

VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 8

March 2006

MUSEUM PIECES. The total number of paying visitors to last year's Exhibition was just over 1000. It is always about the same total. However, I was pleasantly surprised with an attendance of 39 on Heritage Open Day - a Sunday afternoon in September. Ventnor is not usually very busy on a Sunday - perhaps it was not a beach day!

We now have a new security system for the Museum. I know it works. I was called out twice in a fortnight - once at 10 p.m.! Both false alarms, thank goodness.

It is some time now since we erected any blue plaques. Therefore, we are hoping to start a new programme of historic plaque placements around the area shortly.

On September 23rd the Museum building was 100 years old and on the day, a visitor gift pack was available. The pack included a copy of an opening day advertisement, a press release and photographs of Mr. A.J. Sharpe's two stores.

We have been stocking the I.W. Quiz compiled by the late Dr. E. F. Laidlaw. It is very difficult. We have had several people come to the Museum seeking answers - no good asking us, we do not know many of them ourselves!

Four years ago we took part in the extremely successful I.W. History Association's Exhibition in St. Thomas's Church, Newport. They are holding another one this May. They had over 2000 people looking round last time, so it is a good event in which to take part.

Preparation of the 2006 Exhibition is now underway. This year it is the turn of St. Lawrence to be in the spotlight; also screens on Shipwrecks along the Undercliff Coast, and, marking a sad anniversary, 40 years since the closure of our railway. Colin Elvers and I are hoping to organise a short ceremony at the Ventnor Station site on April 18th. Our new Exhibition opens on May 20th.

Graham.

FROM THE ARCHIVES.

H is for THE HAMBROUGHS OF STEEPHILL

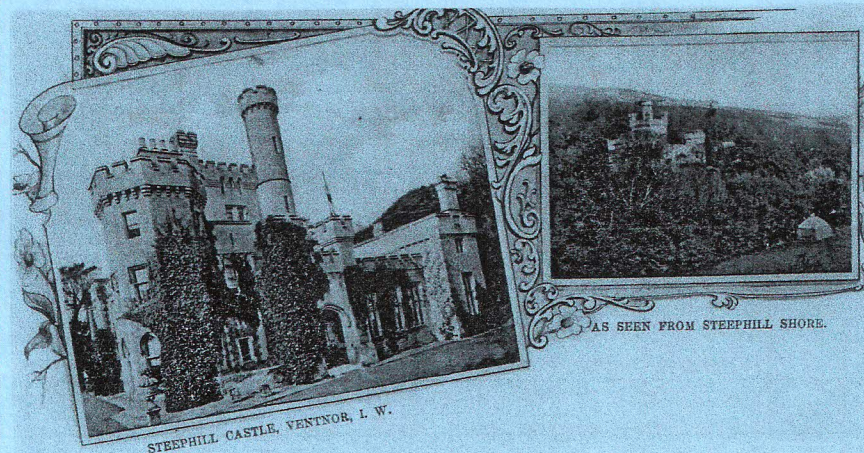
John Hambrough was born in 1793. He was the son of John Hambrough Snr. of "Pipewell Hall," Northampton. He married Sophia Townsend at Ilminster Church, Warwickshire in 1820. In 1825 he purchased "Farringford," later to become the home of Tennyson. In 1828 John bought the 1100 acre Steepphill estate where he planned to build his castle on the site of a thatched cottage which had been the home of Hans Stanley, a previous Governor of the Island. The Earl of Dysart had also owned the property.

John set to work removing the picturesque inn and fishermen's cottages at Flowers Brook. Obviously not to his taste! He instructed James Sanderson as architect, and a Mr. Page from Southampton to lay out the exceptional grounds. Work started in 1833 and two years later the Castle was finished. The family crest was over the door, but John had lost his sight and never saw his "dream home" in all its glory. John must have been a very wealthy man for at this time he still owned "Farringford" and building "Steepphill," furnishing it, and estate improvements came to £250,000, a huge sum in the 1830s. In addition in 1837, he gave £3,300 to build St. Catherine's Church and £2,500 for the Vicarage.

Queen Victoria visited on several occasions and one of the promenades in the grounds was named in her honour.

John Hambrough had three children, all sons - Albert John died young in 1861; Oscar inherited "Pipewell," and Windsor Edmund became a Vicar. John Hambrough died in 1863 aged 69. His wife followed two weeks later. Albert had pre-deceased his father, so "Steepphill" passed to the grandson, Dudley Albert. His son, Lt. Windsor Dudley Cecil, was killed in dubious circumstances in 1892. Indeed, his army tutor, Alfred Monson, was charged with his murder by shooting on an estate in Scotland. The verdict was "Not Proven." So ended a famous murder case. Cecil was buried in St. Catherine's Churchyard.

Graham.



SPONSORS FOR SUMMER EXHIBITION

In the past we have sought sponsorship from local businesses asking for £250, but this is getting more and more difficult to obtain. The Committee have now decided on a different approach. We have 14 display screens in the Museum and we are now asking for £30 to sponsor a screen. Any members who may be interested, please contact Graham. It all helps to cover the considerable costs of setting up, advertising, brochures etc.

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER!

For the last few months, I have been doing research for David Craig, of Queensland, Australia whose ancestors lived on the Island in the 1850s and 1860s at Undermount, Westfield and Mountfield at Bonchurch and at Wroxall Farm (now Wroxall Manor Farm). I sent him information from the Museum and from my own research files and he was very appreciative, so much so that he sent me £50 which I passed on to the Society, and as a personal gift he sent a beautiful book about Queensland.

In his house he has a water-colour of Bonchurch Pond. I sent a copy to Dr. Robin McInnes, who identified the artist as William Gray, a prolific painter of local scenes in the mid 19th Century.

David's great-grandparents, descendants of Scottish migrants who arrived in Australia in the 1820s and 1830s, as far as he knows never went to the Isle of Wight or even England, but they named their house in Tamworth, NSW, - "Ventnor" and the short street in which the house was situated is now known as Ventnor Street.

However, the story does not end there - I mentioned to David that many people from Ventnor emigrated in the latter part of the 19th Century and the early part of the 20th, and I gave him the names of some who had gone to his area. He very kindly looked in the telephone directory and gave me three addresses. On the off-chance that they might be descendants, I wrote to them, received replies in the affirmative and have sent them information about Ventnor, then and now. What a rewarding result!

Since the last Newsletter I have had around 50 postal queries, including those concerning the RNH, John Snowdon Henry, St. Vincent's, Isolation Hospital, Hillside, Winston Churchill, Empress of Austria, the Chocolate Shop, E.C. Martin (carriage builder), Spencers and Blakes and Belgrave House. The latter was once the home of Dr. G.A. and J. Martin, and then of Dr. J.L. Whitehead, well-known names. Visitors to the house included Sir James Clark, who promoted the health-giving properties of Ventnor in the 1830s and the actress Jenny Lind. Included in the Newsletter you will find a report of an 1889 dance - one of the many functions held at Belgrave House. In the mid 1930s it was opened as a hotel by Mrs. Astill and Mrs. Worley and other proprietors included Mr. and Mrs. E. Young Mr. and Mrs. H. Job and Mr. and Mrs. L. Stone. Mr. John Pavledis, who was owner of the hotel for 12 years until 1980, was a "stuntman" in his own way, and thought up several exciting schemes, including a raft project and a home-made aeroplane, which he tried to fly by man-power along on the meadow at what was then called Steephill Pleasure Gardens (now Botanic Gardens). He had seven unsuccessful attempts in half-an-hour, but it was very exciting at the time! Application was made for a flats scheme which commenced in the 1980s - and to my mind, it is possibly one of the best conversions in our area.

As you can imagine, all this research work takes up a considerable amount of my time - finding things at the Museum and then at home; looking through cross-indexing, and then putting it all together in a "package" - but I really enjoy it!

Fay.

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF H.R.H. THE PRINCE CONSORT,
AND OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS.
MR. W. GRAY, ARTIST,
CHURCH STREET, VENTNOR, I.W.,
DRAWING & PAINTING IN OIL OR WATER COLOURS,
PERSPECTIVE,
AND SKETCHING FROM NATURE, &c.

Fred and Olive Waterhouse are continuing to provide flowering plants outside the Museum. They look lovely - thank you both.

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



A copy of the painting of Bonchurch Pond by William Gray owned by David Craig

PRIVATE DANCE.—Mrs Whitehead gave a charming dance at Belgrave House on Tuesday evening. About 70 guests were present. The whole of the interior of the house had been transformed, rare plants adorning the staircase and corridors. The balconies had been covered in, the upper one being used as a retiring room and furnished with settees and sofas, whilst a *recherche* supper was served in the verandah below, the champagne being pronounced excellent. A spirited *cotillon*, led by the hostess and Mr Burnaby, was commenced after supper, several novel figures being introduced. That of the four-in-hand caused much amusement. Each gentleman conducted four ladies, driving them with scarlet reins round the room, the ladies in turn driving four gentlemen. At a given signal the teams were broken up, and partners were chosen. Dancing took place both in the drawing and dining rooms, the orchestra in the former being occupied by Mr Pearson and members of the Town Band, whilst Signor D'Anna and sons, and other members of the Volunteer Band performed in the dining room. Dancing was kept up with unflagging spirit until an early hour on Wednesday morning, and day was breaking when the last carriage drove away.

This year started with a slide show and talk on "The Children of Queen Victoria" by Sheila Caws. February saw reminders of how Ventnor used to look when Fay and Graham gave a slide show. April sees another slide show - this time Colin Elvers will bring railways "back to life," recalling the 40th anniversary of the closing of Ventnor's railway. It is hoped to hold a special event to acknowledge this at the Industrial Estate on April 18th.

Annual subs.(£5) were due in January. If you have not yet renewed and would like to, you can call at the Museum on a Saturday morning or send to Fay.

THE NEXT
NEWSLETTER
will be published
in
September 2006

NEWS FROM THE TRUSTEES

Since last September we have accepted a considerable number of items including a letter which was actually written from the London City Mission Home (Huish Terrace) in November 1894; a black and white framed photograph of "Villas West End of Ventnor" c1870s, showing part of the Royal Hotel, The Priory, Redan Villa etc.; a knife from Ward B of the Royal National Hospital; photographs of Smith's Medical Hall (forerunner of Boot's) and of Mr. C.A. Smith; Ventnor Chamber of Trade Minute Book 1949-54; Steephill Castle Estate auction catalogue 1919; and a black and white photo of local Councillors inspecting the Tomato Scheme in the Undercliff in the 1939-45 War (one of a series taken for the "Illustrated" magazine)

The Executive Committee gave their approval for us to send certain items for conservation. These included a Kelly's Directory, a Carnival Programme 1938, a poster for the Flying Exhibition in 1911 and another for the sale of Ventnor Gas and Water Company Shares 1894. As we have said before, conservation is very costly but worthwhile, and we are grateful to the local Council who give us donations up to £100 each year to help with this work. Fay also requests that the money she receives in donations for research work, her slide shows and stalls at various events (amounting to over £500 last year) goes towards conservation.