. She is getting to know how our office works and I hope she enjoys working with us!

It is with a heavy heart that, owing to worsening health, I have had to resign as your Curator. I informed my deputy, Peter Pye that I could not carry on and that he was next 'in line'. This will no doubt be discussed at our next committee meeting. I have been your Curator since 1997 and it has been a wonderful job to have had. So I hand over to my deputy and wish him all good luck.

Graham

## LOCAL RECORDS

In view of the proposed transformation of part of St. Catherine's Church Graveyard, the opportunity has been taken to transcribe the Church's 'Burial Records'. Initial transcription work is complete, awaiting a tomb-stone 'Inscription Survey' being carried out in-house by the Church.

When completed, the burials that took place at the Church between 1838 and 1939 will be uploaded to the Museum's front-of-house computer, supplementing the 9,534 Ventnor Municipal Burial Records already there. *Volunteers to carry out similar work for Bonchurch, St. Lawrence and Newchurch, plus updating work at Whippingham please step forward.*

Peter

## JOHN LEECH (1817-64)

A commemorative plaque marking the 'Hillside Cottage' in Bonchurch where John Leech, the Victorian illustrator and Punch cartoonist stayed, was unveiled on 30 August by award winning Daily Mail cartoonist Jonathan Pugh. A good crowd enjoyed good weather and excellent hospitality from house owners John and Catherine Kellett.



John Leech was a friend of Charles Dickens during his time in Bonchurch. In 1848 when Leech was knocked over and concussed by waves while bathing, Dickens helped rescue him and recorded that he was put to bed 'with a row of his namesakes round his forehead' (*History of Punch*, 1895). Picture: 'Two Ladies and a Gentleman in a Rowboat', by John Leech

## SOUTHERN LIGHTS

This report from *The Times* 21 August 2004 describes a curious phenomenon which was seen again this June according to Graham:

*On Sunday, August 8 the Coastguard at Southampton received reports of a flashing light seen out at sea from the coast of the Isle of Wight. It seemed as though a ship were in distress - possibly on fire - but the light was flashing in such a regular pattern that it made no sense as a distress call.*

*The Coastguard called vessels in the area but the only flashing light they could see was the lighthouse at Barfleur, near Cherbourg, on the French coast. To add to the mystery, other, smaller lights began to shine as the sun set.*

*David Butler, an auxiliary coastguard at Ventnor, climbed up on to high ground and, with binoculars, could see clearly not only Barfleur lighthouse, but also the houses and harbour walls of Cherbourg, which he knows well.*

*Cherbourg is well over 60 miles away and usually hidden under the horizon. But it was revealed by a mirage, created by layers of air at different temperatures which were bending light over the horizon like a glass prism.*

**PLEASE LET US HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS (IF YOU HAVE ONE!):** We would like to use email where possible to communicate with our members. Email addresses will only be used to send messages concerning the Society, and will not be shared or passed on to anyone else. We will, of course, still use post to communicate with members who do not use email. *Lesley*

## WORLD WAR ONE MEMORIALS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Last November Geoff Allan, of the Isle of Wight Family History Society, talked to our monthly meeting about the Monuments and Memorials on the Isle of Wight and gave examples of memorials in Ventnor. He is the webmaster of the website Memorials and Monuments on the Isle of Wight ([www.isle-of-wight-memorials.org.uk](http://www.isle-of-wight-memorials.org.uk)), which lists all the known war memorials on the Island and most of those commemorated have links to their Commonwealth War Grave entry. If anyone knows of any memorials not listed, Geoff would be pleased to hear of it.

For some time now I have been working my way through the war years of the Isle of Wight Mercury, held at the Isle of Wight County Record Office, Newport. I have been transcribing any reference to those recorded on the war memorials and submitting them to Geoff. He has then created a biography for them including service details and census information. In this way most of those commemorated for the First World War in Ventnor, Bonchurch and St. Lawrence now have a biography page on the website. There is one exception, Frank Jeffries, commemorated on Ventnor war memorial. Does anyone know anything about him? I have also come across a report for the dedication of memorials in the streets of Holy Trinity parish. They are not there now. Does anyone remember where they were located, or have photos of them?

*Janet*

## MEMORIES OF 'OUR LADY AND ST WILFRID' CHURCH AND SCHOOL

I was born and grew up in Ventnor so with my parents and sister attended St Wilfrid's Church, and my sister and I attended the school. In fact four generations of my family went to the school - my mother, my sister and I, my four children and seven grandchildren.

Miss Pardoe was the first headmistress. Her house was behind the Church, and was later demolished when alterations were made to the school. When my sister and I started school Miss Pardoe was there along with Miss Howlett, who was the infant teacher. There were only two classrooms: a small one for the infants and a larger which was later divided into two classrooms. There was a dividing wall across the playground making separate play areas for the boys and girls. I was ten when Miss Pardoe retired and Sister Michael and Sister Alphonsus came to the school - Sister Michael was headmistress for many years.

The 'Convent of the Sacred Heart' was at East Dene, Bonchurch (now a holiday centre). All the children went there for processions on various Feast Days and the nuns would provide us with a lovely tea. Alfred Noyes, the poet and author who lived at St Lawrence attended Mass at the church every Sunday with his family. (It was many years later that his son, Hugh, ran the 'Rare Breeds' park.) St Wilfrid's was much smaller then as the extension hadn't been built. There were always two priests in the parish, and there were two Masses every Sunday and Benediction in the evening. During the second world war Benediction was in the afternoon, and one afternoon when we were all in Church we heard several explosions, and later heard that there had been an air raid on Shanklin and the Sacred Heart Church there was destroyed.

I made my First Holy Communion and was Confirmed at St Wilfrid's and on 2 April 1945 my husband John and I were married there, so the church has many happy memories for me. This photograph was taken in front of the Headmistresses house behind the church.



*Contributed by Pat Giplin*

**SAD NEWS:** Four of our members have died since the last newsletter, all of them good friends to the Society and personal friends of many of us: Phil Chaundy and Brenda Creese (who both served on our Committee for several years), Bill Mansfield (our Chairman from 1999 to 2006), and of course Fay Brown, our researcher and Secretary for so many years. All sadly missed.

## **'PERSONALITIES WERE THROWN ACROSS THE TABLE'**

While looking at old issues of the *County Press* for an exhibition in Ventnor Library, I came across the report below of a lively Ventnor Town Council meeting held on 1 August 1914. Local politics were as confrontational a hundred years ago as they are now!

Sadly, three of the Councillors quoted here lost sons in the coming war - *Alan Robertson*, aged 15, died 1914, *Tom Leitch* (aged 37) died 1915, and *James Brading* (aged 24) died 1917. *William Judd* (Mr Judd) served overseas and rose to the rank of Major and died in 1918 (*see biographies on the [Memorials website](#) on previous page*).

*Lesley*

### **TOWN EMPLOYEES AND THE BAND CONCERTS - LIVELY DISCUSSION**

MR SPENCER asked how many attendants the Council employed at the Band Concerts on the cliffs and how they were paid. It was stated that the Advertising Committee bore the whole expense but he noticed that town employees were working there from early in the morning till late at night.

MR LEITCH said that an estimate of the time employed would be made at the end of the year, and the Council reimbursed for the time of these men.

MR SPENCER said that one of the men was assistant market toll collector. Who collected the tolls when he was on the cliffs? He heard that several people came into the town and sold goods without paying tolls.

MR JUDD: Who told you?

MR SPENCER: I am not going to say.

MR JUDD: Then you ought to.

MR LEITCH said that the man referred to - Stacey - did a lot of voluntary work for the town. It was not right for members to come there and criticise those who were giving up their time for the town. Mr Spencer had come on the Council for his own benefit and the benefit of his own firm.

MR BAKER contended that Mr Spencer was perfectly in order in asking why Stacey worked on the cliffs when he was employed by the town.

MR LEITCH: He is not employed by the town for 24 hours a day. Stacey had done a lot of work in connection with the evening classes.

MR TORY said that he was responsible for the evening classes and Stacey had not been engaged for a single hour.

MR JUDD said that one would think they were doing harm to the town by holding these concerts. He would like to see some of the Councillors come there and help.

MR BAKER: Some do a jolly sight more than you do.

MR JUDD contended that it was a disgrace that gentlemen should get up and start criticising those who were trying to advance the interests of Ventnor. Stacey worked hard and saved time in consequence. He was paid a weekly salary and not overtime and deserved a vote of thanks rather than criticism from those who did nothing. Thanks were also due to the Town Clerk and the town Surveyor, who, although not born there as several were who did nothing, worked hard for the town.

MR BRADING said the town was the guarantor in the matter of these concerts, and if there was a deficit they would have to make it good.

DR ROBERTSON said there was a little irregularity in the employment of the town men on the cliffs which a resolution would put right.

After further discussion in which much heat was shown, and personalities were hurled across the table, it was decided . . . to refer the whole matter to the Finance Committee."

*Isle of Wight County Press, 1 August 1914 [IOW Records Office]*



**VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

Ventnor Heritage Museum, 11 Spring Hill, Ventnor PO38 1PE

01983 855407 / [www.ventnorheritage.org.uk](http://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk) / [ventnorheritage@btconnect.com](mailto:ventnorheritage@btconnect.com)

