



This is Ventnor Esplanade in the late 1890s. It is striking to see the seats along the Esplanade firmly placed in the roadway, leaving the pavement free for people to walk. The little traffic on the road was human or horse powered rather than petrol driven - there is a handcart parked by one of the seats, and what appear to be horse droppings on the road.



In the centre is Amanti Villa, set back from the road, with the four storey Queens Hotel (later the Metropole) on the right of the picture. The elaborately domed structure on the left is the Grand Pavilion, which opened in 1896 and provided entertainment for visitors and residents for more than 120 years. It is a ghost of a building now. The remains of the central dome over the main hall can still be seen today, but the twin cupolas at the front of the building, each with a small dome on top of a square tower, are long gone. One of them can be seen in the photograph - they stood on the roof at either end of the entrance vestibule, which had windows looking onto the sea front.

Along with providing concerts and dances, (the theatre was said to have the largest and most palatial dance floor on the Island, with a maple floor), the Grand Pavilion was probably the first place in Ventnor to show films; they were silent ones, of course, and the earliest were shot locally, including one called *Home* which had as its setting the Crab and Lobster Hotel, Wheeler's Bay and scenes at Steephill Castle and Pelham Woods.

Although it was always used for entertainment, the building has had many names over the years. In 1914 it became The Ventnor Hippodrome, but by June 1923 it was known as The Summer Theatre, described as having an up to date refreshment house in the commodious vestibule, which seated 150. There were yellow and blue curtain hangings, a daily orchestra and resident concert parties and in July 1930 the entertainment was *Pierrot in Plus Fours with Henri Harper and Teddy Mastyn*.

Times were changing, and the building with them. In 1931 a new owner, Terry Wood, installed a 9 hole midget golf course (3d per round including putter and ball). The local paper reported that *the greens very closely resemble grass in appearance and every hazard is really interesting. Open daily except Wednesday evening and Saturday afternoon & evening.* There was no golf on Wednesdays and Saturdays because those nights were reserved for roller skating (admission 6d, hire of skates 6d). But there was still dancing in 1931: *The Girl Guides held a dance at the theatre, about eighty being present. Mr Eldridge's band was much enjoyed.*

In June 1932 the forecourt was roofed in, and the building renamed The Ventnor Casino, but in 1939 the second world war changed everything of course. The beach was sealed off, the pier disabled, and the Grand Pavilion/Ventnor Hippodrome/Summer Theatre/Casino was used for assembling aircraft parts. Next week we have the story of how in 1948, the old building began a new lease of life as The Gaiety, an amusement arcade, run by Richard Studt and complete with rifle range and dodgem cars.

Lesley Telford, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](http://www.ventnorhistory.com), using records and photographs from our collection. The comments in italics are taken from contemporary newspaper cuttings in Fay Brown's files and are probably all from the Mercury.

August 30, 1912.

Grand Pavilion,
ESPLANADE.
Manager... .. MR. E. C. MORRIS

Ventnor's Popular Place of Amusement.
Always Showing the World's Best Pictures

POSITIVELY APPEARING
on
Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday.

The Event of the Season!

At Great Expense we have secured the exclusive rights of the wonderful Picture,

"TRILBY,"
Over 3,000 feet long.

Taken after the Play which scored such a success at His Majesty's Theatre, London.

DON'T MISS THIS GREAT TREAT.

Usual Prices. Commence at 8 o'clock.

TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!
"HIS DAUGHTER" and
"SAVED BY HER LION."

Great success of these two magnificent pictures.

Matinee on Saturday at 3 o'clock.