



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## A New Harbour for Ventnor: 1864 - Tugboat to Littlehampton



Last week's article described the wrecking of the paddle steamer *Chancellor* at Ventnor on 2nd July 1863. But the disaster did little to dissuade the Ventnor Harbour Company from proceeding apace with its two planned breakwaters.

By the late spring of 1864, the western arm was almost finished and the Company announced that it would be open for traffic. The picture here reveals the full form of the refuge harbour by late summer 1864, with the eastern breakwater arm close to completion.



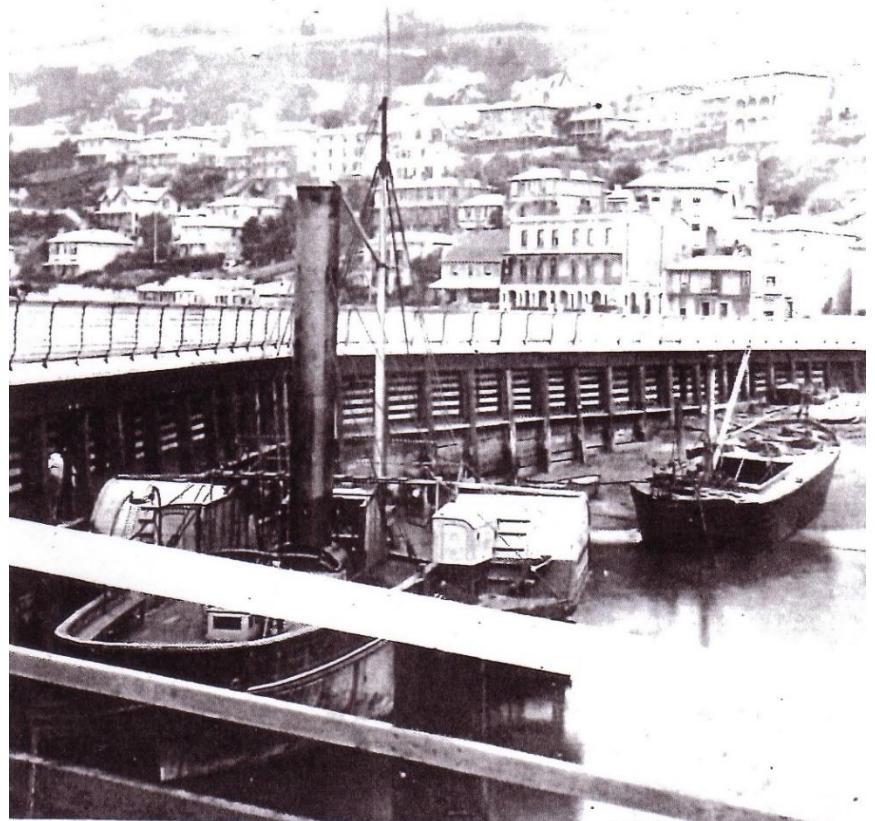
Heavy goods and merchandise could be shipped in (including coals), excursion steamers were once again invited to call, and there was to be a passenger service to Littlehampton and back, making connection with trains to and from London. A converted steam tug, *Antagonist*, had been organized to ply the Littlehampton route. Built at Deptford on the Thames in 1857, 83 feet in length, 17 feet in breadth, and of 83 gross registered tons, it had been chartered by the Isle of Wight Steam Packet Company in 1863.

Early on the morning of 10th May 1864, eager observers spotted the *Antagonist* out in Ventnor Bay waiting upon the tide to dock and unload her cargo and then take on passengers. Her departure around 10 a.m. was greeted with loud cheers from onlookers and the firing of cannon.

As it turned out, however, *Antagonist* failed to provide a reliable service, particularly in contrary weather conditions, and it was not long before the schedule had to be altered to provide running only on every other day. For passengers, it could hardly have been a comfortable journey, for there was no proper accommodation for them on board and little shelter. Deck space was shared with whatever cargo she happened to be carrying.

The picture here shows the *Antagonist* tied up inside the western breakwater. The tide is low and the type of construction used for the breakwater is plain to see. The vessel's paddleboxes appear far too large for its size, but this reflected, of course, its tugboat origin.

Soon the Harbour Company directors were announcing grand plans to build two fast steamers to handle passenger traffic to mainland ports.



Michael Freeman, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](#). Source: this piece has been compiled mainly from the late Fay Brown's index files now held in the Heritage Museum.