

VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 47

November 2025

Urgent Call for Volunteer: Society Treasurer

We are looking for someone willing to take over from Paul Kingswell as Treasurer in 2026 when Paul steps down. Paul served as Treasurer for two years, then stepped in again when his successor Melvin Hurst had to resign for health reasons. Paul agreed to stand again for 2025, but now needs to focus on other things. The position does not necessarily require any previous experience, as full training will be given. It will suit

anyone interested in getting more involved with the Society – although much of the work can be done from home if that appeals to you. The Treasurer also serves as a Trustee.

Treasurer is a vital job but not hugely time consuming. It involves handling the day-to-day finances of the Society (paying bills, issuing invoices and keeping track of sales and spending), preparing short monthly accounts for the other Trustees, and providing necessary information for our external accountants to prepare the annual accounts.

If you'd like to know more about what's involved we'd love to hear from you – please contact Paul on treasurer@ventnorheritage.org.uk or Sarah Kelly, the Secretary, on secretary@ventnorheritage.org.uk.

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Newsletter Introduction

As the current season ends, we can look back on several successful initiatives and achievements, and not the least, the range of research and other work that goes on behind the scenes. See below for more on the research carried out.

We must congratulate John Elton for his magnificent wooden model of Britannia's hut. It has sparked off many interesting conversations with visitors, and many compliments as to its accuracy and quality.

Other popular items have included, as always, the model trains and stations of old Ventnor. They never seem to lose their appeal. The new Kevin Garlick displays are also popular and

have led to conversations as to his worldwide achievements. It also brought some smiles to his wife and family when they visited the museum.

The book range continues to provoke interest (as well as much needed monies for the Heritage Centre) and discussion. The 99 Old Postcards series has continued to be popular with visitors to the museum; the latest Godshill edition has provoked the same degree of interest as the previous Bonchurch and Ventnor issues. The Batswing photographs have often been discussed with visitors, but most go on to compliment the wide range of postcards – showing the Old Smithy, together with pubs, the school, as well as the wide range of rural views and cottages included in the book.

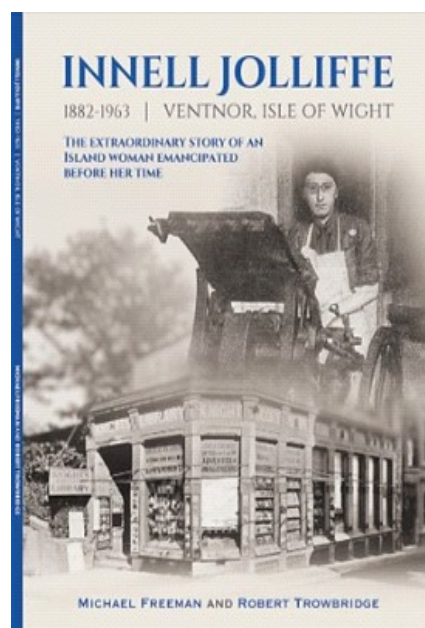
Finally, the latest book from Michael Freeman and Robert Trowbridge – not, to be sure, one of the Society's publications but of great interest to our members – has already proven popular. Many Ventnor people, as well as visitors, had never heard of Innell Jolliffe.

Innell Jolliffe: Exhibition and Book

The Museum opened its doors on 14 October for a private members' viewing of the new exhibit on the life of Innell Jolliffe. Tea, coffee and home-made cake were free-flowing and it was a lovely opportunity for members to come see the exhibit, spend some time looking around and chat with fellow members.

Innell was a pioneering woman journalist on the Island, eventually becoming proprietor and editor of the *Isle of Wight Advertiser* from 1915 to 1923. She was also a talented musician, photographer, and author of many short plays and sketches. She volunteered through both world wars as well as captaining the 1st Ventnor Guides for some time in the 1920s and was local secretary of the RSPCA from 1918 until her death. An extraordinary life indeed.

The viewing coincided with the publication of Michael Freeman and Robert Trowbridge's new book about Innell and her remarkable life. Michael and Robert engaged members with anecdotes from Innell's incredible story.



The book is available in the Heritage Centre for £9.95 or from the online shop (<https://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk/shop/>) for £12.80 including postage and packing.

Update from the Curator's Desk: Your Donations Needed Please!

You may remember that when I took the Curator role on around this time last year, I mentioned I wanted to re-jig the research room, both in terms of layout and storage. So, what has happened in the ensuing twelve months?

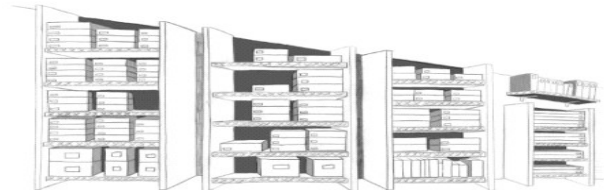
Well, we have re-positioned the computer desk, moved the Fay Brown filing records up under the window to the right, moved the stationery to the far left set of shelving and done some remedial work to the plan chest (courtesy of our friends at Ventnor Shed). Collectively, these changes have created a sense of more space in the back room as well as (in my humble opinion) making it easier to access records and artefacts.



All well and good, but the elephant in the room remains – the main shelving units where most of our photographic and paper artefacts are stored. The current shelves in the research area of the Heritage Centre have been in place pretty much since we first opened back in 1987. They have served us well for the last 40 years but are no longer fit for purpose (the shelves are struggling to cope with the weight of items and in some cases present a health and

safety concern). After discussion, the Trustees have agreed that we can replace them. Consequently, we have instructed a local carpenter to build us four bespoke shelving units to replace the current ramshackle ones. These will be constructed of moisture resistant, reinforced, CaberMDF and will allow us to store the maximum amount of artefacts in the safest manner – for the next 40 years!

Work has commenced on the first of these units (these will house the larger outsize *Mercury* and *South Wight Chronicle* boxes). All the shelves are being cut remotely and will then be transported in flat-pack mode to the Heritage Centre for installation. The first ones were installed on Tuesday 4 November and the remainder are due to be in before the end of the year.



Now this all sounds great – and I absolutely believe it will be – but it does come at a hefty cost, and that is why I need to ask for your help. With my

Treasurer hat on for a moment, the harsh reality is that we need some sponsorship to spread the load of the cost. If you would like to sponsor an individual shelf or even a bank of shelves, please consider making a financial donation specifically for this project (£30 per shelf). Even a relatively small amount such as this will make a huge difference overall and ensure we have shelves that will see us through the next 40 years. In addition, your name will be displayed on said shelf(s) as the sponsor for those next 40 years!

Donations can be made via the usual channels (cash, card or cheque in the Heritage Centre; PayPal or direct bank transfer if you are unable to get there). Please be sure to fill out a form (available on request or in the Centre) so we know the donation is for the shelves, and get correct wording for the sponsorship label.

Paul Kingswell, Curator/Treasurer

Poetic Musings

A visitor from Somerset, Martin Perry, so enjoyed his stay in Ventnor (and the museum in particular) that he sent us his impressions in verse form. We present them here for your interest and enjoyment.

Ventnor Impressions

Hilly? Rising from the sea – it's hilly!
To think of sprinting up? That's silly!
Just plain silly, quite an undertaking
that leaves the knees and muscles aching:
tarmac paths and tarmac roadways rising
to view of breadth of sea surprising:
high above where rocks and cliffs came falling,
and streets and buildings took a mauling,
narrow town streets in the compact centre,
supplies and business heart of Ventnor,
cottages, and houses, Georgian villas,
an esplanade with varied sellers
for the visitors and trippers calling,
memento buys of view enthralling,
hotels on the hillside solid perching
whose guests go climbing, something searching,
found appearing from the past historic
to whet the mood, if not euphoric,
where lay once the tracks to railway station,
replaced by warehouse generation,
blocked black mouths of hilltop tunnels
for trains of green behind smoke funnels:
over them St. Boniface's highest downs,
the climbers mounting, earning crowns,
long and steep the route up from the town
but summit's view deserves renown,
wide expanse of sea in solar shining,
blanched wavelets strongly redefining
solid shape of beaches, cliffs and coast,
not noticed much by town engrossed
in its trading, boarding and its living,
to visitors their pleasure giving:
drifting by slow heavy cargo vessels
horizon hides where future nestles.

– Martin Perry, Somerset

New Membership Secretary

The Society welcomes and introduces our new Membership Secretary, Alan Kelly, who will be handling membership renewals and records beginning this month. Alan moved to Ventnor in 2020 with his wife Sarah (who is the Society Secretary) and has a keen interest in the area and local history. Alan is looking forward to offering practical help with the Society's ongoing work.

You will be able to renew your membership for 2026 at the monthly meeting on 28 November, in person in the Heritage Centre or online. Alan will send out an e-mail with full details, forms and links as soon as the paper forms and website pages are updated and tested.

Research News

In the last five months we've had more than 25 research queries from members of the public, either via our 'contact us' web form, by e-mail, or in the Heritage Centre. We were able to provide useful and interesting information from the archives, or refer them to other sources who could help, in most of the cases.

Notable queries included:

- A visiting scholar from Japan came to the Heritage Centre along with a guide/interpreter to look at what information we had about Karl Marx's stays in Ventnor. Particularly notable are photostats of two letters Marx wrote to James Mann Williamson, his Ventnor doctor, donated to us by one of Dr Williamson's descendants. We were also able to direct the scholar to relevant locations in town.
- Dr Kate Felus, a social historian specialising in the restoration, planning and management of historic parks and gardens, visited the Centre to look at pictures of East Dene's gardens as part of ongoing renovation. We were able to provide her with many photos of the gardens and landscaping over the years, going back to the mid-1800s. She was particularly keen on finding any images of a bridge that apparently used to connect East Dene with the new Church. We weren't able to help her with that, but no one else has either. VDLHS members who know anything about the bridge – especially if they have any photographs or drawings – please let us know!
- As part of long-term planning for improved coastal defences along the Undercliff from Monk's Bay to Steephill Cove, two representatives from the Environment Agency came in to look through our extensive collection of photographs of the construction of the current defences in the 1990s. They were particularly interested in how the engineers and workers gained access to the shoreline, for assessing the environmental impact of new construction. We were even able to provide them with a one-hour videotape of work underway at Wheelers Bay, and some planning documents for the original works.
- The great-granddaughter of Phyllis Twigg (aka Moira Meighn), who is working on a biography of her forebear, approached us for any information we might have. Phyllis

was an artist and author who, among other things, wrote the first radio play broadcast on the BBC, on Christmas Eve 1922 and was the first TV chef with a series on 15-minute meals in 1936. She lived in Ventnor 1913–1931. Her father is buried in St Lawrence. We were able to provide a lot of useful details, and we learned a lot about Phyllis in return.

Finally, we've had a recent query from a Mr Robert Cochrane, who is researching the novelist Audrey Erskine Lindop, who was living at Southcliff Cottage, Sandrock Rd, Niton at the time of her death in 1986 and may have lived in Ventnor for a time. He asks anyone who knew her or has any information to contact him on brokenwords@hotmail.co.uk. Does anyone recognize her from the rather excentric photo here?

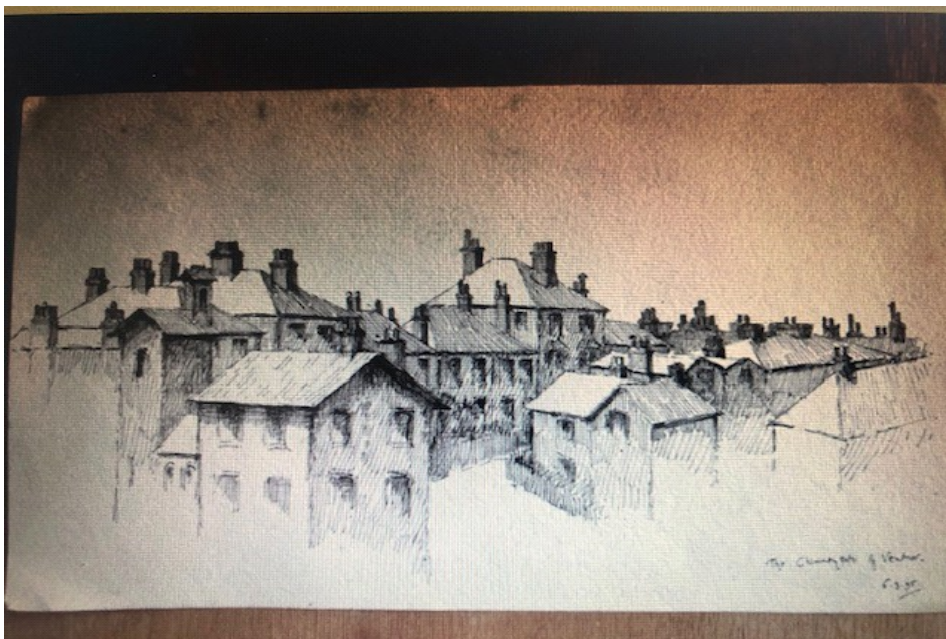
-- Jeffrey Mazo



That's My House!

In June we received a phone call at the Heritage Centre. The caller said he had a sketch of Ventnor chimney pots, drawn by his great grandfather, Charles Reed Peers, who was working as a pupil architect for Thomas Graham Jackson on the island in 1895. The caller wondered whether we could place the roofscape? We certainly could: to cries of 'that's my house!' it was identified as being the North Street area of Ventnor.

The life of Sir Charles Reed Peers CBE FBA FRIBA FSA, as he later became, is worth looking up. He became a famous architect and preservationist, as well as the first Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments. All this fame would come later for the young man sitting in a boarding house, smoking his pipe, and looking over Ventnor sketching the view.



Isle of Wight Mercury

As usual we include some selected articles from our local newspaper collection. This time they are from the paper dated Friday 18 August 1944. It was chosen to give people a brief picture of life in wartime Ventnor, albeit at a period when, after D-Day there was growing optimism about the war's outcome. The advertisements are interesting and reflect the priorities of that particular time. On the front page is an update on the National Savings Campaign. Ventnor and District contributed £805 in the previous week, bringing the wartime total raised to an astonishing £610,630. (With inflation that now equates to £23,547,658.10, according to Bank of England) figures) The scheme encouraged people to save, but also the fund was used to pay for war equipment.



NOW THAT THE FULL-SCALE ALLIED ATTACK HAS OPENED IN WESTERN EUROPE...

Enormous quantities of blood are needed for the treatment of casualties. It is, therefore, essential that we maintain adequate supplies of blood, plasma and serum. Will YOU help by giving a little of your blood? It is quite painless, yet half-an-hour of your time may mean a lifetime for someone else.

Will YOU enrol as a blood donor?

ISLE OF WIGHT BLOOD TRANSFUSION CAMPAIGN

Newport, East & West Cowes, Freshwater, AUG. 26—SEPT. 2
Ryde, Sandown, Shanklin, Ventnor, SEPT. 9—16
Headquarters: COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT

ARMY BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICE

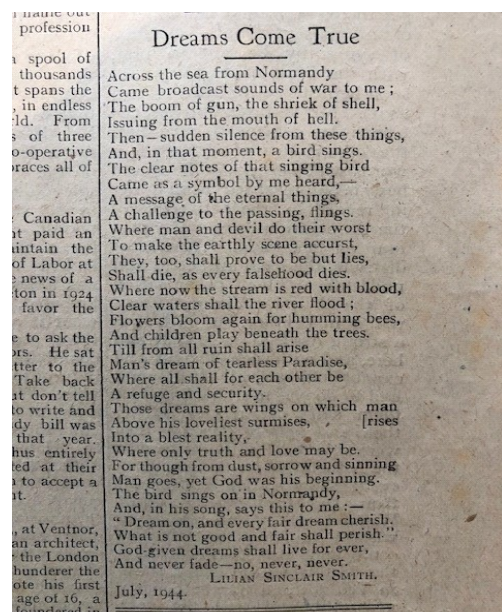
The Ventnor Spiritualist Church continued to promote their Sunday Services, whilst the Cricket Club was playing on Saturday against an 'Army 11'. Another advert explained about a lady with two small children requiring furnished accommodation in the town – 'airman's wife' – 'husband overseas'. Another large advert was for blood donors to turn up in Ventnor during the week of 9–16 September (see left).

A wide range of other news was in evidence. In Ventnor, there was an article which described the hosting by the W.V.S. of an exhibition taking place during the week beginning 22 August of invasion forces equipment. This included a 24-hour ration pack for D-Day troops provided by the RASC, whilst the Americans gave details of how their troops were fed by rations for ten men. The RAF gave

examples of the emergency equipment for crews, including dinghies, baler, distress rockets and fishing tackle. An advertisement described the continuing 'blackout' times with 9.51 pm to 6.21 am for 18th August and 9.39 pm until 6.31 am for 24 August.

Another article covered the topic of invasion, describing how the lessons from the costly Dieppe raid (1941) had been used to help save lives on D-Day, but also in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.

As part of its invasion coverage the paper also printed the poem reproduced here. It is certainly of its time.



Dreams Come True

Across the sea from Normandy
Came broadcast sounds of war to me;
The boom of gun, the shriek of shell,
Issuing from the mouth of hell.
Then—sudden silence from these things,
And, in that moment, a bird sings.
The clear notes of that singing bird
Came as a symbol by me heard,—
A message of the eternal things,
A challenge to the passing, flings.
Where man and devil do their worst
To make the earthly scene accursed,
They, too, shall prove to be but lies,
Shall die, as every falsehood dies,
Where now the stream is red with blood,
Clear waters shall the river flood;
Flowers bloom again for humming bees,
And children play beneath the trees,
Till from all ruin shall arise
Man's dream of tearless Paradise,
Where all shall for each other be
A refuge and security.
Those dreams are wings on which man
Above his loveliest surmises, rises
Into a blest reality,
Where only truth and love may be.
For though from dust, sorrow and sinning
Man goes, yet God was his beginning.
The bird sings on in Normandy,
And, in his song, says this to me:—
"Dream on, and every fair dream cherish.
What is not good and fair shall perish."
God-given dreams shall live for ever,
And never fade—no, never, never.

LILLIAN SINCLAIR SMITH.
July, 1944.

The Ventnor auctioneers Sir Francis Pittis and Son were conducting an auction of goods belonging to 'the late Miss R. J. Hue' of The Cottage, St Lawrence – a 'lovely old-world residence'.

Thoughts were obviously going to the future with the Ventnor surveyor, Mr Geoffrey Poole, making post-war suggestions for the 'New Ventnor'. The site of the demolished International Stores site (now part of the Tesco store) should be preserved for all time and the area known as Richmond Terrace. Pound Lane should be 'swept away'. The store had been hit by a bomb in 1942, and part of a weighing machine was found in a garden 300 yards away!

The paper also quotes the British Road Federation Agency report that became very relevant for post-war Ventnor. It stated that, 'a population with more leisure time and longer holidays will demand cheap cars, and roads on which to use them'. By 1966 both of Ventnor's railway stations had closed with serious consequences for the local economy.

2026 Meeting Dates

The tentative schedule of Society member meetings and talks is below. As usual, meetings/talks are on the last Friday of the month at 7:30 at the Masonic Hall on Grove Road, and there is no meeting in August or December.

30 January
27 February
27 March (Annual General Meeting)
24 April
29 May
26 June
31 July
August – No Meeting
25 September
30 October
27 November
December – No Meeting

Heritage Centre Winter Opening Hours

Fridays	10am – 4pm
Saturdays	10am – 1pm

We will be closed on 26–27 December and 2–3 January for the Christmas break.