



Richard Leitch



One does not normally associate Ventnor with the Canary Islands, but one medical practitioner did exactly that when he gave young Richard Leitch just six months to live unless he re-settled in either the Canary Islands or Ventnor. Quite why this particular doctor offered to his patient such a juxtaposition of 'healthy' climates is unknown, but Leitch chose Ventnor as his new abode in 1889, arriving with a wife and young family at a property on the corner of Albert Street and Market Street. Here he set up trade as a boot and shoe repairer, a business he pursued for the rest of his working life. He lived to the age of 86 and attributed the restoration of his health to daily walks in the invigorating air of St. Boniface Down which he visited on most days. Leitch was one of quite a number of tradesmen who sought out Ventnor as a potential cure for chronic health conditions, 'Tiger' Sanders of the Tiger Tea Stores on Pier Street being perhaps the most memorable. Joseph Sanders arrived in Ventnor in 1886, having been given just five years to live, but he confounded the physicians by surviving to the age of 93.

The adjacent image shows Richard Leitch's business premises by about 1900, by which time he had relocated to the opposite side of Albert Street and, from the signage, in partnership as Leitch & Field, shoe manufacturers and boot repairers. By around 1910, he had moved yet again, this time to commodious premises at the top end of Pier Street where he remained active until the mid-1930s.

Conscious of the way Ventnor's microclimate had helped restore his health, Richard Leitch became an enthusiastic member of the Town Council for over 20 years. In particular, he became an outstanding chair of the Pier Committee, was instrumental in engaging concert parties for the Pier Pavilion, hotly in favour of roller skating there, and a strenuous advocate for steamboat excursions from the Pier on Sundays.



Richard Leitch and his wife had four children, a son and three daughters. In June 1939, Mr and Mrs Leitch were congratulated by the townspeople on the occasion of their Diamond wedding anniversary. Son Tom was among the first to respond to Kitchener's call for men at the start of the Great War where he rose to the rank of Staff-Sergeant in the Army Service Corps. Very sadly, he became unexpectedly ill in the summer of 1919 and then died of pernicious anaemia at Netley Hospital a few months later, aged just 37. He left a widow (formerly Miss Hetty Bull) and three youngsters.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



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The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

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