



Ventnor Esplanade: the west end about 1865



This is quite an early photograph of the west end of Ventnor's Esplanade. It can be roughly dated by the wide crinolines of the two women standing on the far right and by the building that stands on the first bend as your eye follows the upward line of Bath Road. The crinoline of the time was a steel hoop petticoat first patented in France in 1856. The fashion spread rapidly in Britain, the dresses requiring yards of material to make. Their popularity was at its height in the 1860s, but by the early 1870s the bustle was starting to become the prevailing fashion. The building seen on the bend of Bath Road is *Danebury House*, erected about 1860. Just beyond it, but facing seaward, were three further buildings: *Landsdowne House*, *Brooklyn Villa* and *Milanese Villa*, all erected around the same time. With the exception of *Milanese Villa* (in the twentieth century called *La Falaise*), all were demolished over 1874-5. The four structures were on land belonging to the Hambrough estate. They were lodging houses that were put up as speculations, intended to capitalise on Ventnor's runaway growth as a health resort, in winter especially. Perched on the western cliffs, close to the Esplanade, with fine sea views, the plan clearly had its merits. Some of the more prominent townspeople, though, regarded them as disfiguring the coastal views from the bay, as well as spoiling the cliff walks. Nature also came to their assistance, for within a few years the buildings started to show signs of ground movement. The three nearest to Bath Road soon became 'untenable'. Wells were sunk to discover the source of 'the mischief': it was water. The Hambrough estate soon agreed to their removal, with the materials recovered from *Danebury House* used to construct a dwelling of the same name on St. Boniface Road.

Returning to the photograph, you can see a hansom cab in the centre, just right of the lamp standard. A little further right, one can make out a tradesman with a large delivery basket on his arm. On the beach, there is a solitary bathing machine drawn up in the middle distance. Closer to the eye, the low sea wall (or high beach perhaps), is lined with the wooden capstans that were used to lower and haul the heavy wooden machines in and out of the water. A solitary longshoreman stands nearby, close to his boat. Beyond the bathing machine, elevated on a rock ledge, is *Undercliff House*, recognisable today, of course, as the *Spy Glass Inn*, one of Ventnor's most popular hostelries.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, the photo courtesy of Sophie from Blake's Longshoreman.



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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