



Ventnor Mill

There will be many residents who, over the years, have noticed the blue plaque that identifies the mill's former location at the western entrance to Alexandra Gardens, at the top of Shore Hill. Ventnor Heritage Centre is very fortunate in possessing a fine model of the mill, constructed some thirty years ago by the late Alan Crossley. It depicts the mill as it was in 1821 (after the Brannon print): all thatched, with a working water wheel, lofty mill-room, millpond, miller's house, grain store and outhouses for farm animals. For the 2019 season, we have mounted a display about the mill's history, with the model at its centre.



The mill suffered a catastrophic fire one night in 1848. So great was the noise from the roar of flames that many inhabitants thought the entire settlement of Ventnor was alight. Indeed, the lurid glare of the blaze was seen for several miles along the Undercliff. A few people woke up thinking that the end of the world had come.

The miller's livestock had been hurriedly turned out into the lane and the sight of the animals roaming free added to the sense of conflagration among more nervous or impressionable souls.

The mill-pond provided an obvious source of water to fight the fire and folk soon lined up to pass buckets to douse it. However, it was quickly apparent that the entire

building was likely to be lost, the thatch and roof timbers too quick to be consumed.

This was not, however, the end of Ventnor's mill. Within a year or so, it had been rebuilt, using the foundations of the old one, though no longer with thatched roofing but with slates. Details of the new structure are revealed in an advertisement placed in the Times newspaper on 7th October 1857 when the mill owner, Charles Banfield, was announced as leaving the Island, his various properties in the town to be put up for auction at the Royal Hotel. 'Ventnor Water Corn Mill' was described as having two pairs of grindstones worked by an overshot wheel, five lofty floors capable of storing 1,000 quarters of grain, a convenient dwelling house with sea view, corn store, yard, stables outbuildings and large garden. Charles Davis was the miller over the 1860s and in the early 1870s and he proved to be the last. By 1875, it had been demolished, seen by the Local Board as detracting from the outlook as you approached the bottom of Mill Street (Pier Street today). Within a few years the mill-pond had been filled in and, later, work started on the building of Alexandra Gardens.

The Heritage Centre has no photo of the new mill premises in its collections, though its roofs can be seen in a number of wide angle views of the resort's rising terraces. This account has been compiled from the index files of the late Fay Brown and from the booklet on Alexandra Gardens by John Allen and Paul & Ann Hutchins which is on sale in the Heritage Centre.

