



Thomas Gibbs and Rock Cottage

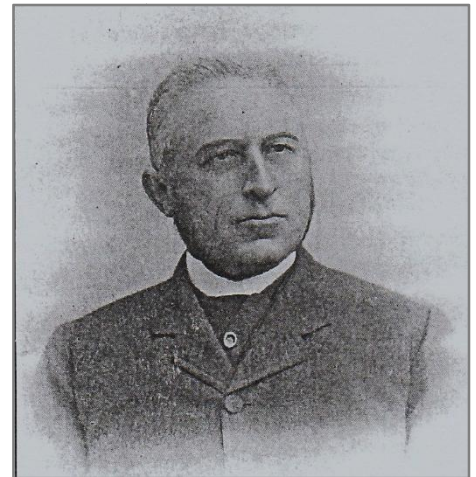


The picture shows a dwelling that once stood on Belgrave Road, Ventnor, known as Rock Cottage. There is a Pittis sale notice visible in the forecourt and the date is sometime in the inter-war years. Both Rock Cottage and the Royal Marine Hotel visible to its left were demolished as a result of bomb damage in World War II. Westhill, just visible to the right, still stands.

Rock Cottage was, for many years, a lodging house. Although only two storeys high, it had a deceptively large floor area, with three large sitting rooms on the ground floor and four main bedrooms on the first. There was servant accommodation as well as two separate

staircases. Thomas Gibbs was a native of Milton in Hampshire who came to Ventnor in 1856, aged about 19. He arrived to enter the service of Dr. G.A. Martin at Belgrave House, but following marriage in 1867, he took Rock Cottage and, together with his wife Jane, ran it for almost thirty years.

When Thomas died in 1909, it was said that he had served the town with a zeal like no other. For many years a high profile member of Ventnor Local Board, at times scoring more than 1,000 votes at elections, he was often viewed as a reactionary, opposed to new ideas and movements. However, few could deny the huge range of his committee work for the town. He was a close companion of Mark Norman, the legendary Ventnor diarist and prominent local townsman, liaising with him at the Literary and Scientific Institution in the establishment of evening classes for young students. Thomas became expert at mimicking Mark Norman's voice, able to repeat Mark's favourite phrases and views. Another of Thomas Gibbs's achievements was as an impromptu concert manager. He worked with Mr and Mrs. Morgan Richards to lay on musical performances, raising money for good causes. The family had become regular guests at Rock Cottage in the later 1880s, along with daughter Pearl Craigie and her husband, together with Miss Susie Arnold, Mrs Morgan Richards's younger sister. When it became clear that Pearl and Susan were accomplished musicians, Thomas Gibbs set to work to harness their talents and soon such benefit concerts became a regular fixture in the town.



Thomas spent his last years living at Milton Cottage on Ventnor High Street. When he died in 1909, he left estate valued at £5,752, a huge sum in those days.

Ventnor & District Local History Society > Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



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