



## VIVIAN YORKE



This is a story of another well-known Ventnor character who had an enormous influence on the history of scouting in the town and elsewhere.

Vivian Christopher Joseph Yorke (always affectionately called 'Viv') was born in 1896 in Norfolk and, after spending his early years in India with his parents, came to Ventnor in 1907. In April 1909, at the age of just 13, along with Mr. Alfred Du Feu, he founded the first ever group of scouts in Ventnor, named 'Bull Patrol' (older readers may remember Du Feu's tobacconist shop on the corner of Church Street and Pier Street - under the clock - now an estate agent). This patrol later became the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ventnor and three years later 'Viv' became its first Scoutmaster.

Viv was born deaf but he never let his handicap stand in his way when he wanted to do something that he believed in. He taught himself to lip read and, eventually, to speak. At the outbreak of the Great War he tried to enlist, but his deafness prevented any active service in the armed forces, but as a scouter he was awarded the War Service badge.

Viv was an expert hiker, camper, swimmer and woodsman and, in addition, he was a voluntary lifesaver on Ventnor beach. Everyone spoke highly of Viv, and he always had the Scout law uppermost.

He was cheerful and kind and was often looking for an opportunity to do a good deed. In 1943 he was awarded the 'Silver Acorn', one of the highest awards in the scouting movement, after 57 years of dedicated service.

In 1938 Viv was working as a longshoreman for Spencer's on Ventnor beach, when the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, who was staying in Ventnor, took a boat trip in Jack Spencer's launch. The photograph shows the Emperor coming ashore after the voyage, being helped down the gangplank by Viv with Jack behind.

During the second war, Viv did lookout work and was a member of the Life Saving Association crew and, with others, picked up German and British airmen who had ditched in the Channel. Viv was also officially authorised, in the early war years, to 'keep an eye' on bathers on the beach until it had to be closed to the public.

He was a keen worker for the Poppy Day collections and on Armistice Day he always went afloat to lay poppy wreaths on the sea and always attended the annual St. Georges Day service at Windsor Castle. For all his good work around the town he was the recipient of a special Rotary Club presentation in 1981.

Vivian was a man of many talents specialising in entertaining as a conjuror. He was also a Punch & Judy man, which must have been difficult for someone who was deaf, and where normal speech did not come readily! He was a member of Ventnor Golf Club and, in 1948, was made a life member in recognition of his services.

He married Elizabeth Selina Withcher and they had one child, a son, Michael who later became the landlord of the 'Central Tap' (known latterly as 'The Hole in the Wall'). Viv outlived both his wife, who died in 1973 aged 78, and his son who was tragically killed in a road traffic collision in the upper High Street in 1978, at the age of 46. Vivian went on to the ripe old age of 98. His funeral service, conducted by Father Davey, was held in St Wilfrid's Church in 1984 and he is buried in Ventnor Cemetery.

*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis, Ventnor & District Local History Society - photograph from Society archives.*