



Church Hill, Ventnor, 1862



The date of this print is 1862 and it is interesting to see the location described as Church Hill rather than Church Street. This was not a piece of artistic licence on the part of the engraver, for the 1841 Census also records it as Church Hill. It led directly into Belgrave Road at this time, for Alpine Road was not made until 1871. Looking closely again at the picture, there appears to be no Mill Street, for the paved footpath on the right seems to be unbroken. However, Mill Street certainly existed, even if not much more than a poorly repaired track, very prone to flood from the stream running alongside it that fed Ventnor Mill. As Ventnor grew as a resort, the Local Board became increasingly embarrassed by the often muddy and rutted condition of this thoroughfare, but it was some years before it was developed into the Pier Street that we know today. The actual entry to Mill Street was just to the right of the two trees, one either side of the stone gate pillars that mark the entrance to Montpellier House, built first as a hotel and tap, but later the home of Dr. Tuttiatt who ran a surgery there. The Co-op stands here today.

The striking feature of much of the central area of the town at this time was the number of cottages (often thatched) that made up its various buildings. On the right of the image, where there are two stone pillars and some iron railings, was Poplar Cottage. And if you look through to the centre of the image, there are yet more cottages visible in the lowest part of the High Street. However, Ventnor also had some very new buildings by the early 1860s. The three-storey structure just beyond the railings of Poplar Cottage was built about 1850. The building stands today, now with shops on the ground floor, but the first-floor bay windows remaining, along with the distinctive top parapet wall.

The small wooden kiosk on the extreme right is a booking office for the Vectis stage-coach which ran several times daily to and from Ryde. The proprietor was Sydney Robinson who lived just behind, in Vectis House, his wife Sarah offering lodgings there. The coach fare to Ryde was three shillings for an outside seat and four shillings inside. This was a small fortune at the time, accessible only for a well-off few. The figures in the picture are definitely among them, the women dressed in the fashionable crinolines of the time, while the fine grey horse on the left, standing in charge of a calash with its hood fully down, is illustrative of a standard means of conveyance for Ventnor's well-off visitors.

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



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