



Walk south along Victoria Street's east side and you may (if you look upward) spot this three-storey stone house, once with tripartite French window to the right of the ground floor that formed the entrance. The adjacent image dates from the late 1990s. The structure was Listed Grade II by the DoF in 1976 and the inspector recorded that it was built 1840-1850. It originally had a 2-stall stable and coach house to the left.

Monte Bello has a rather chequered and yet fascinating history. It seems clear that it was erected as a lodging house for the town's growing visitor population. In June 1863, for example, the *Isle of Wight Mercury* recorded a Mrs and Mrs Needham staying there, along with Captain March, Mrs March, the Misses March, and the Misses Jeffery. In the 1871 Census, the keeper of Monte Bello was William Rayner, aged 55, assisted by his wife Emma and a nineteen-year-old servant, Alice Tehery. Rayner was the first Beadle for the Commissioners of the Local Board. Earlier, in 1860, the *Mercury* had recorded that a Russian couple were lodging at Monte Bello. Mr and Mrs Mordvinov were among a surprising number of political dissidents who frequented Ventnor that summer.

When we get to the 1891 Census, William Roper is listed as the household head and described as a 'carman'. However, Monte Bello clearly remains a lodging house, probably run by Roper's wife, for several visitors are listed staying there. By the time of the Great War, though, it had been turned into a Soldiers' Institute where men convalescing in the Undercliff from wounds incurred at the Front could visit to play billiards, chess and other activities. The Institute gained a reputation among the men as a 'Home from Home'. During this time, the property was let to Albert Bull, a local businessman, but his tenancy ceased at the end of September 1919.

Between the two wars, Monte Bello largely seems to have vanished from view as a lodging or boarding house, but by 1947 it was being advertised as a café and guest house, run by Mr and Mrs R Cross, though the name contracted to Montebello. The business clearly prospered in the immediate post-war years, for it featured annually in Ventnor Guides through to the early 1960s, by then run by Mr and Mrs E. Guy whose primary address was on the Great West Road in Hounslow, Middlesex.

It was in the mid-1960s that the 'Count of Monte Bello' showed on the scene. Sydney (Syd) Clark, who first came to the Island in the 1950s, took over the guest house. Apart from war service in the Army, he had spent all of his working life in the catering trade, notably as a barman and waiter. He had once waited upon Winston Churchill. His reputation was one of living life to the full, trying to make everything he did full of fun. The quip was that he would one day work at a bar for St. Peter. Among the Heritage Centre archives, there is a visitor book for Monte Bello, covering the years 1970-1973. Within it are letters from guests that thank Syd for the happy and comfortable stay they enjoyed, promising to pass the word to others and promising, too, to come back again. By the later 1980s, Syd seems to have ceased running the guest house and was working for Graham and Sue Perks at the Rose Inn. He died in September 1995.

'Monte Bello', of course, means beautiful mountain in Italian. One presumes that this refers to St. Boniface Down, although the property did not really have a view of it. The main view from the front, looking west, would originally have been across an area known as 'the swamp' (now a car park).

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

MONTEBELLO CAFÉ
and **GUEST HOUSE**
Victoria Street :: Ventnor
(One minute Town Hall and High Street, two minutes
Leas, Sea and Tennis Courts)

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Fragrant Tea . Continental Coffee
HOME-MADE CAKES AND BISCUITS
POPULAR PRICES
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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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