



The Hann Twins



An impeccably attired nursemaid from the Edwardian era presides over the Hann twin girls, Ethelreda and Sheila, a mere few weeks old. It is plainly a studio portrait from the symmetry of the composition. Yet more striking is the style of pram, comprising a capacious wickerwork basket that has been fitted up with twin hoods, the whole then mounted on an Edwardian chassis that has a wheel arrangement that looks decidedly unusual. It is more than likely that this was made to order by local carriage builders.

The family was a well-off one, the twins being grandchildren of the Henry Brown who ran the well-known Posting and Riding establishment in Pier Street, Ventnor. The lower picture shows the twins a couple of years later, walking on Ventnor Esplanade with their mother, Mrs Arthur Hann (nee Brown), on the right, and Granny Brown (Henry Brown's wife, Millicent) on the left. After Henry Brown died in 1919, aged 71, Pittis & Son were charged with disposing a part of his Pier Street business, including 17 carriages, 2 coaches, 15 sets of harnesses, 26 saddles, along with bridles, collars, lamps and other paraphernalia. Henry's widow, Millicent (or Granny Brown as she was widely known) outlived her husband by 33 years, passing away at the grand age of 99 in 1952. Following the sale of items from Henry's Pier Street business in 1920, she immediately purchased her first motor-car, driven for her by a smart chauffeur.

We know rather less about the life story of the twins. One of them (Sheila) was married as Mrs. W. Clarke, but Ethelreda remained a Miss Hann. Just after the war, in May 1946, the sisters opened 'Brown's Café' on Pier Street, soon changing its name to 'The Copper Kettle'. However, the pair sold the business as a going concern in October 1948 to Mr G.F. Turner. A column in the *Isle of Wight Mercury* of 26th September 1947 suggests a reason for their short tenure of the café. It recorded that Sheila Clarke had had a serious accident on the premises. At 8 a.m one morning, she was returning to her bedroom from the bathroom when she discovered the bedroom door had become locked. She decided to re-gain access to the bedroom through its window, which involved climbing across a roof over the café. In doing so, she had the misfortune to fall through a skylight, striking a partition as she came down. According to the newspaper, the poor woman suffered a fractured spine, a compound fracture of the ankle, as well as severe shock. The accident caused quite a sensation in the town.



Michael Freeman, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](http://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk) from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, with help from Jill Wearing.

