

VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

March 2008

Newsletter No. 12

MUSEUM PIECES.

On a cold November afternoon, we assembled at Alexandra Gardens to witness the unveiling of a plaque by Andrew Neill, Chairman of the Elgar Society, to commemorate Elgar's honeymoon visit in 1889. John Allen kindly provided hospitality inside No. 3.

In October, Roger Silsbury, a Committee member, arranged for the 'premiere' showing of a new DVD on the Ventnor West Railway at our monthly meeting. This was a great success. Another 'premiere' was held at the Winter Gardens a few days later. We are now retailing this DVD, running time 1 hour (including a Havenstreet film), price £12.95 including postage. Orders welcome.

Our own DVD is encountering slow progress, but we are still hopeful of a release sometime this summer.

A terrific acquisition in December saw the Museum proud custodians of two superb busts by Birch of John Morgan Richards and his wife (Steephill Castle). Not all good news though as we have suffered a theft of a model locomotive from our railway display. To make matters worse, it was not ours, it was on loan. Value £210.

The Committee are at present debating the pros and cons of having new display screens.

Our Exhibition theme for 2008 is an "Edwardian Journey" - which depicts an imaginary walk through the Undercliff. Other screens feature the great storm of 1987 and items on Chale and Godshell. Sponsorship for our 2008 Exhibition is again sought at £30 per screen. This year we are approaching local businesses, but, of course, if any members wish to donate we shall be delighted.

Gloves and a book cushion to allow us to treat our conserved and fragile items with the necessary care have been obtained—just like the professionals! Graham.

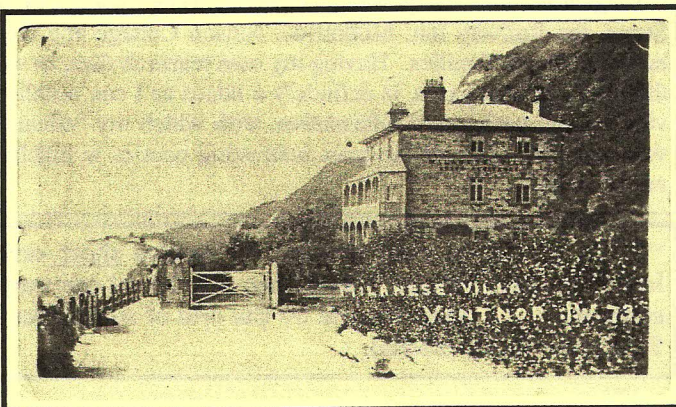
FROM THE ARCHIVES

L is for LA FALAISE

Many of you know the car park on the Western Cliffs off Bath Road. The area is named after a hotel which stood on the site. "La Falaise" (The Cliff) was one of three properties that once occupied the cliff top. "Lansdowne House" and "Danebury House" were the others. As sometimes happens in Ventnor some sites are unsafe and the last two were taken down in 1874 leaving just "La Falaise" or "Milanese Villa" as it was then called, standing.

A report in 1910 stated " ... it was an insecure building and needed strutting. The process had been going on for the last 30 years." That year the house was put up for auction, along with the Park and the Western Cliffs by the Hambrough Estate, the catalogue describing it as " ... well built of stone, a verandah front, 2 reception, 7 bedrooms, 4 dressing rooms ... in front a good sized flower garden, a tennis court, a large kitchen garden to the side and a frontage to the cliff of 312ft." It was all purchased by Ventnor Council, the house having been let to George Sanders for many years, and then to K. Graham for £80 per annum. Alexander Aitken soon became the next tenant and remained there until 1943. Mr. and Mrs. Ken White took over in 1944 and their 1953 advertisement stated that it was open all the year and boasted: "..... all that goes to make your holiday a pleasure." Mrs. White was in considerable trouble by 1956 as the hotel was slowly subsiding backwards into the cliff and would cost the Council a fortune to save. After the 1956 season, the hotel closed for the last time, the Furnishings and Effects were sold by Auction in the December and the hotel succumbed to bulldozers in 1957. Today, it is one of the town's main car parks in an impressive setting with a fine view out to sea, the site benefitting from improvements and enlargements in 1992. - Graham.

(An old photographic card, posted in 1910)



The Executive Committee meets four or five times a year to discuss the progress of the Society and the Museum. By the time some members read this Newsletter, there will probably be a few changes in the Committee. Fay has given up her "temporary" job of Speaker Secretary, taken on 11 years ago (!) but she has already arranged the 2008 programme. Roger Silsbury has offered to take on this job.

"ONE OF VENTNOR'S FINEST CITIZENS"

Some visitors to the Museum in the Autumn asked about Frederick Sheppard's connection with Ventnor and I said I had considerable information at home, including advertisements for his china shop at 95 High Street, West Hill, Belgrave Road which he ran as a boarding house and that some of the family moved to Leigh on Sea. They were amazed that I could remember this without looking it up! I do hope that I will retain this memory of local historical facts for many years to come. However, everything has been recorded in my files, so hopefully will never be lost.

I said I would let the visitors, one of whom was Leslie, Frederick's great grandson, have copies of my research. Leslie's father married Susannah Stears, from a Bonchurch family well-known in educational circles. Standing in his shop doorway, Frederick wore a white apron and was consequently nicknamed "Pinafore" Sheppard! His successful business, opened in 1869, was originally at 116 High Street. He and his wife had 13 children, two dying in infancy, and two later emigrating to New Zealand. Frederick, who was prominent in Ventnor's history, retired in 1910 and took on West Hill. He was a member of the Local Board and VUDC. He lost his seat on the Council through his advocacy of extending the Eastern Esplanade towards the Gasworks (*now done!*). He was an IW Volunteer, a pioneer of the Carnival, a member of the Yarborough Lodge of Freemasons, a Life Deacon of the Congregational Church and local Registrar of Marriages for 15 years. His funeral was attended by a large number of people and his obituary bore the above headline - a fitting tribute. (Leslie was very pleased with my help).

Fay.

A few of the items accepted by the TRUSTEES are brought by Graham to the monthly meeting each month. Since October, acquisitions have included postcards of Ventnor Carnival 1953, file containing items relating to Mew and Son; a piece of a ginger beer bottle (Premier Mineral Water Co., Down Lane), a copy of Royal Marine Hotel sale catalogue, a German photo showing Ventnor from the air during 1939-45 War, a 1930's photo album found in Australia, items about the RNH, copy of IW Advertiser 18/5/1908 and IW Mercury 9.11.1928, Daily Mirror report of Prince of Wales' Visit 1926 to open RNH Nurses' Home, memorabilia of local character Frank Lewis, 1937 holiday photos, "Bermuda Guest House" Visitors' Book

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MEMBERSHIP has already reached over 100 (paid-up) plus 24 Honorary and Life members.

RESEARCH

APRIL 25th meeting —
"Operation P.L.U.T.O."
Melvyn Dennett

During the last few months I have received several queries from abroad, mainly Australia and Canada, some of which have entailed finding particular graves in Ventnor Cemetery and photographing them. Other queries related to the Royal Marine Hotel, Jasmine Cottage, St. Catherine's Home (3), the Globe Hotel, East Dene, Coastguards, the "Eurydice," Hillslea, Tanglewood, 14 West Street, the Railway Inn, Mountside, Nelson Cottage and the Gilbert and Sheath families. Having my own research files, as well as the Heritage Museum's, is definitely a bonus as I can usually provide a good package of information, with which my "clients" are very grateful. One of the most interesting queries is highlighted on this page.

***** I would be very grateful to receive short articles from members for our Newsletter, so that I can vary its contents. (Send to me by the end of August for the September issue, please).

MONTHLY MEETINGS are generally very well attended and there have been suggestions of changing to a larger hall. This would have advantages and disadvantages. Numbers vary each month, the Hall is convenient for the Car Park and the proximity to the Museum is especially useful as items need to be carried back and forth each month. It is also easy to go back to fetch extra items, if necessary. The Committee are to monitor numbers. Speakers since September have been Roger Silsbury, Andy Butler and Colin Haygarth, all very popular. The lunch at Leconfield in November was much enjoyed.

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