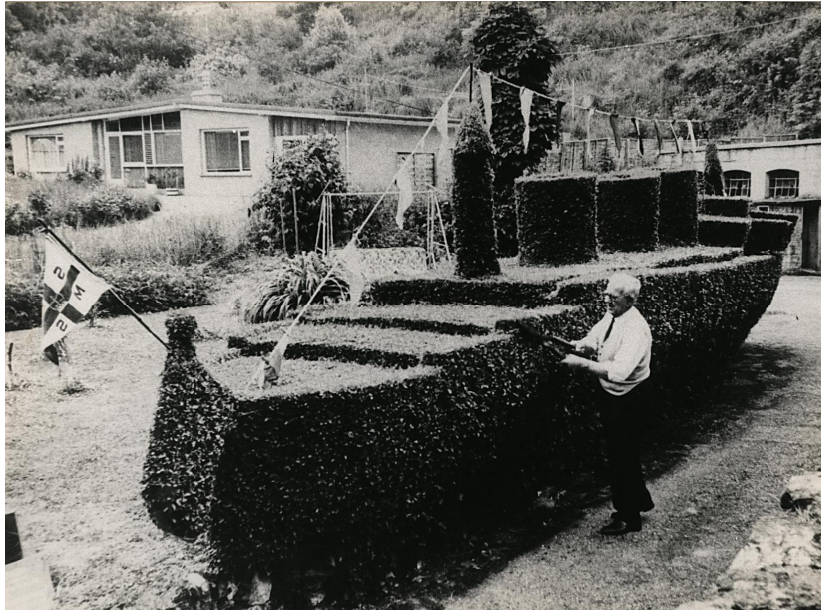




The Queen Mary Hedge at St. Lawrence



Postcards were printed of this fantastic piece of topiary during the first decades after the 1939-45 war. Generally, they did not include its creator busy practising his art of clipping, but a few of the many thousands of Island visitors who paused to view the spectacle would no doubt have seen John White tending his immaculate creation.

Older locals will, of course, recognise it as the famous 'Queen Mary Hedge' at Craigie Cottage, St. Lawrence, where it grew on Water Board land and where John White had charge of the pumping station there. The topiary idea came to him in 1938, some two years after the new Cunard liner, *Queen Mary*, had begun to make regular transatlantic crossings between Southampton and New York, twice stealing the Blue Riband from the great French liner, *Normandie*, that had entered service the year before. Being a fairly fast-growing privet hedge, it did not take long for the funnels to appear, then the bridge and then the forward mast. In the early days, the 48-foot long hedge was six feet high and six feet wide. Ultimately, it grew to be eleven feet high and eight feet wide.

John White was an Islander, having been born at nearby Niton Undercliff. He saw service in the Royal Navy during the Great War and, after witnessing a large merchant navy convoy under fierce German aerial attack off the south of the Island in August 1940, he thought of the idea of mounting collecting boxes along the hedge in support of the *Merchant Navy Comfort Society*, an organisation set up during the war to assist the families of seamen who were lost under enemy warfare, as well as those that survived the ordeal, but often with deep scars.

Like so many men of his era, John White had a nickname: 'Brisher' White. He appears to have acquired this name from his cricketing career, for he was a stalwart player member at Ventnor Cricket Club for over 40 years, legendary for deceptively slow curling deliveries as a bowler, as well as an accomplished batsman.

John White died in late 1973, aged 75. For a time the Queen Mary Hedge continued to be maintained by his daughter, Mrs Sue Nobbs, but after Water Board lorries damaged it, a decision had to be taken to cut the hedge down – sometime in 1976. However, postcards of the hedge continue to pop up at collectors' fairs from time to time, reminding us of this gem of local history.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre. Fay Brown wrote more fully about the Queen Mary Hedge in the SW Chronicle of 27th March 2014.



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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