



VENTNOR AND DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. 9

September 2006

MUSEUM PIECES

The 2006 Exhibition was officially opened by Susan Scoccia, Councillor for Ventnor West and St. Lawrence. As this year's main theme is "Aspects of St. Lawrence" we thought this an appropriate choice. Secondary displays dealing with the 40th Anniversary of the Railway Closure, and "Shipwrecks Along The Undercliff Coast" have resulted in quite a lot of interest. Actually, anything to do with old railways is always a winner.

On the theme of railways, we had two very successful events in April. One was a wreath laying at the station site, including a visit to the tunnel, when about 80 people turned up on a beautiful Spring afternoon. A few days later, Colin Elvers gave us a film show on the railways. The hall was packed - about 100 attending.

In May, the Society took part in the all-Island History Exhibition at St. Thomas's Church, Newport. Official figures show 2354 persons visited the Church.

This year we tried a new approach to attracting sponsorship. In the past we have asked local firms for assistance, but this time we adopted a "Sponsor a Screen for £30" scheme. This turned out to be a great success and I would like to thank all who contributed.

Recent publicity in the new "Ventnor Life" magazine, plus our colourful leaflets have made the Museum busier in August, although the July heatwave saw poor visitor numbers for two or three weeks. Too hot for Museums!

As last year, the sales counter has a range of local history books, including Derek Sprake's new title "Men of Chale."

We have had visits from St. Wilfrid's R.C. School and St. Lawrence Community Association.

We assisted the "Public Catalogue Foundation" in their quest to list all oil paintings in local Museums.

Our Ventnor West model railway layout has been out of commission for most of the Summer with track and engine problems. This was a shame as children of all ages (8-80!) enjoy it. Finally repaired, it is now operating again.

Graham.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

I is for the ISOLATION HOSPITAL

A sanitation review into Ventnor's drains and water supply was not impressed with what they found and action was urgently called for. Amongst other things, this led to the building of the Ventnor and Undercliff Isolation Hospital at Lowtherville Road, Upper Ventnor.

Discussion about having a hospital started in 1892. However, it was some time before a suitable site could be found. For a short time, a house in Gills Cliff Road was used.

Eventually, in March 1900, a site was acquired on land leased from Captain Lowther. Loans of £3570 were agreed, tenders were invited and the hospital opened in 1904. There was considerable unease from the locals and the Island's leading physicians were called on to allay fears, stating that no disease could infect beyond a distance of 40 ft.

The hospital site extended to two acres, comprised three buildings and a Nurses' Home. There were four wards, eight beds, a nurses' room, bathrooms, an administration block, kitchen, waiting-room, mortuary, laundry, ambulance shed and a sterilising tank.

The hospital was to receive patients from Ventnor and the surrounding villages but eventually, it took patients from other areas too. By its very nature, it was busy at times of epidemic, but at other times was virtually empty. There was a Matron, Mrs. Kemp, who took over in 1905, and she ran the nursing side single-handed, except at times of epidemic when nurses were employed as necessary. In 1936, there were only 25 admissions, but in 1942 there were 52.

Outside, the hospital had a windmill for pumping water. The ambulance comprised a covered wagon pulled by a horse. As late as 1939, this spartan conveyance was still in service, so it presumably continued till closure in 1943.

The buildings have seen a variety of uses since - including a toy factory, Council depot, builders' store and now conversion into dwellings.

Graham.

Brian Gardener kindly invited us to his lovely home at New Close Farm, Carisbrooke in July. It was a beautiful afternoon and we enjoyed walking and being driven around the delightful surroundings and having tea on the patio.



Children from St. Wilfrid's R.C. School looking at the "Then and Now" screen

We have been having excellent attendances at our meetings. In April, Colin Elvers commemorated the 40th Anniversary of the closing of the Ventnor-Shanklin Railway. In May Dr. David Wright "opened our eyes" relating tales of "Life in Island Villages 1860-1920". "Twelve Curiosities of the IW" were brought to our notice by Don Margham in June and I am sure many members were fascinated enough to seek them out. In July, Brian Greening, a prolific writer of Island books, described how "Every Picture Tells a Story."

DONATIONS FOR CONSERVATION

Conservation of delapidated documents, books etc. is an important consideration for the Trustees. Since I have been doing research, using information from the Museum and my home files, I have asked that any donations I receive are put towards conservation. Up to the time of writing this, the total received for my work is £400 and the regular grants from the Town Council are also used for this purpose. Flimsy and torn paper or loose-leaved books quickly deteriorate when handled - they look so much better after visiting the conservator.

Subjects for queries since March have included Medina Cottage, Lynchcliff Terrace, Hillslea, Melville Lodge, Burlington, Castle Cliff, Scouts, Carnivals; various families including Hambrough, Giles, Sewell, Compton, Meager, Groves and Hurley; and characters like Holy Joe and Britannia.

I answered a letter in the County Press from a man asking about one of the biggest fires ever seen in Ventnor before 1900 - at Stringer's shop in Upper High Street. I had a long report in my files and sent it on - the enquirer was very pleased and has been corresponding since, and sent me a picture of Clarisdale and Glendower in St. Alban's Road, with the original "tin" church nearby. After the fire, Stringer's moved to where we will remember Thompson's jewellers shop in Spring Hill.

One of the most interesting thing about being a researcher is that you just never know what you are going to be asked next!! At the Museum we have a large selection of sale brochures, and many, many boxes full of programmes and paperwork of all descriptions. After perusing them, I go home and look in my own files and put together a "package" for my "clients." The cards and letters I receive make the time-consuming work so worthwhile - and I really love doing it.

- Fay

FROM DONCASTER TO VENTNOR

Sitting in front of the Winter Gardens one day last month, a young girl who worked for the Mill Bay came over to me and said "two of our customers have been phoning you - they are walking along the cliffs." She ran after them (a thoughtful act) and they came back to talk to me. Coming from Doncaster, they were visiting Ventnor to find information about Alexander Houston, once a tutor to members of the Hambrough family and later Clerk to the Local Board from 1883. He lived at Terrace House, which was demolished to make way for Castle Cliff in 1901. At the Cemetery, I took them to the graves of Alexander's wife and her brother, but there was not a memorial stone for Alexander. Afterwards they came indoors and enjoyed looking at the information I had about the Houston family.

WE SHALL MISS BILL

Last month, we received with regret the resignation of Bill Mansfield from the position of Chairman. He has moved to Colchester but will continue to maintain an interest in the Society, and will retain his membership. Bill has served us well as Chairman since 1999, and will be much missed. In 2001 he took the office as Treasurer for a short while. Janet Griffin, the Vice-Chairman, has kindly agreed to take his place until the AGM in March. Bill had acted as a Steward for many years, usually on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Members will, I am sure, wish Bill every happiness in his new home.

Annual subs. (£5) will be due from January 1st 2007 but may be paid earlier if you wish by calling at the Museum on Saturday mornings during December or sending to Fay.

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SAD NEWS

Through the deaths of Peter Barnes and Ernest Biggin we have lost two more Honorary Members. Ernest was the "power-house" behind the formation of the Society and the founding of the Museum, which took up a large part of his life's work in Ventnor. We are grateful for the legacy of £1,000 which he left us, in order to help continue his good work.

FORMER RESIDENTS

Many former residents call in at the Museum. Recently Robin and Pam Turney called in and were pleased to see photos of Ventnor as they remembered it. Since then I have been looking out items re the Scouts, Clark's shop in Pier Street, the Junior School, Rosetta, Alexandra Gardens etc. in which they were interested. In 1963, the new 3rd Ventnor Scout HQ was named the Turney Hut, in memory of Robin's father. Both his father and mother worked tirelessly for the Scouting Association.

THE PAST UNCOVERED

Whilst renovating 27 Newport Road, builders uncovered the name "Harry March Ltd." over what was the baker's shop in Lowtherville for many years. Harry ("Vin") March's grand-daughter, Joy Nagle, visited the Museum in March and we were able to give her information, and from home, I sent her advertisements and reports of "Vin's" prowess on the cricket field. Recently I sent her a picture of the sign and she and a friend visited Ventnor again specially to see it. A nostalgic moment for her. It has now been painted over and is gone for ever!

THE TRUSTEES have been overwhelmed, but absolutely delighted, with the very large number of gifts to the Museum in the last six months. These have included several photos of old Fire Brigades, cricket teams, items about local families, scrapbooks for the Steephill Castle Kids and Macnaughton Festival, Musical Society and other programme and photos, RNH items and architectural drawings of local properties. Space is becoming a problem and we have to stick to our policy of only accepting items which relate specifically to this area.

Around 60 visited the Museum on Heritage Open Day, September 10th

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