



Ventnor Secondary Modern School swimming gala 1970



This is a photo taken by the late Fay Brown who had a long association with Ventnor Secondary Modern (later Ventnor Middle School). The image has captured four contestants as they are in the act of diving into the pool. The costumes worn by several of the swimmers are highly distinctive in pattern and it is possible that someone still living locally may recognise themselves or else fellow competitors.

The School itself was a new one, completed and opened in the spring of 1957. It was among the finest secondary schools built on the south coast in the early post-war years. The total cost was around £160,000 and many Island businesses were involved in its construction and fitting out. Moreys, for example, supplied the Gurjun floor for the gymnasium, Gurjun being a fine hardwood ideally suited for the purpose. They also supplied the teak floor in the large assembly hall which had seating for almost 400 pupils. Some half a million bricks were used in building the School, all supplied and manufactured by Island Bricks of Rookley.

The teaching and recreational facilities offered were outstanding for a secondary school of that era. There were dedicated rooms, for instance, for mathematics, commerce, history, geography, arts and crafts, needlework and music. There was a fine domestic science suite, with six fully equipped kitchenettes. There was a science laboratory for the study of physics and chemistry, with benches fitted with AC and DC electric points for each pupil, together with a photographic dark room.

The swimming pool seen in the above photo was not initially part of the construction plan. It was the idea of the parent-teacher association and some of the third and fourth-form boys helped with aspects of its construction. Measuring 45 feet by 15 feet, it held 20,000 gallons of water and the School Science Department was lined up to oversee water purification. For pupils who did not fancy the water, the School's extensive 13-acre site eventually provided two soccer pitches, two hockey pitches, a cricket pitch, a running track and a rugby pitch.

When one reads all the accounts of the commissioning and opening of what the local press called 'Ventnor's Super-School', putting to shade many older schools both on the Island and over the water, it is disconcerting then to have to record that, within 60 years, it would be demolished. Changing pupil rolls and changing educational practice overtook its use and viability.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, especially the extensive index of the late Fay Brown.



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.

www.ventnorheritage.org.uk / telephone 855407

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