

VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 43

May 2024

INTRODUCTION

The museum re-opened for the summer period on 3rd April.

Opening times:

Wednesday morning (10 am – 1 pm)

Thursday morning (10 am – 1 pm)

Friday all day (10 am – 4 pm)

Saturday morning (10 am – 1 pm)

If more volunteers are forthcoming, then we will be able to extend these hours. Current opening hours are always available on the [Ventnor Heritage Centre website](#).

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OPEN AFTERNOON APPEAL FOR VOLUNTEERS

There will be an 'open afternoon' in the Heritage Centre in June for members who are interested in finding out what goes on 'behind the scenes' - [click here for more information and how to book a place](#).

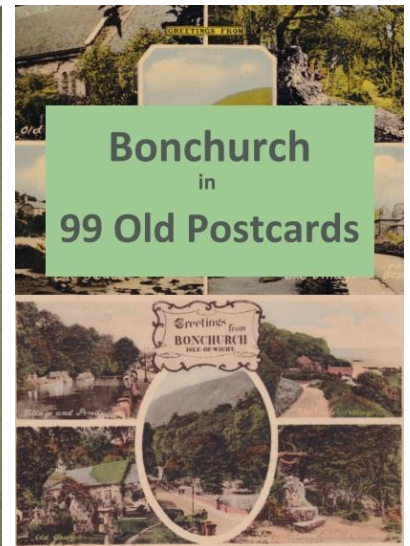
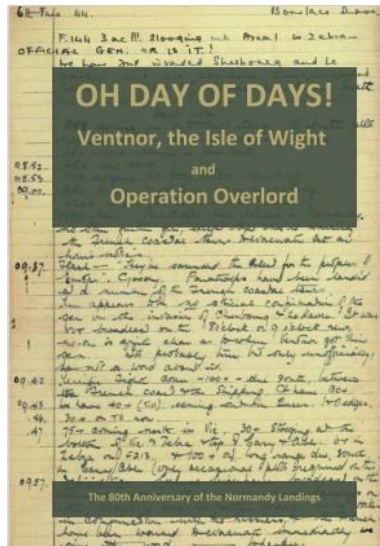
We are also looking for someone interested in taking over from Jeff Mazo as Secretary in 2025 when Jeff Mazo steps down to spend more time on other things. It would suit someone with admin skills who'd enjoy getting more involved with the Society - although much of it can be done working from home if that appeals to you. Secretary is a vital job but not hugely time consuming - our governing body meets once a month. If you'd like to know more about what's involved we'd love to hear from you - please contact (???)

NEW SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS COMING SOON:

Bonchurch in 99 Old Postcards (£6.50, to be published in June) is a follow on to last year's successful 'Ventnor in 99 Old Postcards' (which has already been reprinted). It uses postcards from the Society Collection along with some from the personal collection of Mr Graham Wheeler.

Oh Day of Days! Ventnor, the Isle of Wight and Operation Overlord (£4.00, to be published in May). This book accompanies our D-Day 80th anniversary exhibition (see page 2 here). In 1994, for the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landings, the

Society published *D-Day and Operation Overlord* by Peter Bray, who was one of the founding members of the Society and a driving force in the development of our archive of photographs and documents. Now, to mark the 80th anniversary of D Day, we are issuing a significantly revised and updated version of his booklet incorporating the latest research, new material since deposited in the archive, and with a much greater focus on Ventnor and the isle of Wight.



IN THE MUSEUM

One of the most popular recent items displayed in the museum is the large reproduction of an Ordnance Survey map of the town from 1898. Even a casual look reveals a lot of interesting details and changes over the last 126 years. Other historic maps of our area are available for visitors to browse on the computer at the Research Desk.



Exhibitions:

We have several new exhibitions already in place or planned for the coming months.

***Ventnor Women for Life on Earth* exhibition**

In the early 1980s the possibility of a nuclear war was very real, and protests held outside the RAF base at Greenham Common, where nuclear weapons were being stored, grew into the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. A group of Ventnor women with young families found it difficult to spend time at Greenham, but instead did anything in their power to make local people aware of the nuclear threat. They campaigned tirelessly, with very limited resources, holding an Island-wide conference, a sit-in on the roof of the Nuclear Bunker on the Downs, and protests at arms fairs on the mainland. Their peace campaign in the 1980s is a fascinating part of Ventnor's history.

Longshoreman exhibition

Local resident, Mike Tigg, a former longshoreman himself and also part-time coastguard, has lent the Society a selection of photos of Ventnor beach, dated 1976, that show practice runs for setting up a breeches buoy apparatus. Many of the people identified in the photos will be names that older residents are sure to remember. A separate image, dating from the early 1980s, shows the rocket-launcher in a practice action on the western cliffs, the purpose being the shooting of a line out to any ship found in distress along the Undercliff coast. Accompanying these photos is a further set that record the day-to-day activities of longshoremen on Ventnor beach in the 1980s and 1990s. They are from the camera of the late Daphne Carter, whose 'Ventnor Remembered' albums are now accessible online, free to use.

D-Day exhibition: 'Oh Day of Days'

This exhibition will be in place in early June, marking 80 years since, on 6th June 1944, the Allied Armies launched the largest amphibious operation in the history of warfare, attacking a 50 mile stretch of the Normandy coast. By the end of 'D-Day' nearly 175,000 troops had landed at a cost of nearly 4,500 Allied lives over 10,000 casualties in total. The Normandy landings, which led to the liberation of France and the Low Countries, and the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany, were only made possible by the combined efforts of Allied soldiers, sailors, aviators and civilians. Our exhibition looks at what was involved, looking particularly at the Isle of Wight and especially the Ventnor district and its residents, to show what the experiencing D-Day was like for those who had already suffered 5 years of war.

Olivia Parkes exhibition

This is due to be in place by late June. It follows the story of 'Britannia' (Olivia Parkes) who for some thirty years lived alone in an old boathouse on stilts in Myrtle Bay, west of Ventnor. She became a well-known, if somewhat eccentric figure, among both residents and visitors. She died in January 1962 in a council flat in the town, but her story remains very current, especially following the Olivia art installation that figured in Ventnor Fringe in 2023. The exhibition will consist of a large board display, a model of Britannia's Hut that will be positioned in the main window, and also a new book telling Olivia's life story.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 29th March in the Masonic Hall on Grove Road.

Chair's Report:

- Lesley Telford, the Society Chair, reported that the Society had had another good year. The decision to allow free entry to the Heritage Centre and Museum had been a success – donations from visitors had more than made up for the loss in income, and sales of publications were up.
- Our monthly meetings had returned to a full schedule after Covid, and numbers of attendees were up. Lesley also thanked Andy Butler and Alan Clark for their talks at the Ventnor Arts Club, which expose a different audience to Island history and bring in welcome donations for the Society.
- The Review Committee had now cleared the backlog of donations that had built up during Covid. In the past year, they had reviewed 88 distinct donations, and accessioned 74 of them, including an old horseshoe, first-hand notes of growing up in Ventnor in WW2, glass slides and photographs of our area, and advertising ephemera from the 1950s to the 1970s.
- Museum exhibitions and displays included a 'home-laundry' window display, Ventnor's Comic Seaside Postcards, a Wroxall exhibition to accompany those on Godshill and Whitwell, and a new Niton exhibition, and in the week before the AGM, we produced an exhibition on Rene Howe to mark the re-opening of Rene Howe Walk after renovations.
- Away from the Heritage Centre, Andy Butler, Alan Clark and Peter Ewbank presented "The Almost Magic Lantern Show" during the Fringe, and our local history walk "Ventnor – Cradle of the Russian Revolution" with author Stephan Roman continued for a third year as part of the Fringe and the Isle of Wight Walking Festival.
- In September we had launched a Ventnor Heritage Centre Facebook group, to encourage members and others to share information about the history of our area. It now had well over 400 members.
- Lesley thanked the 20 or so the volunteers who made the Society work – the trustees, the front-of-house stewards, the review committee and others who work on the collection, the museum displays and publications like the *South Wight Chronicle* articles and the newsletter, and handling and despatch of online sales. In particular, she remembered Alexandra Woodruffe, who joined us as a Steward last year, and then took on organising the speaker programme. She was a delightful presence and nothing fazed her. Her untimely and sudden death in November shocked and saddened us all, especially the stewards she had worked with so successfully during the season.
- Finally, Lesley gave a special thank you to Leigh Geddes, who was standing down as a Trustee this year after 9 years, including serving as Deputy Chair and then Chair until last year's AGM.

Treasurer's Report:

- Paul Kingswell, completing his second and final year as Treasurer, reported that although the Society's balance sheet remained healthy, we had had an operating loss in 2023 of £2,425 following on from a loss in 2022 year of £1,925. This was mainly due to costs associated with just keeping the doors open to visitors, which had shot up over the last year, and included: telephone and broadband, website, fire alarm and intruder alarm support, cleaning, electricity supply, insurance, and venue hire for AGM and monthly meetings. If this continued we'd find ourselves in financial difficulty sooner rather than later. We had also spent £960 for essential refurbishment involving with asbestos cladding in the back office. In 2024 we would not be receiving discretionary rate relief (an Isle of Wight Council decision covering all similar organisations on the Island), which effectively means an additional £980 in expenses.
- The Trustees were implementing or looking at ways to offset these increasing costs, including increasing membership subscription, new publications selected to minimise costs and maximise income, introducing formal budget planning, and seeking grants to cover specific projects.

- Paul thanked Martin and his team at Cross & Co for their help in auditing the accounts and supporting him over the last two years.
- In light of the financial position, Trustees recommended that the membership subscription rate be increased to £15 in 2025. The last increase was from £10 to £12 in 2017, and a rise to £15 was in keeping with general inflation rates since then. The recommendation was approved unanimously.

Election of Trustees:

John Carter, Melvin Hurst, Paul Kingswell, Jeff Mazo, Nigel Slater-Bishop and Lesley Telford were re-elected, with Leigh Geddes deciding not to stand. Lesley Telford and Jeff Mazo were re-elected as Chair and Secretary respectively, Paul Kingswell elected as Deputy Chair, and Melvin Hurst elected as Treasurer.

The meeting was followed by a screening of two short films:

The first, *The Shoemaker* was about Kevin Garlick, who died in February. His workshop One Step Beyond was on the High Street for over 30 years, where he specialised in making and repairing period and vintage shoes, including many for museums, TV and film productions around the world. The film was produced in 2022 by Paul Knights, a local filmmaker, whose works on Island life and nature can be seen on his YouTube channel.

The second, *Ventnor Saved My Life*, was produced by the Ventnor and Undercliff Heritage Partnership, who were also responsibly for the Time Travel Ventnor information boards and Heritage Trail. It was the brainchild of Richard Downing and Evelyn Knowles, long-standing VDLHS members and volunteers, and was based on Richard's popular local history walk of the same name.

LOCAL HISTORY ARTICLES published to date 2024

- Carl Prausnitz – Dr Giles, by Colin Beavis (Jan)
- Wesleyan Methodist Chapel & Sunday School – Lowtherville, by Colin Beavis (Jan)
- Ventnor under a blanket of snow and ice 1985, by Michael Freeman (Jan)
- A Time Traveller in Ventnor, by Michael Freeman (Feb)
- Church Hill, Ventnor, 1862, by Michael Freeman (Feb)
- A hundred years of Smugglers Haven, by Colin Beavis (Feb)
- March's Bakery, Ventnor, by Colin Beavis (Feb)
- Shopping in Ventnor one Friday morning in 1972, by Michael Freeman (Feb)
- St Boniface Villa or Hotel, by Michael Freeman (March)
- Beach Hotel Soda Fountain, by Michael Freeman (March)
- Collecting water from a standpipe in Lowtherville, early 1963, by Colin Beavis (March)
- Dorcus Barnett, by Colin Beavis (April)
- Rene Howe: one among Ventnor's finest, by Michael Freeman (April)
- Wickenden & Co., photographers, Ventnor, by Michael Freeman (April)
- Ventnor Beach by Wickenden & Co., by Michael Freeman (April)
- The Central Kitchen*, by Colin Beavis (May)



Our articles are posted on our website a week after publication in the *South Wight Chronicle*, and also on our Ventnor Heritage Facebook Group.

SOCIETY MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meetings are held at the Masonic Hall on Grove Road at 7.30 pm on the last Friday of each month. For a full list of meetings and any changes or updates, please see the [Monthly Meetings](#) page on our Ventnor Heritage website.

- 31 May 2024: Roger Silsbury *A Look around the Undercliff in 1988*
 - 28 June 2024: Paul Kingswell *Wanderings in the Isle of Wight*
 - 26 July 2024: Mark Earp *Isle of Wight on Film & TV: Memories, Murder and Make-believe*
 - 27 Sept 2024: Andy Butler & Alan Clark *Do you Remember? (An Isle of Wight Scrapbook 1950s to the Present Day) Part 2*
 - 25 Oct 2024: Robin McInnes *250 Years of Undercliff Art*
 - 29 Nov 2024: Paul Thompson *RAF St Lawrence: An Archaeological Investigation*
- There are no meetings in August and December**





ISLE OF WIGHT MERCURY STORY (6 September 1963)



Ventnor anglers were amongst the record entry of 750 in the IOW Open Angling Championship. However, weather conditions were so bad and only 34 fish were caught. There were lucky escapes – a middle aged man was swept out to sea, but the next wave brought him back-in. A local man lost a pair of trousers containing a £1 note.

Mr Arthur Wheeler of Upper Ventnor retired after 28 years as a hospital porter at the local Royal National Hospital, St Lawrence. The matron presented him with a pipe, pouch and smoker's accessories.

Ventnor was blessed with a number of activities for entertainment. Acker Bilk was at the Winter Gardens. In addition, the Rex Cinema (Tel. Ventnor 400) was showing *El Cid* with Sophia Loren and Charlton Heston. It also had other films on during the week! And at the Ventnor Theatre there was 'The House on the Cliff' – a new thriller, and from September 12th Kenneth Horne's comedy hit 'Sleeping Partnership'. Seats were bookable at the Information Bureau at 32 Pier Street or from the theatre. Prices 6/-, 4/6 and 3/-.

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