

VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

September 2008

Newsletter No. 13

MUSEUM PIECES.

The 2008 Exhibition was opened by Brian Gardener of Newclose Farm, Carisbrooke, on May 10th. Brian used to be an Undercliff resident and is the moving force behind the new cricket ground at Blackwater. The Society also receives an annual invite to his splendid farm.

Our new DVD is gradually getting nearer production. All filming is complete, the script has been written and we now await recording and finalisation. It is to be called "Ventnor and the Undercliff" and will include Wroxall and Whitwell.

Display screen sponsorship is excellent this year, fifteen of our screens being sponsored by individuals and local companies. Many thanks to all who subscribed.

I led an historical walk around Ventnor for the IW Walking Festival. We were blessed with superb weather and over twenty walkers took part.

Sadly the Methodist Church building closed in June. Many of their marble plaques, cups, silver trowels, banners etc. have been donated or loaned to the Museum and many of the objects are now on Museum display.

Although final figures are obviously not yet to hand, it looks as though visitor numbers are better this year—thank goodness, because 2007 was really disappointing.

The Museum co-operated with St. Catherine's School for their reunion exhibition in June. Fay and I were invited and about 200 'old boys—and girls!' turned up. Our photographic input was much admired.

Finally, thanks to Rob Mew for making some of his fine quality photographs of the coastline available for sale at the Museum counter.

Graham

FROM THE ARCHIVES

M is for MILL

According to Dr. Whitehead, in his book "The Undercliff of the Isle of Wight," Ventnor Mill had probably been in existence for centuries and may be the mill referred to in an assessment list of 1327. In 1729 it was shown on an estate map with 5 acres of ground

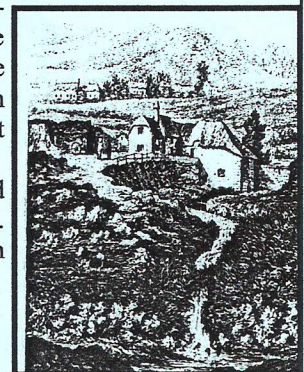
Descriptions of the mill in its scenic setting enthused early travellers. In 1790 Hassell stated: ".....the mill, at its head a double pond, and when through heavy rain the water pours with universal violence .. it is immediately given vent otherwise the whole fabric would be washed into the sea ." Three years later Wyndham tells us: " .. A considerable cascade of fine water, which after turning a corn mill, falls upon the beach." From an 1813 traveller: "The mill and waterfall ... form a lively and gratifying picture." A fourth writer informs us of "an old mill perched on a crag high above the beach," whilst an unimpressed critic described it as "a humble grist mill." A Brannon print of 1812 shows the mill with the stream to its left turning the mill wheel and cascading to the shore.

An agreement dated 1836 conveyed "all that piece of land adjacent to the mill pond belonging to Ventnor Mill to George Mundell." In 1837, George Gilbert, a baker was listed as miller. Next year, James Cole, a miller from Godshell, paid £50 for the lease. The mill was described as being a square building, built of stone with a thatched roof. The wheel was of wood, overshot, probably with two mill stones.

On March 7th 1848 "a fire of very destructable character took place at Ventnor where the water corn mill and an adjacent house were burnt to the ground. Mr. Hambrough, the owner, and Mr. Banfield, the tenant, must be considerable losers by the catastrophe." However, Barber writing in 1857 obviously witnessed the mill in operation: "when the corn mill is at work it forms a beautiful contrast to the adjoining coast scenery."

An 1866 map pinpoints the location opposite the corner of Hambrough Road with the mill pond occupying the site of the future Alexandra Gardens. The last miller is given as Mr. C. Davis in 1867. It was demolished in 1875. "Mill Cottage" is still with us in Albert Street.

- Graham



"BRANDY FOR THE PARSON, BACCY FOR THE CLERK"

Following Mrs. Johanna Jones' talk in July, Mr. John Nash, of Brighstone quoted part of "A Smuggler's Song" by Rudyard Kipling, based on old smuggling yarns about Romney Marsh. This theme was later developed by Russell Thorndike in his famous Dr. Syn books, several of which were adapted for the cinema. The phrase in the title became synonymous with nostalgic stories about smuggling activities across the country, including the Isle of Wight.

<p>"If you wake at midnight and hear a horse's feet, Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie,</p>	<p>Don't go drawing back the blind or looking in the street <i>Watch the wall my darling while the gentlemen go by.</i></p>
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<p>Five and twenty ponies trotting through the dark, Laces for a Lady, Letters for a Spy,</p>	<p>Brandy for the Parson, Baccy for the Clerk <i>Watch the wall my darling while the gentlemen go by."</i></p>
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I looked in my files for a few smuggling tales! In June 1859, after 'creeping' by the coastguards for many days, 36 tubs of 4 galls. each and a flagon of contraband spirit were seized. In May 1862 some boys birds-nesting at Gills Cliff discovered 62 flaggons. They tapped one and became oblivious of everything! By the time the coastguards got there, the tubs had gone but five were found later in the outbuildings of Steephill Farm. Coastguards hiding in 1870, watched a boat sail under the shadow of Luccombe cliffs and saw 25 tubs of brandy carried to the shore. The men ran off, apart from one Noah Williams who got about 5 miles out to sea before being caught. He later received £100 fine + £2 costs! When he died in 1925 he was said to be "the last of the active smugglers."

Thomas Dyer, a member of one of the families moved by Lord Dysart from his cottage at Steephill to the bottom of Mill Street, sat on a bench half-way between his front door and the stream (later Cascade) and related his adventures. After dark, residents were invited to a little jollification - barrels would be carried up the garden by shadowy forms, emptied into his old-fashioned upright cask and spirited away again! He died in 1855 and is buried in St. Catherine's Churchyard.

A few of the items accepted by the TRUSTEES are brought by Graham to each monthly meeting. These have included an 1845 print of Bonchurch Pond, a Ventnor Secondary Modern School scarf, a 1950 Guide Book, and pictures of Carnival "Royalty," Holy Trinity Church Choir 1950s, the Parsonage, the Railway, St. Boniface School pupils 1970s and St. Catherine's Church; and the items from the Methodist Church mentioned by Graham.

MEMBERSHIP is 145, plus 23 Honorary Life members. Miss Flora Muller, our oldest member at nearly 106, died in May and earlier this month, Mr. Cyril Creasey, a former Treasurer, died aged 95. Both were keenly interested in the Society's work when I called in to see them.—Fay

DL REGISTRATIONS

Don Vincent writes: "Island motor vehicles that were previously used on roads without any identification were required to be registered from January 1904, under the Motor Car Act 1903. The then IW County Council was initially allocated the index letters 'DL' in the original two letter series. DL39 was the first recorded registration to have been issued. This would suggest that the 38 vehicles registered in Dec.1903 as DL1-DL38 were probably those existing on the Island from c1895-1903, before the Act came into force. We wonder if any of these early motor vehicles were owned by Ventnor residents. I have a listing for DL1-9999—any queries contact me on 405545." *(In my files I have a note that Lt.Col.Mayes owned DL 6, and Dr. Armstrong DL 10 — Fay)*

OCT. 31st meeting— IW RIFLES AT
SUVLA BAY - Gareth & Valerie
Sprack.

RESEARCH

Some of you may have read about the research I have done for Nicholas Jellicoe, grandson of the 1st Earl Jellicoe, who lived at St. Lawrence Hall and took part in Ventnor life. In 1985 Nick's father George, unveiled a plaque at Inglewood Park which was stolen, but has now been replaced. George, who became the 2nd Earl, had a distinguished war career, being a member of the SAS and Special Boat Service. Nick and his half-brother Johnnie met me at the Museum. My Chronicle article led to visits from a resident of King Charles 1 Court who had served with him and from a relation (living at Sandown) of a former nanny to the Jellicoes! Other research queries have included: Esplanade Hotel, Seacliff, The Rock, Honeythorne, the Savoy Café, and local families—Field, Clements, Hookey and Jenkins.

- Fay



A very successful "Heritage" Weekend Open Day resulted in an attendance of 58 visitors. On the same day "This Charming Island," chronicling Elgar's stay at Shanklin and Ventnor, was published. I was invited down to Alexandra Gardens where the author kindly donated five of his books to the Museum. The book is now available (£5 plus postage). It looks an interesting publication. - Graham

***** I would be very grateful to receive short articles from members for our Newsletter, by the end of Feb.2009 please.

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