

Ventnor and District Local History Society

NEWSLETTER 27

September 2015

Now and Then

Our job as a Society is to preserve and record the history of Ventnor and the surrounding area, but 'History' is not only in the buildings and events and photographs - it is also in the memories of the people who lived in those buildings and through those events, what we call 'Living History'. A photograph means much more if you can put names to all the faces.

So there is a bit of a 'Living History' theme to this newsletter, with articles about Ventnor life which are separated by only about ten years in time, but which record very different experiences. One is the story of a country childhood in Whitwell in the 1930s, written by Audrey Chiverton, who still works at the desk in the Museum every Friday. The other is a vivid account of fifteen minutes in a summer day in August 1940, when Ventnor suffered its worst bombing raid. On a lighter note, we have 'Echoes from the Hole in the Wall' - some stories from one of Ventnor's favourite old pubs.

No one walking down Grove Road and Spring Hill earlier this year could have missed the work that has been going on at the Museum, using generous bequests from Graham Bennett and Phyllis Chaundy. Most of the work is finished now, and we think it is looking good. Our plans to display the music notes from the Victor Fleming's house on the Esplanade are on hold at the moment as the notes are being repaired, but we are most grateful for donations made by members towards the cost of this.

We recently answered an enquiry about J Williams & Co, who produced metal signs in the early 1900s, and the grateful enquirer sent us a picture of this old sign advertising Sharpes Furniture Store, which occupied our building in those days. Quite a difference from what is there today!

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this Newsletter - especially Audrey, Yvonne, Anne, Jill, Vi and Richard. We are always looking out for interesting stories and information from members to include in the Newsletter, so if you have something you would like to share, please get in touch.



Lesley Telford (Editor)

Museum



A four-year plan for Museum development has been agreed which will require considerable work during the period of winter closure 2015-16. Items will be removed from the walls, the Museum will then be deep-cleaned and re-decorated. This will all be done by volunteers, so please make yourselves available if you can help.

If you have suggestions for change, or wish to help in any way, please contact Michael Freeman who will also be coordinating the programme of implementation. Email us at ventnorheritage.org.uk, phone us, or drop a message for Michael at the Museum.

We have expanded our range of Victorian postcards available at the front desk, thanks to the generosity of member sponsorship, and they are selling well at 40p. The latest include views of the High Street and of carriages at the station.

Richard Downing



Volunteers

We need more stewards to cover the opening hours at the Museum. This is interesting work with the Museum visitors who are always inquisitive about our local history. Most stewards commit to a regular half day a week from May to October, but we also have 'Reserve Stewards' who we call upon when other stewards are on holiday.

If you are interested in helping, please get in touch - leave a note at the museum, or email us. We look forward to working with you!

Evelyn Knowles

A Country Childhood - Growing up in Whitwell in the 1930s



Audrey with her sister Angela and their parents Florence and Frank Morris

My childhood was a happy one, spent first of all at Ludbrook, quite a tiny cottage. We only had oil lamps and candles as there was no electricity at this time.

Father worked on a farm and earned twenty nine shillings a week, out of which the rent was three shillings. I remember going up to the shops for groceries, sugar and sweets etc were put into blue cone-shaped bags. To get water there were standpipes in the village in the shape of Lions and we had a well in the garden, and a pump inside the gate. The water was always very cold and crystal clear.

Auntie Maud lived next door and had the little farm across the road. I remember her with a yoke over her shoulder so that it was easier to carry two buckets of milk at a time across to her dairy. The cream was taken off and put into a barrel, where she kept turning the handle until it became butter. Then she would use butter pats to shape it into blocks. It was always very cold in there.

On Sunday evenings we used to go out for a walk, and when we got back always had some of the cold roast meat for supper - my

favourite was cold lamb & mint sauce made from mint grown in the garden. On Good Fridays, Dick Dyer used to come round with bags of hot cross buns (really hot) and throw them up to the bedroom window as it was early in the morning, so we ate them sitting on the bed. There was a field at the top of the garden where we used to have big picnics with friends and family. We sat under the Elm trees and had tables and chairs.

Angela and I used to go to Sunday School in the Chapel next door to us. Once a year we had our Sunday School outing to Ryde. We both had a money box in the shape of a post box, and the night before we would get the scissors and get our pennies out through the slot. Once we each had 5 shillings. What riches! The charabanc took us to Ryde and then Mother, Grandma and the Aunts took us over to Portsmouth on the old paddle ferry.



At the end of August just before we went back to school we used to have a day on Sandown Beach - us, aunts & cousins. We went into MacFisheries and all got fish and chips, and a big bag of buns in Masters shop. Then on to the beach where we ate them out of the paper - fish and chips have never tasted the same since. When we went to Puckaster Cove it was a climb back to the road. Mother, who had asthma, would have to stop sometimes, and would say she had stopped to admire the view. I tell myself the same thing when I have to stop for breath on the way home here. She also used to take an empty bottle, which she filled with sea water to put her feet in when she got home.



A lasting memory is of Christmas. Grandmother always got the family together, which was quite easy then because we all lived in the village. We always had a wonderful tea, and then went into her front room where there was a big log fire. Grandfather sat by it cracking walnuts with his teeth! We played charades and dressing up and guessing games. When it was time to go, Grandma always asked us to sing the hymn "God be with you till we meet again", and when she died we sang it at her funeral. I suppose this is why I've always tried to have family re-unions, although it is now more difficult as the families are getting scattered. Still it gives me so much pleasure to have them all around me.

Audrey Chiverton

Echoes from *The Hole in the Wall*

The "Hole in The Wall" pub stood on the corner of Market Street and Pound Lane, where the Clarendon Court flats are now. In 1860 a beer licence was granted to Charles Farrow as an extension of the Hotel licence for the Commercial Hotel (later the Central Hotel), and the 'Commercial Tap' was born. It was housed in what had been coal storage buildings for the Hotel. There was a stable yard behind the wall which extended from the Hotel down Market Street, and at the end of the stables there was a tack room - this was the original 'Hole in The Wall' where beer and other refreshments would be passed out to the ostlers.



Charles Farrow's daughter, Sarah, married Tom Reed and they, and then their son Les Reed, ran the pub, followed by his son Jack Reed, so the pub stayed in the family until Jack surrendered the tenancy in 1961. *This picture taken outside the Hole in the Wall in 1943 shows Les Reed on the left with his wife Ethel (nee Jenkins) on the right of the picture, and her sister Nora and Nora's daughter Jill (Wearing) who contributed this article, in the centre.*

Jack is 91 years of age now and has many fond memories of the Hole in The Wall. The stableyard had coachhouses for the four-in-hand coaches, and Barnabus 'Barney' Bull, who sold fresh fruit and vegetables around town from his cart, rented stables there for his two horses. Barney would take round fresh fruit and vegetables, selling them from his cart to the townspeople. In about 1934, when he was 10 years old, Jack kept white mice in one of the stables along with straw for them. He was puzzled when his supply of straw gradually diminished and he decided to set a trap. He carefully placed a bucket filled with horse manure on top of the stable door, so that when anyone entered the contents would empty on top of them. Well the trap worked! The hapless person that got well and truly covered was "Curly" Raynor who had not realised that the straw was for Jack's mice! His mum, Ethel, had the job of washing all Curley's clothes!

The stable yard was very much a feature of life in the pub, and Jack and his wife Fay turned the stables into the popular Barn Bar. On a Saturday night, coaches from all across the Island, including soldiers from Parkhurst, would stop in Albert Street and the revellers would go straight down to the Hole in the Wall until nearly closing time, which was around 10pm in those days, and then on to the Winter Gardens, where it its heyday more than 500 people would dance the night away.

Jill Wearing

We are planning a series of articles on Ventnor Pubs, including the "Hole in the Wall", for our local history page in the South Wight Chronicle. Many of the old pubs are gone now, we should make sure that they are remembered - if you have photographs or stories, please do let us have them.

Heritage Walk

Ventnor's health heritage: Monday 26th October. A circular walk to key sites in Ventnor's development as a health resort: climate, health, medicine, sanatoria, hospitals and doctors. Starts at 10.30 from the Esplanade pumping station. 2.5 miles in 2.5 hours. No need to book in advance. Walk leader is Richard Downing 01983 856210

Membership Matters

We are delighted to report that our membership numbers are increasing, with more than 150 this year, and people still joining. A very warm welcome to all our new members.

Subscriptions for 2016 are due on 1 January, but we encourage everyone to renew membership at the November meeting if possible. Our new membership card will be smaller than in the past and without details of Monthly Meeting dates and speakers, but these will be available on our website, and in the Museum as well as around the town.

Wendy Stromberg, one of our members, has taken on the job of organising the speaker programme for 2016, and the dates and speakers for the first three meetings are:

29 January: *Walled Gardens of the Isle of Wight* (Speaker Sheila Caws)

26 February: *The French Invasion of the Isle of Wight 1543* (Speaker Gareth Sprack)

Wendy Marshall

12 August 1940 "It was a beautiful summer's day . . . "

It was a beautiful summer's day, with a gentle breeze. The siren went off just as it struck 12 o'clock. Oscar was home to dinner a little earlier that day, I had come down from upstairs to Oscar's house for safety sake, Cyril was out on the lawn and Nellie had just got to the door to call him in as we could hear the planes - enemy - roaring in from the sea over the town. Cyril had just got inside when Nellie stumbled away from the window shouting "*Oh God the Downs is gone up*" and the same time bombs were dropping. Nellie had seen the result of two bomb explosions and the Downs on fire. Oscar rushed in from the back shouting "*To the shelter! To the shelter! Nellie, Cyril, Mab. To the shelter!*"



We heard bombs falling thick and fast and glass crashing all around us. There were bombs, whistling bombs, time bombs, guns roaring and machine gun fire. Nellie went icy cold, I thought she would collapse. Although we were all saying our prayers quietly, Oscar knelt down and said "*Let's say a prayer*". We were all clinging to each other, we prayed aloud, Hail Marys, acts of contrition and Our Fathers, thought and prayed for those poor men and women on the top of the Downs - it was the top of the downs they were attacking. We thought the invasion had started, and that they were bombing their way into the town. We were terrified and all thought the end had come. Oscar's shelter is one of his coal cellars and although it is a pretty safe place it has no door and it opens into a stone passage which also has no door so we had the full force of the blast and noise. It lasted about 10 minutes to a quarter of an hour and about 80 to 100 bombs were dropped on the Downs and Leeson Road and in the big private grounds in Bonchurch, then our Spitfires came and

drove them off, and when they were driven back all was peace and quiet and it was still a beautiful day.

Then we went upstairs to see what damage had been done and we saw two huge craters on the side of the Downs and a big white house in Leeson Road half blown away, a poor woman was alone in this house and she was seriously hurt, but recovering now, and another house opposite Trinity Terrace (where we used to live) was half blown away - a Miss Williams was seriously hurt, but improving now. Hundreds of panes of glass were blown in, and heaps of shop plate glass windows, the whole lot of windows went in one go at Trinity Terrace. One soldier only on the Downs was seriously injured but he is getting better. It is a miracle that no other lives were lost, the Downs have deep shelters.

Well dear E & A whatever is in store for us in the future we shall never forget our Baptism of fire in the frontline - the door of Hell was opened but God closed it again.

Love to all, Mab

This account of the raid on Ventnor on 12 August 1940 was written by Mabel Harding (nee Channing) to her brother and sister in law in Tasmania, Austin and Ethel Channing ("E & A"). The photograph here was taken in 1942, and shows Mabel with her grandchildren Marigold, David and Desmond. Mabel was at her brother Oscar's house at the time of the raid - Nellie was his wife, and Cyril their son. Cyril was a sergeant in the RAF and died on 12 June 1944.