

Ventnor and District Local History Society

September 2007

- Newsletter No. 11



The Executive Committee meets four or five times a year to discuss the progress of the Society and the Museum. Reports are given by officers and any other relevant matters discussed. Left, L to R: Wendy Marshall, Fay Brown (Secretary), Graham Bennett (Curator), Colin Elvers, Mike Vokes (Publicity Officer). Below, L to R: Rob Mew (Vice-Chairman), Peter Pye, Violetta Vokes, Yvonne Hardy (Treasurer), Janet Griffin (Chairman) (Roger Silsbury joined the Committee after the photos were taken).

THE TRUSTEES have met regularly and much interesting memorabilia has been accepted, including Carnival and other photographs, programmes for local Dancing Displays, a report of the bombing raid on Ventnor on October 10th 1942, postcards, framed engravings, an aerial view of Steephill Castle, pictures of the Women's Liberal Club garden party at Littledene in 1912, and outings organised by Mr. A. J. Sharpe and the Girls' Friendly Society, O/S maps, a china vase with Ventnor crest and four small spoons inscribed "Ventnor Hospital."

MEMBERSHIP has already passed 2006 final total by 2! - 165, including 24 Honorary and Life members.

RESEARCH

I just never know what I am going to be asked next! Recent queries included those about 33 High Street (once Thurgood's), Buona Vista Terrace, Belle Vue (now Llynfi), Elizabeth House, Brunswick, The Belgrave, Tower House, Undermount, Collingtree, Hill House, 21 Church Street, the Blenheim, air raids and several about St. Catherine's Home and Ventnor Coastguards. Combining Heritage Museum archives with information from my own files at home has become quite fascinating and it is very rewarding when I receive profuse thanks. Sue Stott wanted to know about some members of the Bull family, one of which was Cromwell Bull. It was a sheer coincidence that the week before I had included one of his poems in my SW Chronicle article. I sent her details about him and his relatives from home and she replied: "You can't imagine what it meant to me to receive it. You really are a star!" Praise indeed, in my old age!! FHB



OCTOBER meeting—"Lines into Ventnor West" - Roger Silsbury

Since March we have had talks about "Coastguards" (Tony Gale); "Post-boxes" (Arthur Reeder), "A Walk Around the Island Coastline" (Jill Green) and "Bygone Brading" (Molly Pewsey). All have been very well attended. I have arranged the 2008 programme. Next year it will be eleven years since the late Rene Howe gave up the post of Speaker Secretary and because no successor was forthcoming, I volunteered because I did not want the monthly meetings to stop. My Society work incorporates secretarial duties, Trustees, research and membership, and now I feel it is time to "shed a job." So at the AGM there will be a vacancy for a Speaker Secretary.

MUSEUM PIECES

Our 2007 Exhibition opened on 12th May, the Ventnor Town Clerk, Mr. John Farrant, performing the ceremony. Unfortunately, this has been a poor summer and visitor numbers are well down on this time last year. With this year's awful weather, I would have expected a better result. Very disappointing!

Nine screens at £30 each were sponsored by members this year. Many thanks.

Our entry in the Public Catalogue Foundation directory of oil paintings is now in print. This is a very high quality catalogue and certainly does justice to our paintings.

An acute shortage of space in the archives, and in the map drawers in particular, has forced us to purchase a new cabinet to hold these and other similar large items. The price was high, but we must look after our artefacts.

I promised to update you on our "unreadable" document. It has now been confirmed as an Irish legal document of 1735—but with no Island connections.

Our new booklet "From Chickenpit to Soapsuds Alley" has sold well over 100 copies. Perhaps it's the title! Over 20 members of the IW Industrial and Archaeological Society had a look around the Museum and I then took them on a history themed walk around the town. Fortunately, it was a rare, fine, June evening. A highlight for me was an appearance on Angel Radio, a community station on the Island which plays records from the 1920s-1950s. I was interviewed live on air for about an hour on the Museum, the History Society and Ventnor's history. I even introduced a record. A D.J. now!

A team making a DVD about the Royal National Hospital brought a Spiritualist with them, who requested items to study from our archives. Apparently a table knife and a door number plaque gave her strange feelings and a vision of beds. I was interviewed about the various objects. We certainly see life in the Museum (or hopefully, in this case, not!).

Graham

We are in the process of preparing a DVD of Ventnor. We are hopeful this will progress to production. If it does as well as our "Ventnor—No Finer Place," video, we will be very pleased. The DVD will comprise a completely new programme, mainly showing photographs from the Museum's archives.



THE NEXT NEWSLETTER will be published in March 2008

An old visiting card from my collection of the Crab and Lobster. FHB

From the Archives

K is for King Charles I Hotel

VENTNOR had many hotels which catered for the upper class visitors during the Victorian years. In 1875 the first class Crab and Lobster Hotel in Grove Road was built at a cost of £10,000. It was known as Cass's Crab and Lobster Hotel. The Cass family also ran the adjoining Crab and Lobster Inn, Ventnor's oldest, and the two premises were inextricably linked for many years.

In 1905 the hotel was refurbished and boasted electric light throughout and corridors heated in winter. German and French were spoken, the hotel's own omnibus met all trains, and the view from the flag-staff was described in the 1908 Mates' Guide as one of the best in the Undercliff. The telephone number was 2.

From 1920 to about 1952 the Caws family ran the hotel where according to a 1938 Guide it offered full pension terms from 3 gns., bathing was free from the hotel's tents on the beach and a commanding view could be had from the summer house in the cliff garden.

In the 1950s, the Whittakers took over and in 1955 re-named it the King Charles I Hotel. Mr. Whittaker was Polish and drove around the town in a huge American Cadillac car. In 1960 their advertisement included the claim that the hotel was "... scheduled by the Government as of historic interest King Charles stayed in part of the original building" (Crab and Lobster Inn). This is very unlikely but perhaps it did happen. Later Mr. and Mrs. Harris-Barton were the owners and I well remember going there for Christmas dinners in the early 1980s. The magnificent crystal chandeliers and the glass domed roof over the lounge were special features.

A serious fire in December 1988 saw the hotel enter its decline, abandoned and forlorn. Various property companies' plans never came to fruition and in 1991 it was listed to be converted into flats and after more delays, this came about some years later. Today it is the King Charles I Court - Graham