



Ventnor Park in the Early Days

Ventnor Park was originally part of the Steeple Estate which was laid out in 1762 and covered most of western Ventnor - although it wasn't known as Ventnor at that time. Fifty-nine years later, in 1821, the estate was sold to John Hambrough who, in the mid-1830s, built Steeple Castle as a home for him and his family. It was never intended to be a defensive castle but a country house with turrets, towers and extensive crenellations.

In 1880, Dudley Hambrough, John Hambrough's grandson, who had inherited the estate from his father, also called John, leased the plot of land we now know as Ventnor Park, and shown to the left of the road (later to become Park Avenue) in the photograph on the right.



The land became known as the 'Recreation Ground' and was leased for 99 years to the Local Board (the forerunner of the VUDC) for £80 per annum for the first 20 years, then £120 for the next 79 years. A year later, in February 1881, the Local Board borrowed £600 to construct a large house - to be known as Hambrough Lodge - for the Superintendent and his family. The locals considered it to be 'a hideous notion of a Swiss house', but it is still there today! A fishpond was constructed in the stream that meandered through the park and this remains today.

A year later, in 1882, a Mr. Barnett Meyers contributed shrubs for the park and Sir Lawrence Peel gave £500 for plants. Also, in 1882, the author W. H. Davenport Adams published a book in which he said: "*in a few years these gardens will undoubtedly become one of the great attractions of this locality*" (He couldn't have been more right, as more than a century later, Ventnor Park would receive accolades for its beauty and tranquility and win gold medals, awarded by 'England in Bloom', in the 'Park of the Year' category). A greenhouse was constructed at the western end of the site and was completed in 1883.



Ventnor's first carnival procession in 1889 culminated at the Park which was illuminated with 3,000 Chinese Lanterns.

In 1903, Ventnor Urban District Council decided to remove the bandstand from the pier (see adjacent photo) and re-erect it in the Park. Some councillors wanted it erected on the lower lawn, but it was pointed out that this area should be left unobstructed as the annual Horticultural Show and Sports were always held there. It was finally sited where it stands today.

In 1905, Mr. Walter Bull, the Park Keeper, along with his assistants, decorated the park with thousands of lanterns and, when lit, created a beautiful effect. The occasion was the first illuminated concert of the season with music provided by the Ventnor Company of the Artillery Volunteers and the Ventnor String Band. About 900 people attended!

Nowadays, the Park is run by Ventnor Town Council and is much more than a place of beauty, as it plays host to many community events throughout the summer including 'Ventnor Day', Children's Carnival events, Ventnor Fringe, weekend Band Concerts and, of course, the Putting Green and refreshments. In addition, for keep fit addicts, there is the 'outdoor Gym' on the upper plateau, open all the year around. All in all, the Park is an amenity of which Ventnor is rightly proud.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis. Photographs from the author's collection



Ventnor & District Local History Society is a registered charity, working to preserve and record the history of our area and make it available to the public in the Ventnor Heritage Centre.
The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

www.ventnorheritage.org.uk / telephone 855407

