



VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 10

March 2007

MUSEUM PIECES. Although this is the Winter period, there is no hibernation for us at the Museum. Two new blue plaques have been erected at the sites of Steephill Castle and the Railway Station. Two more are ongoing at the moment and we will announce in the local press where and when they will be unveiled.

Last Summer nearly 1400 visitors came through the door at the Museum, helped by a railway theme (always popular) and our excellent colour leaflets.

This year the theme is the 1920s and 1930s, with other screens on Theatre and Summer Shows, and a display entitled "The Victorian World of Edgar Harvey." We were delighted to receive a fantastic collection of old plans, drawings, catalogues, fashion plates, even Victorian wallpaper which belonged to Mr. Harvey and was discovered at his former home "Springvale," The Grove by Mr. and Mrs. L. Riley. Mr. Harvey was Town Surveyor and an eminent architect. He was responsible, among other things, for laying out the Cascade Gardens. So I intend putting some of this material on exhibition. I am expecting it to be quite a highlight!

Our £30 "Sponsor a Screen" initiative went very well in 2006 so we are running the scheme again this year. If you wish to sponsor the 2007 Exhibition this way, your cheques will be most welcome.

The IW Steam Railway delved into our archives and some of our old photographs will be appearing in their new educational video which they use on site. We will get a mention, so good publicity for us.

The IW Council is running a project to find interesting buildings not covered under 'Listed Buildings.' We have put the Museum forward to be included, because of its unusual architecture.

An 18th Century document in an old frame, which we received from a resident of St. Lawrence, has baffled us all. We cannot decipher it! We have sent a copy to the British Museum and are awaiting a reply. If we get one it could be quite exciting! Graham.

FROM THE ARCHIVES.

J is for WILLIAM MEW JUDD

In any history of Ventnor it is not long before the name of William Mew Judd is mentioned. This gentleman was a prominent businessman who played a full part in the life of our Victorian town. He was born in 1832 and came to Ventnor in 1863, arriving by sea at our short-lived harbour.

He joined his uncle and soon took over the running of the Marine Hotel in Belgrave Road. The hotel's fame grew and it received Royal patronage from Princess Henry of Battenburg. The "Royal" prefix was granted in 1886 and was proudly added to the name.

Morgan Richards, in his book "Almost Fairyland," writes about coming to the hotel in 1882. "Mr. Judd owned, controlled and managed everything pertaining to this excellent establishment. These genial and kind hosts (Mr. Judd and his wife), promptly made our acquaintance and as comfortable as we have ever been in any hotel in any country and have thoroughly appreciated the hospitable welcome."

Mr. Judd was described as having a remarkable personality, full of vigour and kindness, boundless hospitality and great benevolence."

Apart from running the Royal Marine, he busied himself in all aspects of the town, from Chairman of the local authority to acting in local repertory, from the Carnival Committee to Church Warden at Holy Trinity. He also excelled at giving graphic lectures on the history of Ventnor. In 1878 he was foreman of the jury at the inquest held in Ventnor into the tragic loss of the training ship "Eurydice."

On retirement from the hotel in 1890, he went to live at "Grove Mount" (now "Ravenscourt"). He died in 1913 and is buried in Ventnor Cemetery. A great loss to Ventnor - a dynamic man who was dedicated to the town and firmly believed in Ventnor's future as a premier resort. - Graham.

(See picture on reverse)

COMING SHORTLY - as it used to say at the Cinema!

"FROM CHICKENPIT TO SOAPSUDS ALLEY"

A booklet about just *some* of the many buildings - now gone for ever - and places in Ventnor for which there are fascinating nicknames! It would need a much larger publication to name them all!

Compiled by Fay and Graham, it will initially be on sale in conjunction with the opening of the Exhibition on Saturday, May 12th, at £1.

SPONSORS FOR SUMMER EXHIBITION

Last year's sponsorship scheme, when we asked if anyone would be kind enough to sponsor a display screen for £30, proved very successful. We are continuing with this idea in 2007. Any members who may be interested, please contact Graham. The money helps to cover the considerable costs of setting up, advertising, brochures etc.

Thank you to the Town Council for their regular half-yearly grant. So very useful.



William Mew Judd (from "Almost Fairyland")

THE TRUSTEES have needed to meet more often in the last few months because amongst other things we have been given several collections of really interesting memorabilia. We have also received an album in red Morocco, with raised gold monogram in one corner - this is beautifully illuminated and given by his patients to Dr. James Mann Williamson, father of Dr. James Bruce Williamson, in 1901. He was also given a handsome clock and cheque for £150, but died three days after the presentation. The album can be seen in one of the Museum showcases.

I FIND RESEARCH FASCINATING

A large part of my time is spent doing research for other people. Queries come through the Museum, by Email, letters and telephone and from the County Record Office to my own home, and by being stopped in the street! I really enjoy looking in the Museum archives and then in my own information at home, which I combine, in what must prove to be an interesting package to the enquirers as I get much appreciation.

Recently I had one from Sid Banks in Australia whose brother-in-law was visiting him and he said he was always talking about "St. Elmo's" in Ventnor where he came as a child in the 1940s. Putting two and two together I thought he must have been talking about Elm Grove as this was the boys' house at that time. I put together some papers and pictures and air-mailed them to Canberra. Sid replied: "Dear Fay, You will never know the interest and discussion that your information on St. Catherine's provided. Ron did indeed transpose "Elm Grove" into "St. Elmo's." He was very familiar with the pictures you sent, down to recognising the steps where they used to sit on the garden slopes. He could see the "rubber tree" as they called it, where they dug their pencils in to obtain a glue which was used to make small boats and other objects. It was all very nostalgic and I can never recompense the value of the enjoyment you have provided." Sid sent me a £20 note which I will give to the Society for conservation work. In January I was given donations of £30, £25 and £15 - so the Society benefits from my "hobby."

Subjects for queries since September have included: coal merchants, the Congregational Church, "Casa Nostra," "Hughenden," "Cravenscroft," "Seacliff," Turgenev, "Metropole," various families including Mr. and Mrs Martin Schultz who lived at "Combe Wood," Bonchurch (now "Peacock Vane") before the first World War. Martin's great-nephew and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Lloyd-Davies, stayed at "Elcombe" recently and came to meet me. I have also been asked for facts about the local connections of Sir James Douglass (see elsewhere in Newsletter) - Fay

OUR BEAUTIFUL ISLAND

We live amongst the most beautiful scenery on this Island of ours and the first two meetings of 2007 have really emphasised this to us. We have never had such a crowded hall as we had at the January meeting when Andy Butler delighted the audience with his lovely slides. Then in February, Terry Nigh brought us scenes of the Island in postcards - what a way that was to get publicity for our Island. The firm was started by William J. Nigh, in Ventnor, in the early 1900s. That is something of which to be proud.

RECORD MEMBERSHIP?

We ended 2006 with a membership of 163, including 23 Honorary or Life Members. Looking back in the records as far as I can, I think this is a record number. Perhaps we can increase this even more in 2007.

WREATH IN SHAPE OF A LIGHTHOUSE

In October last year I was asked for information about Sir James Douglass who lived at "Stella," now "Miramar" in Bonchurch. At his funeral in 1898 the family wreath was a representation of the Eddystone Lighthouse, about three feet high. Many of the lighthouses around the coast of Great Britain during Sir James' term of office with Trinity House, and many in the Colonies and abroad, were built under his direction. Eddystone was the best known of all his works but he also superintended the remodelling of St. Catherine's Lighthouse, the reduction in the height of the tower, and the introduction of the electric light machinery there.

The coffin was borne from his home to the churchyard on the shoulders of employees from Trinity House, and staff of St. Catherine's Lighthouse. In 1975, his grand-daughter wrote to the Rev. A. Tedman, Ingram's and the IW Mercury trying to locate the grave, which unbelievably was unmarked. She and her husband visited Bonchurch and the position of the burial was eventually found. Her idea was to provide a suitable plaque to his memory before the centenary of the Eddystone Lighthouse in 1982. In 1979 a tablet commissioned by the family was unveiled at the graveside. Sadly his grand-daughter had died a few months before, but her husband was present. So Sir James is remembered in the Old Churchyard - although, in fact, he was re-interred at St. Petroc, Dartmouth in 1913.

NEXT MEETING

Tony Gale, who used to live in Ventnor and is a former member of the Society, will speak on "Coastguard Stations of the Island" at the meeting on April 27th at 7.30 p.m.. Last year he produced an excellent book on the history of this subject.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you have not already renewed your 2007 subscription, and wish to do so, please send £5 to Fay Brown, c/o Heritage Museum, Spring Hill, Ventnor, PO38 1PE or come in on a Saturday morning.

THE NEXT NEWSLETTER will be published in Sept. 2007

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