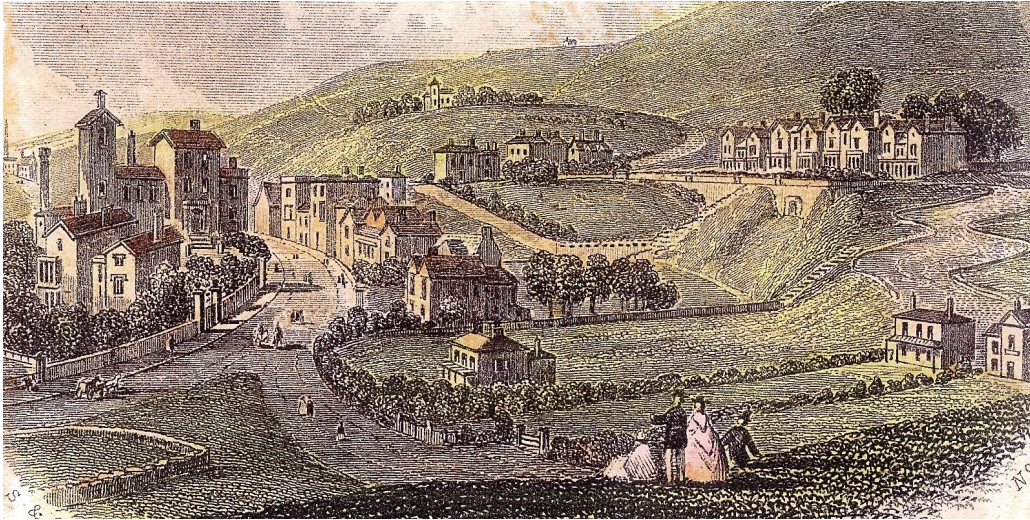




## St. Boniface Villa or Hotel



This is an engraving of the eastern approach to Ventnor in the later 1840s. The curving thoroughfare on the left is the top end of what is now Ventnor High Street. Up on the right is the newly built St. Boniface Terrace, easily recognisable today. Otherwise, the town of Ventnor at this date still fades into fields. St. Boniface Villa is the striking Italianate style building at extreme upper left, with grand entrance and tower, even if the engraver has used some artistic licence. Part of the building remains today, on the junction with East Street. But two floors of the tower were demolished as unsafe in 1963.



This building, constructed probably in the late 1830s, has had an extraordinarily chequered history. George Brannon described it as a hotel on first sight, and imitating 'the airy and picturesque style of an Italian villa'. It was run by one of Ventnor's improvement commissioners, H.R. Hartley. However, there is evidence that the building was conceived originally as a school, quite possibly for boys and girls of delicate health; and there was certainly just such a school (for young women) across the road at Vicenza Villa around this time. By the 1850s, George Bailey had charge of the hotel, known then as the 'Family Hotel and Posting House', with hotel tap and stables on separate sites nearby. By 1859, though, the hotel had ceased operation and St. Boniface Villa had become a private residence, occupied by the Rev. John Roper and his two sisters, together with their servants. The 1871 Census described him as a clergyman, aged 73, 'without care of souls'. His family resided there for nearly 30 years. The building took on another new guise around 1888, this time as 'The London Cabmen's Home of Rest', or alternatively, 'The London Cabmen's Mission', the Rev. John Dupee named as superintendent. For reasons unknown, this venture did not last long, and, by August 1894, the entire St. Boniface Villa Estate came up for sale. Its land area was extensive and there were 47 building plots offered to potential buyers. The Villa itself was not part of the sale, but in 1895 the building seems to have been split into four separate apartments and the name altered to 'The Lions', though exactly why this name is not evident. The name nevertheless persisted right through to the early 1960s when the part of the tower was removed. Today the building still exists as apartments, but in much modified form.

*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, main image courtesy of Julie Roberts*



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