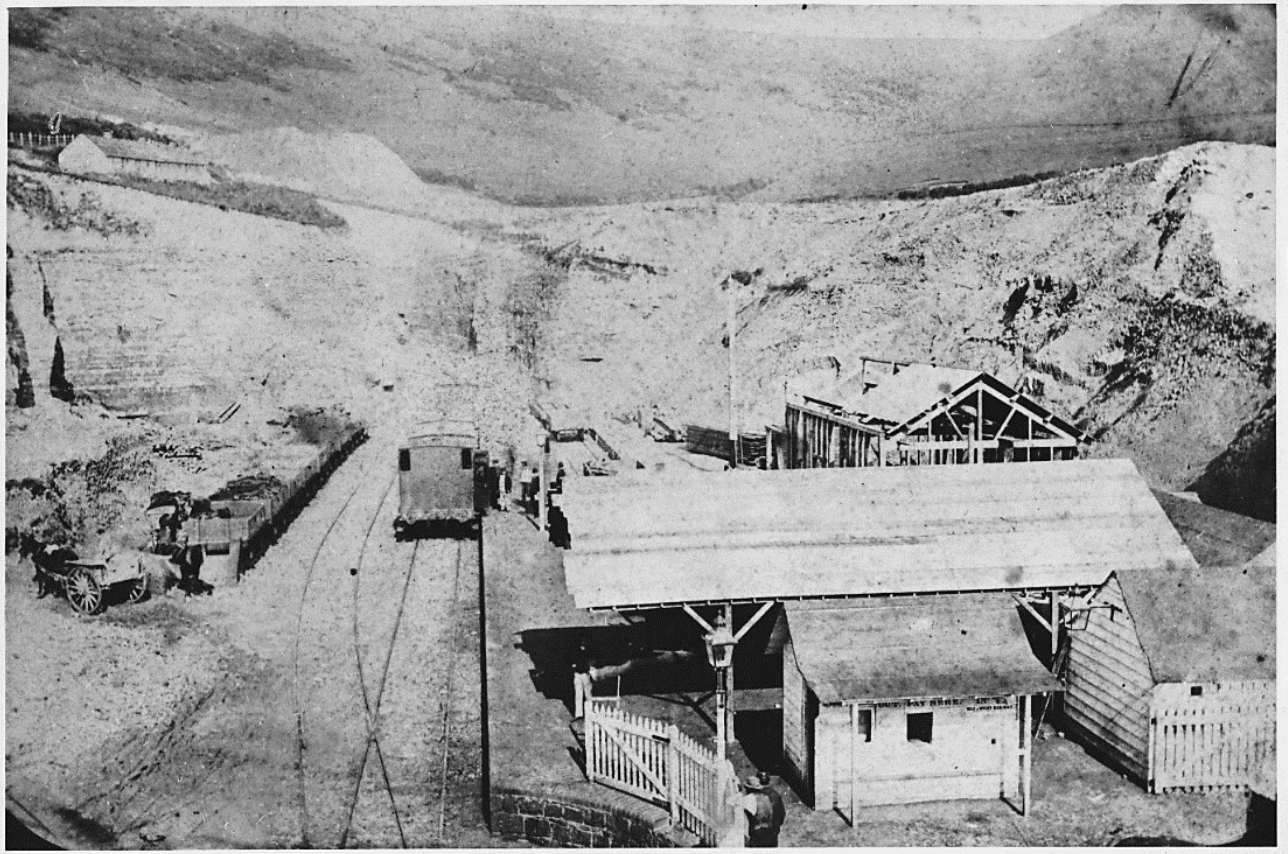


This is the rather bleak prospect that would have greeted Ventnor's first railway passengers as they arrived at eight o'clock in the morning on 10th September 1866. After the three-quarters of a mile of smoky gloom in the tunnel under St. Boniface Down, with the only illumination being tiny oil lamps in the compartment ceilings, they found themselves alighting in what was still a working quarry and with Ventnor Station itself still under construction.



The goods shed, as can be seen, is but half built. There are not yet any canopies over the platforms, so travellers were open to the elements while getting on or off trains. There appear to be some basic offices in the concourse area and a makeshift canopy, but otherwise the station has all the hallmarks of a building site.

However, for those accustomed to making the slow journey by horse-drawn coach or carriage, including the few public stage-coaches that had, up to that time, plied the route, it was a major improvement. The journey from Ryde (the present St. John's Road Station) had taken just 25 minutes and there were to be twelve trains each way daily. Moreover, with a tramway operating along the length of Ryde pier to connect to steamboats, passengers were placed within four hours and seven minutes of London. For those long accustomed to railway travel, Ventnor station's privations would have been nothing new, nor would the blackness of its long tunnel approach. The reason is that many would have seen it all before. Throughout the 1840s, the country at large had been in the grip of railway expansion. In towns, cities and in the countryside, the thrusting lines of their permanent way had been everywhere. The pace slowed in the 1850s, but gained further momentum in the 1860s when Ventnor obtained its connection.

In the 1830s, Thomas Carlyle once described an early rail journey as a Faustian flight on the devil's mantle. Thirty years later, there were many who were quite happy to ride with the devil: a train ride had become second nature.

Michael Freeman, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](#). Details of railway opening from *The Times* newspaper, 11th Sept 1866