

VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

September 2009

Newsletter No. 15

MUSEUM PIECES.

The Tourist Board promised the Island a busy summer with many extra visitors. Unfortunately, our visitor numbers for the early part of the summer were well down. August was better, but we are unlikely to recover lost ground. In an attempt to increase visitor awareness I approached the Winter Gardens to see if we could put up a small display showing old Ventnor and advertising the delights of the Museum. Permission was received and our display in the foyer has, I think, worked as we seem busier since it has been up and running.

Our cash flow was saved by the excellent sales of our long-promised new DVD 'Ventnor and the Undercliff' priced at £8.95 (+ post and packaging). We purchased a DVD player to maximise sales in the Museum, which it has done.

The flat above the Museum is now unoccupied following the death of Miss Williamson. We are apprehensive about its future as any new occupancy relates directly to the Museum's welfare.

The Committee were of the view that I should have a deputy. It is important, if for any reason I am not available, that someone can continue the work in the Museum and keep it running. Mr. Peter Pye has agreed to fulfil this post.

I have led two history walks around Bonchurch, both blessed with fine weather which helped make them successful events.

We must seek more stewards for next year. Many of the rostered turns for this year have only one person on duty—there should be two for security reasons. I am sure our stewards will not mind me mentioning that four of them are now over 80, so additional staff are imperative. I fear if this does not improve, our opening hours will have to be cut, so drastically reducing income. We have over 200 members. SoI look forward to hearing from you.

Graham

FROM THE ARCHIVES

O is for OBSERVATION TOWER

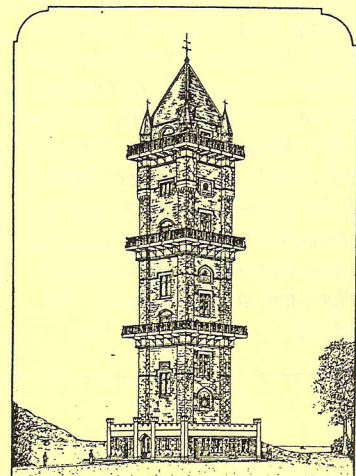
John Morgan Richards, owner of Steephill Castle, was an American who fell for the charms of Ventnor and the Undercliff. Like many of his countrymen he was a man of ideas and was keen to get Ventnor noticed and for it to become a more go-ahead town with superior attractions and advanced facilities. He was in favour of a funicular railway to the top of the Downs and in 1904 suggested an observation tower be placed on the upper Park plateau.

In his book 'Almost Fairyland' he goes into detail. The tower was to be 200ft. high, thus giving a height above sea level of 330ft. It was to be of a square construction with three balconies running around the outside at intervals up the tower. The top would have a pointed dome. At the base there was to be an imposing entrance with an ornamental castellated frieze above. Windows were placed at various heights up the tower. On the ground floor, public rooms which would be warm and welcoming for use in winter as well as summer, would contain a reading room, a general lounge for socializing, a shooting gallery, refreshment rooms, a photographic exhibition gallery, a cinematograph theatre and a telegraph office. A superior band would play every morning and afternoon. Lifts and stairs would take visitors to the top where telescopes and powerful glasses would be provided.

The cost of construction "would not deplete a millionaire's capital in any way ... it would be a sound investment. The ascent of the tower would be a paramount attraction, It would be novel and unique as no other such structure existed on the South Coast. "Imagine," he enthused, "crowds disembarking from steamers and trains, plus local residents looking grateful, eager and alert to observe."

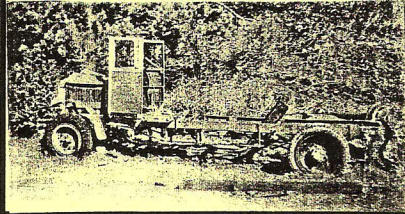
Eight years later, he bemoans the fact that no entrepreneur had shown interest in his tower. So, it never came about. If it had been constructed it would certainly have created an interesting addition to the Ventnor coastline.

Graham

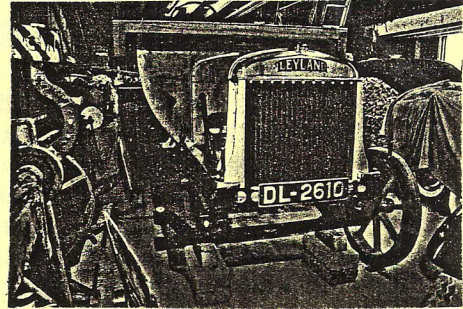


Amazing Story

Following Graham's article 'N' is for Nash's Coaches and the mention of the 'Red Chief,' Don Vincent sends us the following: "DL2610 Leyland type C.1 originally delivered with an all-weather charabanc, solid-tyred coach body to G.K. Nash at Ventnor in March 1922 for the summer season. Its name 'The Red Chief' was derived from the dark red livery of the charabanc coachwork. It ran on local Island excursions and private-hire jobs to and from Ventnor by G.K. Nash until 1931. It was apparently then withdrawn and replaced by another new coach and was sold to F. J. Cheek (Cheek Bros.) of Chale Green. The charabanc body was removed and the vehicle converted into a flat-bed type lorry. It is said that they operated the lorry (still as DL 2610), now with pneumatic tyres, until it was withdrawn in 1941. Eventually the remains were rescued for a proposed preservation project by John Golding in 1964 and much later passed to his brother Geoffrey Golding of Ryde in 1980 for continued 'work-in-progress and believe it or not, this work is still slowly proceeding now in a barn near St. Helens.



Left: Remains when rescued from a gravel pit on St. George's Down in 1964 (photo by John Golding); Right: Photo taken by Don Vincent in March 2009.



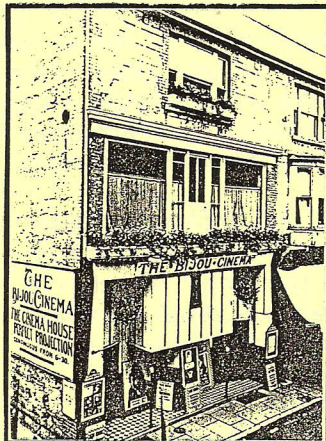
The Executive Committee have agreed the following price changes, taking note of the answers on the Questionnaire: **Membership £7.50; Visitors to monthly meetings £1.50; Entrance to Museum £1.50, concessions £1; Pamphlets £1.50.** The increases to take effect from January 1st 2010.

A RECORD. Membership this year has reached a record high and at the time of writing we had 179 paid members and 24 Honorary and Life Members.

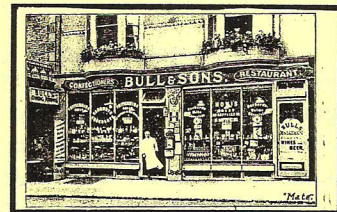
TRUSTEES— Since March, many more items have been acquired for the Museum, included a scrapbook made by the Childs' family, Farrow family photos, DVDs of 1960s Carnivals, RNH memorabilia and old glass slides of great local interest. A selection of over 20 fragile artefacts have been sent for conservation. This is costing over £1200 but is very necessary for the future. I asked for the donations I received for my research work to be included in this total—nearly £650 in 2008.

I JUST NEVER KNOW from day to day what queries are coming next! I have answered around 60 by post since March, including questions about the Priory, Prospect House, Littledene, Greenham Lodge, Clifton Terrace, Victoria Cottages (later Richmond Terrace), Hawthorne, and Schonberg; W. H. Bull's Restaurant in Pier Street; the Good Templars; and families including Potts, Gilbert, Cotton, Venables, Giles, Scovell, Kingswell and Margerison. The last-named had connections with the Bijou Cinema at 19 High Street. The late Ron Pusey used to say that it would never be forgotten by those who knew it as their main weekly entertainment. It brought back wonderful memories of a "crick" in the neck sitting looking up, so close to the screen in the 4d. front seats, of boys ping-pong at the screen, of the suitable piano accompaniment to the cowboy films, and the sadness when 'The End' appeared. Everyone stood for 'God Save the King' and it was over the road to see who could get served first at James' Café with faggots and peas!

I was amazed when I picked up the phone one day last month and a lady said she was speaking from Sydney, Australia and could I do some research for her? Since then I have met her and her husband and they were so grateful for what I had discovered in my files and given them. The combination of the Museum artefacts and my research files at home is certainly paying dividends in verbal appreciation and in donations for the Society. Fay.



October 30th: 'Art, Architecture and the Island Landscape'
Dr. Robin McInnes



In April Alan Doe gave us a talk on Bembridge, and then in May we 'travelled' with Colin Elvers on 'An Evening Mystery Tour.' Rodney Widger was great with his boyhood memories 'All the Way to Wittul,' in June and Roger Silsbury filled in for the booked speaker in July and we all went back twenty-one years in time with slides!

As we are having a meeting on the last Friday in Nov., the annual lunch will be on Nov.20th—venue to be announced.

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