



Rene Howe: one among Ventnor's finest

As the town re-opens the viaduct walkway leading from outside the entrance to the Winter Gardens down by the Cascade to the Haven and the Esplanade, we should all take a moment to recall the townswoman after whom it was named about twenty years ago. Rene was for some thirty years a teacher at Ventnor Junior School and hence became known to generations of children. To Rene, they were family, with former pupils often maintaining contact with her for years after they left. This had a special poignancy because she had been estranged from her own family effectively from birth and her adopted parents died when she was quite young. The main photo shows Rene in 1972 with the first group of junior pupils to occupy the school on St. Boniface Road after it was moved from Albert Street. The museum copy of this image has the names of most of the pupils seen here.



Rene was a delicate child and, in common with many youngsters like her, ended up being sent to St. Catherine's Home in Ventnor, aged 7, in the hope that the local climate and open-air lessons would improve her health. As she was effectively an orphan, she stayed on as a child nurse and, later, a teacher. St. Catherine's and its Sisters (from the order of St. Margaret's, East Grinstead) thus became her home, including the time when it was evacuated to the Hermitage (near Whitwell) during World War II. After the war, Rene attended a teaching training college in Worcester. Then, a year or so after qualifying,

she made her return to Ventnor, not to St. Catherine's, but to Albert Street Junior School.

Rene was plainly a conscientious and outstanding teacher, but she found time in her life to do an astonishing range of other things, all connected to the Ventnor community. She was active in the Girl Guides, the Townswomen's Guild, Bonchurch Social Club, Carnivals, Ventnor Cricket Club, the local churches, the RNLI and Ventnor's Heritage Museum. For a while she was Chairman of the Ventnor & District Local History Society, having been very active in its foundation and in organising meetings and walks. In the lower photo, she sits on the right, at the Museum desk, alongside Brenda Creese, ready to greet visitors. Over time, Rene won all manner of recommendations and awards. When she died in 2001, aged 88, her friends and supporters filled Trinity Church for a service of thanksgiving, in the words of the South Wight Chronicle's editor at the time, to say farewell to an exceptional woman. Altogether, one of Ventnor's finest.



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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