

A Year of Changes, Challenges and Achievements

At the beginning of last year the Society faced considerable problems. We were in the middle of extensive repairs and exterior redecoration to the Heritage Centre building, we had lost two Trustees, and our Curator was away due to ill health. Miraculously, we managed to get the Museum ready for the public and open on time at the beginning of April, although at times we felt a little like the ducks on Bonchurch Pond, apparently moving calmly about our business, but actually paddling frantically under water to keep going!

I'm delighted to report that all our efforts paid off and it turned out to be a very good summer for the Society. We were open for more hours – starting a month earlier than usual, and opening all day on Saturday – and admission numbers to the Museum were up by nearly 30% by the end of the year. Now that the Heritage Centre is closed to visitors during the week we are concentrating on phase two of our Museum Redevelopment (see page 3).

Membership numbers for the year increased by nearly 20% (up to 156 from 131 the previous year), and Society Monthly Meetings continue to be as popular as ever, with entertaining and interesting speakers and audiences of up to 60 members. Wendy Stromberg has put together an interesting speaker programme for 2016 (see page 3). Please do keep this list, as our new wallet-sized membership cards no longer have dates of Monthly Meetings. The information is all on our website as well.

We are delighted that we have recruited two new Trustees, who joined us in the summer: Leigh Geddes, who has taken on the role of Deputy Chair, and Jason Mack. Leigh and Jason are both well known as they are Ventnor Town Councillors, with Jason currently acting as Mayor and Leigh as Deputy Mayor, and they have brought new skills and knowledge to the Governing Body. The loss of some longstanding Trustees prompted a few changes in Society management this year, but it is all working well so far, despite some minor panics.

Research enquiries came in so fast during the summer that we had a problem keeping up with them. Although we miss the encyclopaedic knowledge of both Fay and Graham, we now have a small group of researchers helping with these enquiries, digging out information and photographs from our archives. Michael Freeman held a successful workshop in November for some of our new researchers – and some of our older ones. We may repeat this workshop later this year,

so if you would like to help with the enquiries and are interested in knowing more about what we have in our archives, please do get in touch.

Our Collection keeps on growing. As well as photographs, paintings, documents and artefacts we have extensive property records, and material from all the old Ventnor schools. Last year we were also fortunate to receive boxes and boxes of Fay Brown's collected information, documents, photograph albums, slides and sound tapes. All this has to be catalogued and indexed so that we can make it accessible, and Richard Downing has been helping Janet Griffin with this work.

We are appealing for help from our members to continue Fay's work, photographing the changes taking place in the



town as old buildings are pulled down and new ones built – if you are out and about with your camera or phone please do take pictures and send them to us. The Society feared that no one had recorded St Margaret's School being demolished to make way for a new building for the Island Free School, but were pleased to discover that the pupils had used a drone to take pictures from the air as demolition progressed.

We are also beginning to digitise parts of the Collection – making electronic copies of documents, images and cassettes. This will ensure that items are safeguarded for the future, make them easier to access and share, and will save space, which is at a premium in the Heritage Centre. One major project, led by Yvonne and Michael Hardy, is to convert hundreds of slides into a digital format. This is a long job and we need better equipment to make proper inroads, but it is wonderful to discover new images from the recent past, such as the one of Spring Hill in 1973 shown here. Salon 442, which closed recently, is there, but the Heritage Centre building is Vanasshe's Car Showroom!

Some of Fay's popular slide shows showing aspects of Ventnor over the years have already been digitised and we used one during Ventnor Carnival week last August, with Wendy Marshall giving Fay's original commentary, supplemented by her own inimitable comments.

Thank you all for your help and support over the year – Happy New Year to you all, and I look forward to seeing you at our meetings, or in the Heritage Centre.

– Lesley Telford, Society Secretary

Report from the Trustees

At the January meeting the Trustees decided:

- To change the opening times of the Museum to 30 April–29 October, Monday–Saturday, 10am–4pm. This is a slight change from 2015. We will continue to be open on Saturday mornings throughout the winter (but see below).
- To close the Museum during February to enable redevelopment work, including moving all pictures and displays, painting the walls and cleaning the floor, to take place efficiently and without any health and safety issues to visitors.
- To organise an open day for potential volunteers in the Museum in April (date to be confirmed). If members think they might be interested in helping at the Museum please do get in touch.
- To propose to Members at the AGM that the membership fee be raised to £10 a year, and the charge for guests attending Society meetings be raised to £2. Members' subscriptions are an important part of our income, but the fee has risen very little in recent years.

Finally, two interesting new projects have been taken on for 2016:

- The Society has been invited to take part in the proposed new 'Ventnor Film Festival' to run during Ventnor Fringe.
- Following our appeal for members to continue Fay Brown's work photographing changes around the town, Nick Ballanger has offered to undertake a photographic project for the Society entitled 'Grand Designs in Ventnor', recording iconic new houses in Ventnor, including relevant details of architects, build dates and special features, and putting this into a historical context.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Copy Date for Next Issue

Friday 1 April

SPONSOR A NEW MUSEUM DISPLAY PANEL

This year, as we redevelop the Museum, sponsorship is more crucial than ever

I/we would like to sponsor panel/s at £30 each.

Name/s

Do you want these names to appear on the board panel? Yes/No

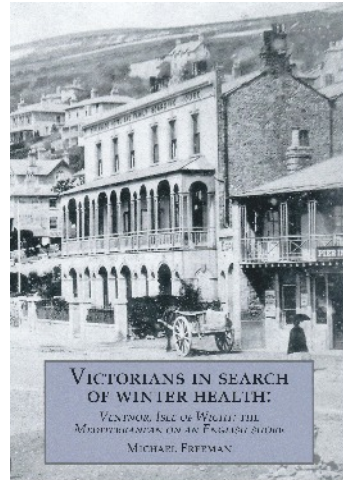
Can we use Gift Aid? Yes/No

Address, if receipt required:

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Send cheques to The Ventnor Heritage Centre, 11, Spring Hill, Ventnor PO38 1PE

Book Review: *Victorians in Search of Winter Health* by Michael Freeman

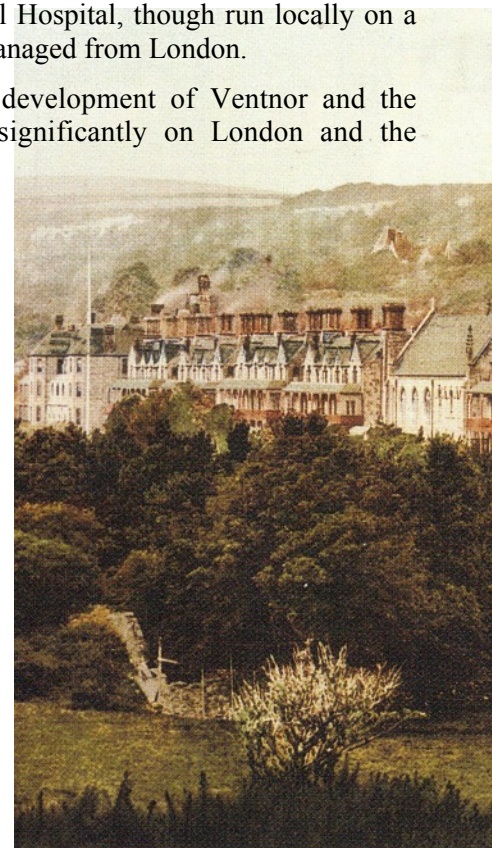


Michael Freeman has previously written two very interesting books about Ventnor and the Undercliff and has now published his third: *Victorians in Search of Winter Health*. It is a fascinating story of how a tiny fishing hamlet, over what is really quite a short time, became a thriving town catering for the needs of people suffering from pulmonary diseases.

The trigger for this development was the publication of a book by Dr James Clark showing how effective he considered a 'Mediterranean' climate could be in preventing and curing chronic disease. Ventnor was mentioned in the second edition of Clark's book, which was published in 1830. Michael Freeman shows how increasingly frequent mentions of land and property for sale in 'the English Madeira' subsequently attracted investors and speculators in ever-increasing numbers.

Chapter three examines how the search for improving health brought doctors, nurses and related services such as chemists and apothecaries to the town, as well as invalids of all ages. The latter were catered for by a wide range of accommodation, from lodging houses to distinctly up-market hotels. One of the many interesting aspects researched by Freeman is the extent to which such a high proportion of the property development was funded by capital from London. Even the Royal National Hospital, though run locally on a day-to-day basis, was managed from London.

But it wasn't just the development of Ventnor and the Undercliff that relied significantly on London and the mainland. A substantial proportion of the people who stayed in Ventnor over the winter months also came from there. Many of these

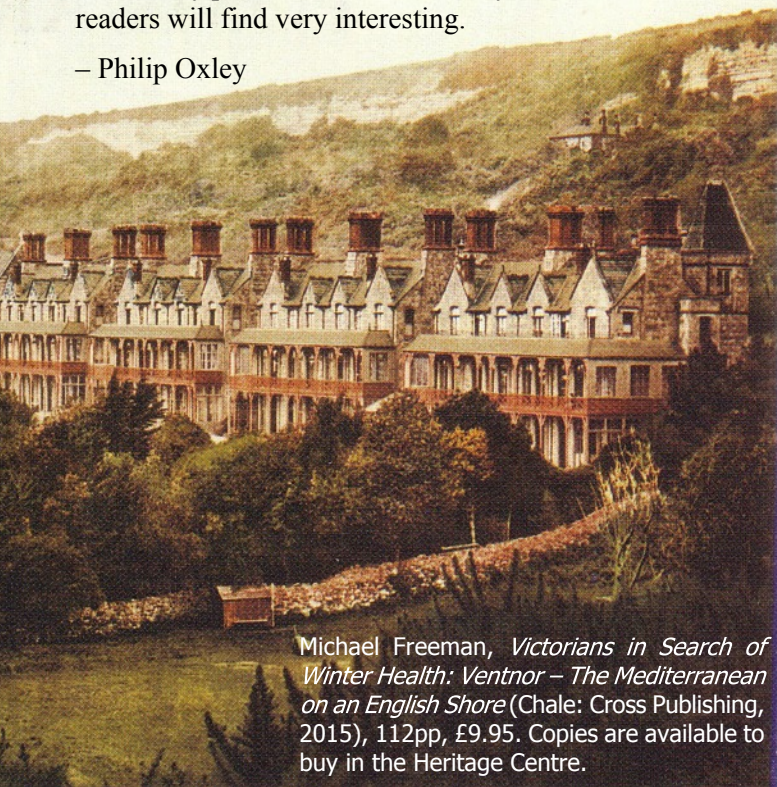


visitors were people of independent means. With this influx of affluent people, Freeman shows how Ventnor High Street began taking on shades of London's West End. In Chapter Six, Freeman describes the shops and businesses that were established through Victorian times. The detail is fascinating, including such businesses as a tailor who, *inter alia*, would make servants' liveries to order; a dealer in high-class horses and a grocer who dealt with the highest classes of French and Italian foods.

Towards the end of the book Freeman looks at the development of Ventnor and the Undercliff as a summer resort. During the 1850s Ventnor's Local Board had regulated sea bathing on the main beach, segregating men and women and requiring the use of bathing machines. As Freeman shows, the regulations, which remained in force well into the twentieth century, were not universally popular with local people. To avoid them, locals would bathe at a small bay between the Gas Works and Highport, sometimes going without costumes, much to the annoyance of some of the nearby residents!

Throughout the book there are many excellent photographs covering all aspects of Ventnor – from tradesmen's bills to the most distinguished of the town's hotels. It is an attractively presented and extensively researched book which readers will find very interesting.

– Philip Oxley



Michael Freeman, *Victorians in Search of Winter Health: Ventnor – The Mediterranean on an English Shore* (Chale: Cross Publishing, 2015), 112pp, £9.95. Copies are available to buy in the Heritage Centre.

Society Monthly Meetings and Speakers 2016

Meetings are normally held on the last Friday of the month in the Masonic Hall on Grove Road in Ventnor, around the corner from the Heritage Centre. Meetings start at 7:30pm and are normally over by 9pm. There are no meetings in August or December, and the March meeting (actually 1 April) is the Society AGM.

29 January	Sheila Caws – 'Walled Gardens of the Isle of Wight'
26 February	Gareth Sprack – 'The French Invasion of the Isle of Wight, 1545'
1 April	Society AGM, followed by slide show presented by Womble Wendy and Yvonne Hardy – 'Round and About in Ventnor: compiled by Fay Brown using postcards from her collection and photographs taken by her'.
29 April	Trevor Price from Dinosaur Isle
27 May	Colin Beavis – 'An Old photo Album'
24 June	Linda Bek – 'The Life and Loves of Sir Richard Worsley'
29 July	Michael Freeman – 'Mayfair by the Sea or Ventnor as You Never Saw It'
August – No meeting	
30 September	Stephen Fisher from the Maritime Archaeology Trust – 'Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War'
28 October	Delian Backhouse-Fry from the Island Archaeology Group – 'All Change, or Life Before Your Very Eyes'.
25 November	Dr Paul Bingham on Arthur Hill Hassall, the founder of the Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.
December – No meeting	

Museum Refurbishment

Thanks to the work of several volunteers, the Museum is undergoing a major change before we re-open in the Spring.

Many pictures and artefacts have been removed for storage in the office loft, walls are being painted, new screens are being purchased and new exhibitions will be on show. The window displays will also be changed.

The DVD viewing area will move to a better location and many of the larger artefacts and display cases will be re-located to form new, themed exhibits.

In the past we have sought sponsors for the screens that display the changing exhibitions: for £30 the name of the sponsor appeared on the screen for a year. We are now seeking sponsors to help with the purchase of the new screens and £30 will buy one screen panel. In return, the name of the sponsor will appear *permanently* on that panel! A sponsorship form is available on page 2.

These new screens will offer much needed flexibility for displays: being articulated, they can form different shapes. If we can get 10 people to sponsor a new panel we will be able to double the display area using these modular fittings. The new screens will also make wheelchair access much easier.

– Richard Downing

Notes and Queries

A column devoted to the asking and answering of member's questions about local historical facts and issues.

Q: What are the lumps and bumps on the grassy area below the Dudley Road car park the remains of? – Jeffrey Mazo

A: My husband remembers there being a garden there with a stream and a small waterfall where he used to catch newts in the 1950s and 60s. The area was known as 'Davy Jones Locker'. – Janet Griffin

A: The Dudley Road car park used to be tennis courts and the area below it on the cliffs was a pleasure garden known as 'Davy Jones Locker', with paths, flower beds and a fountain. The footpath ran from the end of Buona Vista Road down steps and round the edge of the gardens to meet the path along the Eastern Cliffs. The present path from the car park was only put down when the car park was made. – Roger Silsbury



Postcard of Davy Jones' Locker, 1973, from the Museum collection.

New queries

Q: What happened to the Wheelers Bay gasworks? Us kids used to play in and around them between 1944 and 1946. – David White

Q: Does anyone have information regarding the derivation of Canteen Road at Whiteley Bank? It almost sounds like there could have been a NAAFI there during the war. Possibly the proximity of the Ventnor radar station may be relevant. – John Woodhouse

Send your queries and replies to jeffreymazo@hotmail.com or by post to the Society address (see foot of page).

Recent articles from the Society published in the *South Wight Chronicle*

Last January, the Editor of the *South Wight Chronicle* asked the Society to take on writing the weekly 'Local History' page. We agreed (with some trepidation, as nearly 52 articles a year is a lot of work) and are pleased that our pieces seem to have been well received, and have perhaps helped to spread the word about the Society. Our 'Living History' articles, appealing for help putting names to the faces in photographs from the 1940s and 1950s, have been particularly successful. If you have a subject that you think would make an interesting story, please do let us know. The articles published in the last four months include:

'Ventnor's Fire Brigade from the 1920s', Colin Beavis and Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1242, 1/10/15, p. 8

'From Florist to Calves Foot Jelly', Evelyn Knowles, *SWC*, no. 1243, 8/10/15, p. 8.

'Albert Street School Part 1: Victorian Days', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1244, 15/10/15, p. 8.

'Albert Street School Part 2: From 1901 to D-Day', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1245, 22/10/15, p. 8.

'Albert Street School Part 3: The 1950s – The Final Years', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1246, 29/10/15, p. 8.

'Frederick Livesay: A Ventnor Childhood in the 1880s – Part 1', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1247, 5/11/15, p. 8.

'Frederick Livesay: A Ventnor Childhood in the 1880s – Part 2', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1248, 12/11/15, p. 8.

'Growing up in Whitwell: Part One – the 1930s', Audrey Chiverton and Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1249, 19/11/15, p. 8

'Growing up in Whitwell: Part Two – the 1940s', Audrey Chiverton and Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1250, 26/11/15, p. 8.

'Coaches, Horses and Slippers', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1251, 3/12/15, p. 12.

'Furnishing your Home: Sharpe's in Spring Hill', *SWC*, no. 1252, 10/12/15, p. 8.

'Sharpes's Christmas Bazaar – December 1909', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1253, 17/12/15, p. 8.

'Ventnor Fire Brigade: A Brief History', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1254, 7/1/16, p. 8.

'A Hundred and Twenty Years of Entertainment', Evelyn Knowles, *SWC*, no. 1255, 14/1/16, p. 8.