



## Villa Amanti as a Sauna and Solarium



Few local people (and probably many regular visitors, too) will fail to recognise this remarkable Italianate villa on Ventnor Esplanade, dating from 1843, and now wonderfully restored. But what many will not know is that, in the late 1970s, it became the location of the first commercial sauna complex in Ventnor. Finnish sauna baths and solariums had been installed there. The project was the idea of Brenda and Peter Wright who had recently acquired the Metropole Hotel, for which Villa Amanti had for some time been the Hotel Annexe, used mainly for hotel staff accommodation and as a store.

The Wrights had spent ten years running Macrocarpa Hotel on Mitchell Avenue and were endeavouring to apply their business acumen to giving the forty-four bedroom Metropole a major facelift, turning it into a first-class attraction for visitors in season and for local residents all year. The Sauna opened in June 1978, the adjacent advert giving details of its facilities and charges. Women and men were catered for in separate departments and opening hours were from 10 am to 10 pm. Mr and Mrs John Suckling had been engaged to undertake supervision of the new facility. The acquisition of an all-over tan could, it was claimed, be achieved without burning, without creams and without goggles.

There seems to be no record as to the success of this venture, but we do know that in 1987 the Metropole Hotel was sold on and started to gain a reputation for high quality cuisine under experienced chef, Andre Van-Pottlesberghe. A new restaurant had been opened for the purpose in the main sun lounge, with the hotel itself ably overseen by Kay and Colin Knowles.

Unfortunately, within four or five years, the Hotel had drifted into bankruptcy and been closed. Whereas in 1986, it had been up for sale for £350,000, by June 1993 the asking price was only £195,000, subsequently reduced to £150,000 that November, and then put up for public auction, guide price £50,000, in March 1994. A Southampton businessman, Simon Andrews, purchased it, but his tenure proved tortuous to say the least. The hotel was damaged by fire in 1996. There were repeated disputes between Andrews and the local authorities. For a short time, the building was used to provide accommodation for homeless people in a contract with the Council. By 2001, parts of the frontage were boarded up, creating a sea-front eyesore. Eventually, site and building were acquired by a local property company and permission obtained for a block of luxury apartments. Always known now as the 'Met', its street level café culture, under the shelter of a long veranda, has become a favourite part of the Esplanade scene, both for residents and visitors.

*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, especially the Fay Brown Index*

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# SAUNA

AND OBTAIN A

# SUNTAN

AT

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AND SOLARIUM**  
**Metropole Hotel Annexe**  
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