

V ENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 1

September 2002

MUSEUM PIECES

Among many interesting recent arrivals to the archives are three cast-iron street name-plates dug up in a garden in St. Catherine's Street. As they are probably about 100 years old, they are in reasonable condition. The streets the signs refer to are East Street, Spring Hill and Belgrave Road.

For some unknown reason, visitor numbers to the Museum are well down on last year, which is most disappointing. Comments in the Visitors' Book are very encouraging - but we can't get the numbers through the door. Our brochures are out and about and we have a welcoming window display - so where are they?

We have had a poor response to our 'Comic Postcard Caption Competition.' First prize is £25, second prize £10. This closes on November 2nd, so come on members, give it a go!

Minor vandalism including graffiti on the steps and milk poured all over the exterior are sent to try us. The deluge from the skies on Monday, 9th September, saw water once again entering the office - nothing we can do when we have a downpour like that.

The Museum has a new Curatorial Adviser, Miss Rachel Silverson, who is our contact with the IW Council's Museum Service.

Artefacts for conservation have been priced by our conservator at over £2000. Through lack of grant aid we will only be able to do about half that this year. We are grateful to the Town Council for their regular grant.

The Museum counter has the 'Yar River Trail' booklet, priced at £2. The trail goes from Niton to Bembridge, so buy a copy and get your hiking boots on!

The exterior railways, which were suffering from rust have been re-painted. Rene's portrait now has an appropriate plaque. Sales of our video 'No Finer Place' now exceed 850 units.

That's all for now. — Graham

WORK BEHIND THE SCENES!

The Trustees meet about every two months to decide whether acquisitions should be put in the Main or Secondary Collections. Items with local connections may always be considered for acceptance. Since January we have accepted 50 items for the Main Collection, including books, photos, slides, old street name-plates, and a Ventnor Pier turnstile. We have been unable to send items for conservation recently because it is so costly - we have just received an estimate for over £2,000 for items in dire need of conservation. The Town Council supports us regularly with Grants and this year the money has been used for polypockets and storage boxes for artefacts. >>>

WALKABOUTS

Some of our members have enjoyed walking around the Bonchurch and Niton areas - nothing too energetic! - with Graham leading. He also organised a walk in Bonchurch for the IW Historical Association. A St. Lawrence walk is now 'on the cards.'

From the Archives - 'A' IS FOR AVIATION

One can imagine the excitement in July 1911 when a collection of flying machines landed in a field near Orchard Bay adjoining the Royal National Hospital. Photographs show crowds examining the aircraft, and the machines in flight above the cliffs. For many people this would have been their first look at "them new-fangled flying machines." Demonstrations and trips were also given in a large field in Whitwell Road in the same month.

Ventnor's next encounter with aviation was probably in October 1919 when an AVRO seaplane landed in Ventnor Bay and came up onto the beach.

In 1950 you could have travelled from Sandown to Croydon in an 'airliner' named "The Ventnor Flyer" operated by Air Enterprises Ltd. I do not think the service lasted long.

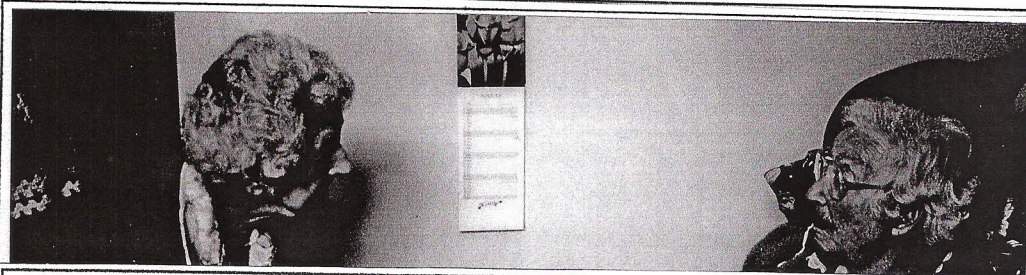
Of course, there have been accidents. The worst one was when a Dakota from the Channel Islands crashed into St. Boniface Down in thick mist and rain, killing 12 people, on 6th May 1962. It is probable that a memorial may shortly be placed in the area. In February 1985, a light aircraft narrowly missed houses at Wheelers Bay and plunged into the sea, drowning two of the five occupants.

In 1972 much time was spent in trying to attain man-powered flight. Local hotelier John Pavledis attempted to be the first. His efforts attracted a large crowd to a field near Orchard Bay, with Press and TV in attendance. Unfortunately despite several attempts, the contraption never clear the ground. The "Air Hopper" as it was called - didn't hop!

Graham

Members of the Executive Committee meet regularly to discuss the business of the Society, to hear reports from the officers and to make decisions about the future. Graham has decided on the title of next year's Exhibition: "From Cottage to Castle." Sounds good!

IS THIS A RECORD? Are we the only Local History Society in the country to have the pleasure of having two members over the age of 100? Here we see Miss Nessie Drover (101) chatting to Miss Flora Muller (100).



Next Meeting -
Oct.25th. "So You
Think You Know Your
Island" - Eric Sieler.

This is the turnstile from the Royal Victoria Pier which we have on show in the Museum. Many thousands of people must have passed through it over the years

It is a coincidence that both ladies once attended the same school - Cyprus House. The Drover family once had large nurseries in Leeson and St. Boniface Roads and were well-known florists in the town. In the War, Miss Drover was a telephonist at the ARP HQ at Orchardleigh (now Lake Hotel). She was also a familiar figure in Rugg's, the tobacconist's, and at Thompson's, the jewellers, in Spring Hill. Miss Muller is particularly well-known in musical circles and performed at an early age. She was a member of Island orchestras for many years. Her parents ran the Freemasons' Hotel for 33 years, and many of us remember her at Walter Zuber's popular Suisse Cafe. Both really enjoy a chat about old Ventnor.

VENTNOR WEST

Around 20 people were on the site of Ventnor West Station on September 13th, the 50th Anniversary of the closure. Graham (our Curator) spoke of the railway's history and Brenda had made an appropriate wreath. Dave Stotesbury and Margaret kindly provided tea or coffee in the garden. In the evening, the Masonic Hall was packed to see Colin Elver's nostalgic slide show. It was great. By courtesy of the Museum at Havenstreet, we are able to show some super pictures of the railway. They will be displayed until November 2nd

2003

Fay has booked the speakers for next year's programme. Subscriptions will be due in January and membership cards will be available. Robin Thornton opens 2003 with "Whitwell - People and Places". Before that there is a lunch (instead of dinner) in November. Details from Brenda.



NEXT
NEWS-
LETTER
MARCH
2003

IT IS STILL NOT TOO LATE!

If you have not been to the Museum to have a look round this year, please come and do so before the Exhibition "In the Good Old Summertime" closes on November 2nd. The displays entail a great deal of thought and work for Graham and his helpers and it is good to have your support.

OFFICERS of the Society this year include: Chairman, Bill Mansfield; Vice-Chairman, Janet Griffin; Curator, Graham Bennett; Secretary and Speaker Secretary, Fay Brown; Treasurer, Fred Waterhouse; Publicity Officer, Wendy Marshall; Membership Secretary and Events Organiser, Brenda Creese; Curatorial Adviser, Rachel Silversen;+ additional Committee members, David Stotesbury, Ernest Biggin, Steve Cook; Ex-officio, John Farrant.

RENE HOWE WALK

After correspondence with the Town Council, they have agreed with our suggestion that a walk should be named after Rene. At the moment they are awaiting confirmation from the IW Council that the walk from Pier Street to the Esplanade should be named the 'Rene Howe Walk.'

RESEARCH REWARDING

Many research queries are received at the Museum - sometimes as many as 20-25 monthly and the majority are answered by post by Fay .. Lately they have included questions regarding St. Lawrence Hall, Max Miller, Burt's Brewery, the Pelham Hotel, the Rev. Melville Harris and 'The Wilderness,' the Royal National Hospital, local quarries, H.de Vere Stacpoole, the Kingswell family, Silvermist (formerly Highcliff), St. Michael's Cliff, Ventnor Dairies, Seaport Cottage, the Brading family, William Spindler Fay searches the Museum records first and then looks in her own research files at home and is usually able to compile interesting answers. She finds it a very rewarding task as the enquirers are really appreciative. As well as this, the Society has already benefitted this year by about £300 in donations.

Produced for
the Ventnor
and District
Local
History
Society by
Fay Brown