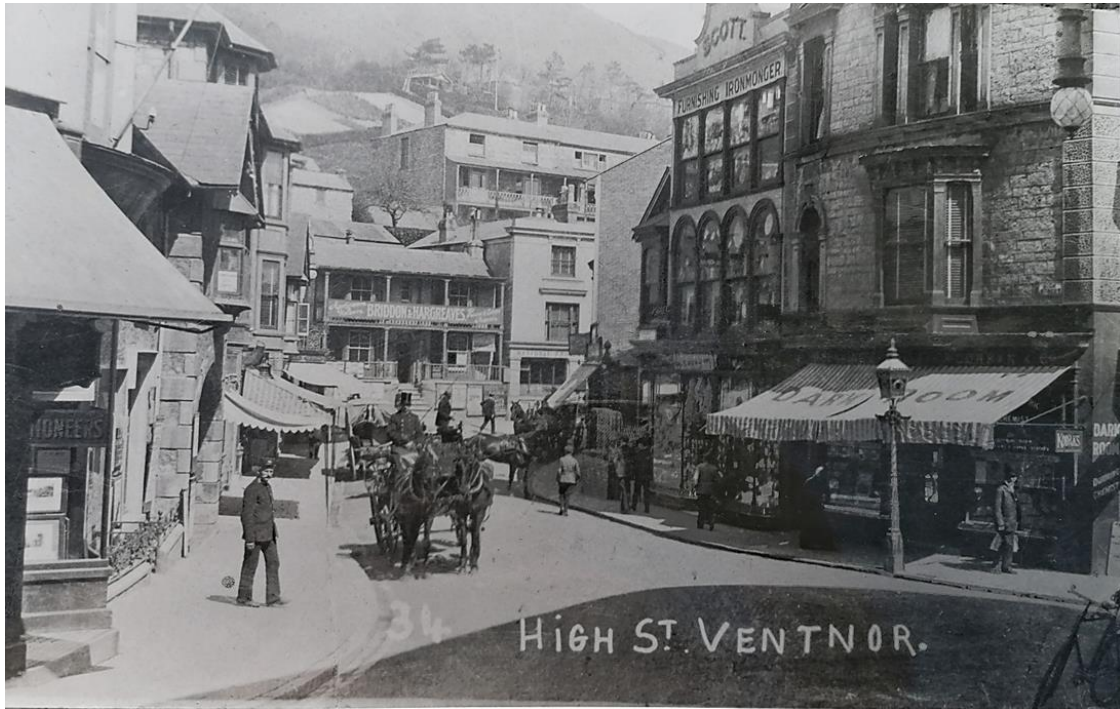


High Street, Ventnor, in the early 1900s



This location at the bottom of Ventnor's High Street was one of the most popular settings for Victorian and Edwardian photographers. Numerous variations on this scene, both as commercial post cards and as individual or private shots, have come to light over the years. Not only is this because we are in the centre of town, but it also due to the attractive composition of buildings that is found here, as well as the southward orientation, catching the sunlight. Judging from the diminutive shadows cast by the various figures, this is a picture taken in high summer.

The small galleried building in the left centre of the picture was for more than a hundred years known as Country House. Over much of the twentieth century, it was run as the Country House Tea Rooms and became admired for its many hanging floral displays. Looking at the building carefully, one can just make out the Briddon & Hargreaves signage. This was a firm of auctioneers, valuers and estate agents. The business was established here sometime between 1903 and 1908, for it figures in Ventnor Red Book in the latter year but not in the former. This gives a date for the picture of no earlier than about 1904-5.

The most striking thing about this image is that virtually all the buildings on view are still there today. The figure on the far left is standing outside Sir Francis Pitts & Son which occupied the building known as Marlborough House and remains an estate agent today. Just beyond it, you can make out the stone archway that leads to the rear. On the right, nobody can fail to recognise the fine late Victorian shopfront, three storeys tall, that was Alfred Scott's Ironmongers and is now Hurst's. Alfred came to Ryde on the Island in 1870 and subsequently bought the Ventnor business at 4 High Street that belonged to Mr. Ellis. He virtually reconstructed the entire shopfront and turned the business into what was effectively a small department store that boasted its own catalogue. To the right of Scott's is the chemist, James Dunning, with a large sun awning proclaiming that he has a dark room. For many years the business had belonged to Charles Weston who advertised himself as 'from Jno Bell & Co., London', a much favoured practice among Ventnor shop proprietors, for it raised their status in the eyes of wealthy visitors. Weston's 'Liver Remedy' was offered to relieve 'torpid or deranged organs, quickly removing all distressing symptoms'. And judging from the vast array of outlets that sold beer, wines and spirits in the town at the time, such 'remedies' were likely much sought after.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of the picture is that one cannot spot any women in it. All the figures are male, which is not at all typical of such street scenes.

Michael Freeman, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](http://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk), from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, the photo courtesy of Sophie from Blake's Longshoremen.

