



An old station in the Undercliff becomes a holiday home



Sometime in the later 1950s, a young family on one of a sequence of annual Island holidays discovered, while out walking, the disused St. Lawrence railway tunnel. They trudged through its 600-yard length, emerging to the fine panorama of the English Channel at its southern portal, before climbing up the 'Red Gun' (St. Rhadagund's footpath that crossed the old line at this point) where there were even grander views from the summit. Not far beyond the tunnel portal they came across the old St. Lawrence station which displayed a sign that it was for sale. British Railways was the vendor and, after some vigorous negotiation, the family acquired it for £750. This was equivalent to the price of a decent family car

at the time, but well below the price of an equivalent sized dwelling house. The picture above shows the station in later years of operation when it was reduced to an unstaffed halt.



The adjacent picture, dated 1960, shows the station in new guise as a holiday home, complete with signboard giving dates when the railway opened and closed (1897 and 1952) and proudly announcing that it was now 'private property'. The family that bought it was soon decamping from the mainland for the duration of the summer holidays. The old stationmaster's flat on the first floor provided kitchen, living room and main bedroom, while the rooms at platform level provided bedrooms for the children. These included the old ticket office, the waiting room, the ladies' room and the lamp room. There was no staircase down within the building, so the kids, when it was time to go to bed, went out the front door at first-floor level and then down and round to the platform. There was accommodation for up to 10 in the building and so the kids were able to invite some of their friends along to stay. In fine weather, there was bathing to be had at Woody Bay and a general store in the village for provisions. The family's name was Wallis and the father, Jack, worked in London at the time, making the journey down each weekend to join his wife and children. He reflected later in life how there could never have been a happier station.

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



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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