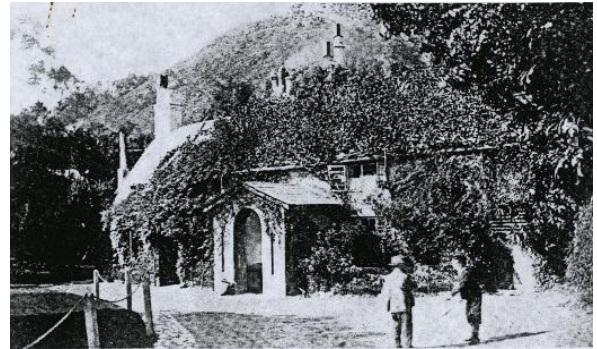




## A Time Traveller in Ventnor

*A small weathered sign points towards a creeper-clad low-roofed building backing on to the cliff. To its front, a large green, interspersed with rustic seats shaded by well-grown shrubs, adds to the sylvan setting. From the sounds issuing out of the low inside rooms, it seems that this is the local Inn. Looking away to the south, there is a distant view of the Channel, while looking east, a narrow upward track boasts a little stream coursing down its side. Shortly, the traveller is approached by someone from inside. Soon, a mug of ale is brought out. The traveller learns that the Inn goes by the name of the Crab. It appears to be a prosperous enterprise.*



*After refreshment, the traveller decides to move on. The track leads south and then westward, with a stream skirting it on its northward side. A small rustic bridge crosses the stream at one point to afford access to a line of four or five cottages, over the largest of which a climbing rose has grown unchecked. A little further on, a farmyard comes to view with a capacious barn and a low thatched farmhouse some way beyond. In parts, the track is now wet and muddy, for it is clear that the stream overflows in heavy rains. Just past the farmyard, another stream emerges to join the existing one and the track turns south, the stream water now coursing fast through a withy bed on the left, with a tiny cottage (pictured) close to the stream bank, while on the right is an orchard. In the distance, well in sight of the sea once more, a small wooden mill stands perched on top of the cliff edge, its water wheel fed from the dammed and ponded stream.*



The above is the imaginary account of an early visitor to Ventnor, set around the 1830s. It draws on the recollections of William Mew Judd who, in a series of lectures of 1905, reminded his audience of what the town and the surrounding Undercliff was once like. The Inn, of course, is the Crab & Lobster which then had a direct view out to sea. And the following perambulation goes along the site of High Street and then down Mill Street. He was equally fascinating about the nearby Chickenpit: a wild, uncultivated wilderness, full of reeds, thistles and wild poppies, the underlying ground formed of blue slipper clay that was nearly always moving toward the shore. It was where the farmer's wife at Ventnor Farm reared her chickens, for it was generally a warm and protected spot. Eventually, Chickenpit was drained, notably after the Esplanade was completed which acted as a buttress to seaward ground movement.

Judd also spoke about St. Catherine's Church in its early days. It was much smaller than it is now: there were no side 'galleries', and the gallery over the entrance was smaller. Music was supplied by a barrel organ which played only six tunes and in a long and drawn-out fashion. There was no choir, the singing being led by the man who turned the organ handle. The Curate at the time was William Sharp, but the poor man appeared overshadowed by John Wheeler, the Clerk, with his jet black hair, black whiskers and a black embroidered gown, looking majestic at the reading desk.

We will return to more of William Mew Judd's recollections in later issues.

*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre*



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.

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