

At the end of the Second World War, Lowtherville (or Upper Ventnor as it is known today) was less than half the size it is now with just a few roads. The main road was (and still is) Newport Road, the others being Lowtherville Road, Down Lane, Steephilldown Road and a short stretch of York Road.

There wasn't a lot for children to do, but we were always happy and always found something to keep us occupied. We did have a school, in Lowtherville Road, but very little in the way of entertainment. There were very few radios, no TV sets, and certainly no mobile phones. In fact, most houses didn't even have an ordinary telephone, but there was always a working call box within a short walk.

In 1946 an organisation called 'The Upper Ventnor Childrens Fund' was created to provide entertainment for the children of Lowtherville and over the following years many events took place in support of them.

In 1950 a New Year's party was arranged at the Drill Hall in Bellevue Road and about 300 children were entertained by Mr and Mrs Bannister, Mr Arthur Wills, Mr Ron Harrison, while Mr R Williams gave a film show. During the show, 'Father Christmas' toured the tables with Mrs T Sydney-Parry who gave every child a shilling. The excellent catering was provided by Mr A E Payne of the Mikado Café. (The Drill Hall is still there but is now a private dwelling after many years as the premises of boat-builders, Copland Boats).

Fund-raising for the organisation was conducted throughout the year at various venues in the district, but mostly at weekly dances and socials held in St Alban's Hall every Tuesday. Music was regularly provided by Tony Warry.

At a Special General Meeting held in April 1951, the group voted to change its name to 'The Upper Ventnor Childrens Welfare Group' with the same aims and purpose as its predecessor. It was soon going from strength to strength in order to cater for the growing number of children now living in a rapidly expanding area.



Although the main venue for a lot of events was St Alban's Hall (on St Alban's Steps – pictured, left, before its demolition in June 2001), various other halls were used and, in 1953, over 200 youngsters and 60 guests were entertained to tea in the Town Hall in Albert Street. Catering for this particular event was by Mr & Mrs A E J Walters from the Briantree Café just down the road.

Also in 1953, as part of the Queen's Coronation Celebrations, the Group organised a special day starting with a street procession from Steephilldown Road to Rolf's Field (at the Wroxall end of Newport Road), culminating in a grand fireworks display at 10pm.

When I was growing up in these times, the names of the main organisers, whom I can remember, included Mr & Mrs L Wood, Mrs & Mrs G Drudge, Mr W Wheeler, Mr G Parsons, Mrs L Clarkson, Mr R H Symmans and Mr W Wheeler. Of course, there were many others who contributed to the entertainment of the children over those decades and we will be eternally grateful to them all.

Finally, one everlasting memory I have is the walk back up St. Alban's Steps after the Christmas Party every year with a bar of Cadbury's Dairy Milk, an orange, and a shiny new threepenny bit!

*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis* (photo from Fay Brown's collection)