

# VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 45

January 2025



Bottom of Spring Hill, now the Central Car Park.

## *In your January 2025 newsletter:*

<b>Introduction</b>	<i>Page 1</i>
<b>New Trustees</b>	<i>Page 1</i>
<b>2025 Annual General Meeting</b>	<i>Page 2</i>
<b>2025 Monthly Meetings</b>	<i>Page 2</i>
<b>Publications</b>	<i>Page 3</i>
<b>Museum Displays</b>	<i>Page 3</i>
<b>St Catherine's School</b>	<i>Page 5</i>
<b>Local Newspaper Stories</b>	<i>Page 5</i>

## **Introduction**

From the 1<sup>st</sup> February to the 5<sup>th</sup> April the Heritage Centre will be open on Saturdays from 10.00 to 13.00 hours. The museum will re-open for the summer period on 7<sup>th</sup> April. As usual it will be open from 10.00–13.00 hrs Wednesday to Saturday and additional from 13.00– 16.00 hrs on Fridays.

With more stewards these hours could be extended. These volunteers work on the front desk, welcoming visitors and addressing any queries. There are also opportunities to work on the collection, scanning and filing documents and photographs, to produce displays, or to help with aspects of Society admin. If you (or anyone you know) are interested in volunteering with us for a few hours a week, then please get in touch at [info@ventnorheritage.org.uk](mailto:info@ventnorheritage.org.uk) or just leave your name and contact details at the desk in the Heritage Centre.

## **New Trustees**

We would like to welcome Sarah Kelly and Leigh Geddes as new Trustees of the Society and members of the governing body. They will serve until the Annual General Meeting in March and stand for re-election (along with the rest of the Trustees) for the following year.

Leigh will be well known to most members, as she was Society Vice-chair and then Chair for many years until a few years ago. She has agreed to come back as a Trustee to give us the benefit of her experience and perspective.

Sarah is a recent resident of Ventnor, but she is a long-term lover of the South Wight since visiting as a child from the early 1970s. She has many fond memories of Ventnor and takes every opportunity to enjoy the surrounding countryside and coastal area as an avid walker and (by her own admission!)

a mediocre runner. Sarah has a professional background in financial services and experience of working with Trustee boards across the public, private and charitable sectors. Sarah says she is delighted to be given the opportunity of working as a Trustee with the Society, which she believes plays a vital part in preserving and exhibiting the wealth of history and memories of our area, not only for our current and future generations but for the many visitors who come to the Heritage Museum every year. She will also be volunteering in other capacities, helping with research and archival work, although she hasn't settled on particular projects or roles yet.

**Jeffrey Mazo, Secretary**

## **2025 Annual General Meeting**

The 2025 Society AGM will be held on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> March at 19.30 in the Masonic Hall on Grove Road to elect the officers and Trustees for 2025/26 and approve the 2024 annual accounts. Further details, proxy forms and an agenda will be distributed to members by e-mail a few weeks in advance.

Anyone interested in standing as an officer or Trustee should contact Jeff Mazo on [secretary@ventnorheritage.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ventnorheritage.org.uk). You can also, of course, be nominated from the floor at the meeting.

## **2025 Monthly Meetings**

This year we are changing – slightly – the way we organise our monthly meetings. We are trying to vary the format, so we will have some traditional talks/lectures as well as some different events, such as social evenings (perhaps with a cash bar), oral history evenings, round-table discussions, etc. We also want to open things up to any members who are interested in organising an evening – we have the Masonic Hall booked for the normal dates, and can help with IT and other set-up, so send us your proposals/suggestions and preferred dates to [info@ventnorheritage.org.uk](mailto:info@ventnorheritage.org.uk).

The full list of meeting dates is as follows. All meetings will be at 19:30 pm at the Masonic Hall on Grove Road. The first couple of meetings of the year are already planned: on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January Francis Quinn will speak on the history of St Catherine's Lighthouse, and on 28<sup>th</sup> February Jo Thornton and Steve Berden will talk on 'The Lost Houses of the Undercliff'. The Society AGM is on 28<sup>th</sup> March.

- 31 January (Francis Quinn on St Catherine's Lighthouse)
- 28 February (Jo Thornton and Steve Berden on The Lost Houses of the Undercliff)
- 28 March (Society AGM)
- 25 April
- 30 May
- 27 June
- 25 July
- 26 September
- 31 October
- 28 November

As usual, there are no meetings in August or December.

## ***Godshill in 99 Postcards***

Following on from our two highly popular books edited by Paul Kingswell, *Ventnor in 99 Postcards* and *Bonchurch in 99 Postcards*, we are planning a third volume covering Godshill for summer 2025. It will be on sale through our usual channels, including our monthly meetings, in the Heritage Centre and through the online shop, but we hope to get some of the Godshill merchants to stock it for the tourist trade as well.



## **Museum Displays**

The displays are under review. Plans include a revised Ventnor narrative that is thematic (as distinct from forming a continuous historical sequence). New images will be added, including many not seen before. Later in the season there is to be a display about Innell Jolliffe. She was a pioneer woman newspaper proprietor and editor, running the *Isle of Wight Advertiser* from 1915 to 1923. She was the focus of a *South Wight Chronicle* article some years ago, but new material has now become available about her life and achievements.

Another Ventnor character, Kevin Garlick, who died prematurely last year, will be the centre of a new static display and exhibition. Described as having 'clear vision, deep devotion, warm compassion, business acumen, a cheerful heart and commanding personality', he was a shoemaker to stars of stage and screen, operating from premises on Ventnor High Street. He hand-made all manner of items and won international plaudits for their quality. After his death the Society given access to tools and samples from his workshop, which will form the basis of the display.



The Olivia Parkes exhibition set up in June last year is being revised to take account of new material and new evidence that has come to light in the wake of the publication of Michael Freeman and Robert Trowbridge's book *Britannia* at the end of August 2024, and the 'Shopping in Ventnor' display is being amended to take the story of town shops through to the present day.

## St Catherine's School



Recently, volunteers have been working to bring the history of this speech and language school up to date, covering relatively recent developments such as the sixth form centre in the old school in St Boniface Road.

From the school's earlier history we were particularly reminded of the influence and work of a nun, Sister Kathleen. In 1908 she arrived at what was then a home for people suffering from chest and breathing complaints. She took charge in 1910 and oversaw the

transition to a place for young people suffering from asthma and malnutrition. The home flourished and expanded. She was 'persuaded' to retire in 1960 at the age of 87. She died six years later in 1966. A beautiful font was placed in the chapel in memory of her (see chapel picture above).

## Newspaper Stories from the Past

In October 1888 the local newspapers were focusing upon the weather. Fog was causing problems for the island population. Traffic was suffering, with movement coming to a halt in many areas. The 'steam packets' were not able to travel across the Solent because of the dense fog, and

consequently letters and newspapers were not available until the afternoon. In one account the newspaper commented that these events showed 'how isolated' the island community was. Even court cases had to be cancelled because the solicitors could not cross to the island.

In January 1901 the local newspapers, including the *Observer*, reported that Parliament was about to discuss a bill giving powers to construct a railway under the Solent. The tunnel would have to be over two miles long and the railway seven miles long - from Sway in Hampshire to a junction of the London and South Western Railway on the island. The capital required would be around £600,000. The plan was not welcomed by the public authorities in Yarmouth, or by the businesses that benefitted from much of the London traffic coming through to the island.