

2016 Annual General Meeting

The Society's 2016 Annual General Meeting took place in the Masonic Hall on Grove Road on Friday 8 April. It was followed by a slide show, 'Round and About in Ventnor', of photographs and postcards from the nineteenth century to the 1980s. The show, originally prepared by Fay Brown (see adjacent story), was presented and narrated by Wendy Marshall and Yvonne Hardy.

At the AGM the Chair, Janet Griffin, reported on the Society's activities over the past year. Refurbishment of the Heritage Museum involved repair of the window on Grove Road, broken in January; covering three panes with large historical photos of the town on vinyl sheets; moving the model railway; and repair and redecoration of the canopy. The vinyl sheets were paid for by a bequest from Phyl Chaundy, and the canopy by a bequest from Graham Bennett. The moving of the model railway and replacement of the display boards provided an opportunity for improvements to the museum (see below).

Some material formerly on display or stored off-site has been moved to the loft, and other material on loan has been returned. The musical notes from Victor Fleming's house on the Esplanade, which had been stored in the museum, are now at Bonchurch Forge where they are being restored in preparation for display outside the Museum on Grove Road – thanks to donations received over the last year.

Future plans include further improvements to the Museum exhibition space, updating the computer in the office and digitising our collection. With these changes in mind the Society is preparing an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is expected to take some months.

Janet thanked the numerous volunteers who arranged last year's exhibition on short notice, helped with the refurbishment, and acted as stewards or in various roles behind the scenes.

Heritage Museum

In his report on the Museum, Richard Downing covered the refurbishment work in more detail. A great deal of work had been done over the winter, and the museum would be ready for six-day-a-week opening beginning on Saturday 30 April. Besides the new display boards, there will be new window displays and mannequins. The loft has been cleared out (with some surprises) and all the artefacts being moved up for storage will be photographed for a database so there will be no need to rummage around, and no surprises the next time!

The summer hours for the next three years will be 10:00am–4:00pm Mon–Sat, with Saturday opening in the winter, and admission for non-members will be raised from £1.50 to £2.00. (continued on page 2)



The Fay Brown Collection

Fay Brown was renowned for her collection of Ventnor documents and artefacts. The Museum now makes good use of her A–Z index for reference purposes but we have also indexed and stored more than 400 items from her personal collection that were passed on to us by her family.

Some of this would be described as ephemera, such as routine business letters, invoices and receipts. There are printed paper bags from shops, melted coins from the pier fire, a school beret and a cap, letters to and from the Council, Parent Teacher Associations, election ballot sheets and land ownership papers.

Perhaps most interesting are the hundreds of photographs and postcards, an example of which is printed above. Many of these are group photos of weddings, sports teams, social club members and staff outings. Most of these have named people, all of them indexed, so they will be a useful source for family history. Also included are photos of wartime bomb damage

and many other Ventnor events. Altogether a very valuable resource for which we are grateful to Fay and her family.

– Richard Downing

2016 AGM (continued from page 1)

Richard also reported on the feedback from visitors to the Museum last summer. Some 12% of visitors were local, 8% from elsewhere on the Island and 80% from off-Island. Most had learned about the Museum 'in Ventnor' – more specific questions would be needed to focus in on exactly how we were getting across to visitors. On a 1–5 scale (5 being the best), 80% of visitors rated the experience '5' and 12% '4'; the rest left the question blank! Visitor numbers, which have been up, were lowest on Saturdays (probably because it is a changeover day for tourists) and highest on Thursdays.

Evelyn Knowles, who coordinates the volunteer stewards for the Museum, reported that, although there have been several new volunteers, there is room for more. Eighteen of the twenty-four three-hour shifts are currently covered by regular stewards. Volunteers should stop by the museum or e-mail Evelyn at ventnorheritage@btconnect.com.

Treasurer's Report and Accounts

Yvonne Hardy presented her report and the accounts prepared by Martin Flux, and the statement of accounts was adopted by the meeting. Income from subscriptions and Museum admissions was up substantially. So was income from prints/photographs, in part due to the Society's new historical postcard series. Overall, both income and expenditure were more than twice the previous year, mainly due to repair and refurbishment of the Museum, funded by several legacies. It had also been necessary to upgrade or replace some of the IT equipment. With the ongoing cost of repairs and refurbishment, the Trustees have decided not to fund further conservation/preservation work for a few years.

Membership subscriptions were up by 13.7% from the previous year. Subscriptions are used for the running costs of the Heritage Centre building – phones, insurance and so on. The Trustees recommended that the annual subscription rate be increased from £7.50 to £10.00 from 1 January 2017. This was unanimously approved by the members.

Election of Officers and Trustees

The officers and trustees standing for re-election were confirmed unopposed: Janet Griffin, Hon. Chairman; Yvonne Hardy, Hon. Treasurer; Lesley Telford, Hon. Secretary; Margaret Davidson (Joint Publicity); Richard Downing (Museum); Leigh Geddes (Deputy Chair); Jason Mack; Wendy Marshall (Membership); and Anne Mundell (Joint

Publicity). There is one vacancy on the committee, for which no one has stepped forward.

For those who were unable to attend the AGM, copies of the 2015 minutes and 2015 accounts are available from the Secretary, Lesley Telford, ventnorheritage@btconnect.com.

– Jeffrey Mazo

Local History Walks

Roger Silsbury will lead two local walks in May as part of the 2016 IoW Walking Festival, with voluntary donations going to the VDLHS.

Monday 9 May

'Whitwell Wanderings', a gentle five-mile circular walk around the Whitwell area, looking at local history and enjoying the spring countryside. There are some steps and stiles on this walk. Meet at Whitwell Church (OS ref 522778) at 10:15am, duration about three-and-a-half hours. Bus service 6, Whitwell Church.

Thursday 12 May

'Ventnor Variations', an easy-paced five-mile circular walk taking in urban, coastal and some downland scenery to enjoy some of the area's rich history. Some steps and slopes. Meet at the Ventnor Heritage Museum (OS ref 564777) at 10:30am, duration about four hours. Bus service 3, Spring Hill or Boots.

For further details contact Roger Silsbury (tel: 01983 853621).

Upcoming Talk: Ventnor's Health Heritage

On Wednesday 20 April, Richard Downing will give a talk at the Botanic Garden on how and why the health industry developed in the Undercliff. The talk, entitled "'Ventnor Saved My Life": Ventnor's Health Heritage 1930 to the Present Day' is in the Café Botanique series run by the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society.

The talk will take place in the Echium Room at the VBG at 7:00pm. Richard is a Trustee of the VDLHS and a steward at the Heritage Centre.

Copy Date for Next Issue
Friday 16 September

SPONSOR A NEW MUSEUM DISPLAY PANEL

This year, as we redevelop the Museum, sponsorship is more crucial than ever

I/we would like to sponsor panel/s at £30 each.

Name/s

Do you want these names to appear on the board panel? Yes/No

Can we use Gift Aid? Yes/No

Address, if receipt required:

Send cheques to The Ventnor Heritage Centre, 11, Spring Hill, Ventnor PO38 1PE

Display Panel Appeal

At the AGM on 8 April, Richard Downing announced that the board sponsorship appeal has gone well. Another £160 is needed to fund a third board. £30 will buy one screen panel, and the name of the sponsor will permanently appear on that panel! Smaller donations towards the cost of a panel are also gratefully received. Please use the form to the left.

Society Talk: The Walled Kitchen Gardens of the Isle of Wight

On 29 January Sheila Caws of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust spoke to the Society about the Trust's recent project to identify, record and learn about the history of walled kitchen gardens on the island. A walled kitchen garden is defined as a fully or partially walled garden over 0.1 of an acre in area, used specifically for growing anything which might be termed 'produce', be it fruit, vegetables, flowers for the house or grape vines.

When the project began they expected to find about thirty such gardens, but in the end ninety-eight were identified using old maps, aerial photography and site visits. Some thirty-four remain largely intact. The earliest date from the early seventeenth century.

Five walled kitchen gardens were identified in the Ventnor district, all dating to the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries:

- (1) at East Dene, a large terraced garden divided into three compartments, now part of Carrigden Farm;
- (2) at Lisle Combe manor, St Lawrence, a large walled garden (no longer extant) north of Undercliff Drive;
- (3) at Sea Cottage in St Lawrence, on the edge of Pelham Wood, now overgrown;
- (4) at Steephill Castle (two gardens); and
- (5) at Old Park, St Lawrence.

This last has seen a greater variety of uses than any other on the island – as a market garden, a piggery and a tropical bird park, among others – and the greatest transformation in the twenty-first century. Its western half has now been reconstructed and restored as part of the grounds of the newly built Haddon Lake House.

The results of the project, including further details on the above gardens, are available in a 96-page book available for download at www.iwhistory.org.uk/iwgt/wkg.pdf.

– Jeffrey Mazo



A Victorian conception of the French landing at Monks Bay, Bonchurch. From *British Battles on Land and Sea*, vol. 1, p. 146 (1873). British Library Digital Collections via Wikimedia Commons.

Society Talk: The French Invasion of the Isle of Wight, 1545

The sinking of the *Mary Rose* in the Solent on 19 July 1545 gets the lion's share of attention with regard to the attempted French invasion of England that year, but it is only a small part of the story. On 26 February Gareth Sprack spoke to the Society on the French invasion of the Isle of Wight, putting the French landing at Monks Bay and the subsequent Battle of Bonchurch in its broader historical and strategic context.

The invasion was part of the broader Italian War of 1542–1546, which pitted Francis I of France and his ally Suleiman the Magnificent against Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and his ally Henry VIII. Unable to dislodge the English from Boulogne, which they had captured in 1544, the French gathered a fleet and army larger than the Spanish Armada four decades later. In May 1545 the French landed a force in Scotland, where Henry had been fighting the Scots for several years (the so-called 'Rough Wooing'). Then, in July, the main French fleet sailed for England, anchoring at St Helen's Bay.

A principal French aim was to destroy the English fleet based in Portsmouth. French troops landed at Seaview, Whitecliff Bay and Sandown to sack the area and provoke the English fleet to battle. An additional landing was made at Monks Bay, where there was a good source of fresh water.

After looting the Old Church at Bonchurch for linens and plate, French troops pressed inland from up the Newport Road towards Wroxall and Appuldurcombe, but were defeated by militia at the Battle of Bonchurch, probably somewhere near the Ventnor Industrial Estate. At sea, the Battle of the Solent saw the sinking of the *Mary Rose* and defeat of the even larger *Henry Grace a Dieu* (the 'Great Harry'), but the French were forced to withdraw, taking their landing forces with them.

– Jeffrey Mazo

Upcoming Society Meetings and Speakers

29 April	Trevor Price – 'Dinosaur Footprints'
27 May	Colin Beavis – 'An Old Photo Album'
24 June	Linda Bek – 'The Life and Loves of Sir Richard Worsley'
29 July	Michael Freeman – 'Mayfair by the Sea or Ventnor as You Never Saw It'
30 September	Stephen Fisher – 'Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War'

All meetings to be held at 7:30pm in the Masonic Hall, Grove Road, Ventnor, around the corner from the Heritage Centre

Correction: The bibliographical details of Michael Freeman's new book *Victorians in Search of Winter Health* were incorrectly given in the January 2016 newsletter. The book is published by Cross Publishing in Chale.

Notes and Queries

A column devoted to the asking and answering of member's questions about local historical facts and issues.

Q: What happened to the Wheelers Bay gasworks? Us kids used to play in and around them between 1944 and 1946. – David White

A: The defunct gasworks were described in 1960 by the local newspaper as 'derelict, untidy and most unsightly'. At least as early as 1957 there were suggestions that 51 holiday chalets could be built on the site.

By 1960 there were ambitious plans to develop the site with chalets, a restaurant and a boating pool, in the style of an old fort, with antique cannon and WWII artillery pieces on display. The developers soon ran in to financial difficulties, however, and put the land up for sale again.



Gas House Hill at Wheelers Bay. Photo by Steve Taylor.

By 1965 much of the original building had been demolished and some chalets had been erected. The grounds are now the site of the Ventnor Holiday Villas, comprising 25 villas and an apartment block. The reception for the apartments on Wheelers Bay Road is named Old Fort Place – a reminder of those earliest development plans. – Jeffrey Mazo

New Queries

Q: I am trying to trace the history of the Blenheim Pub in Ventnor. How did it come by its name? How did Marlborough Road get its name? – Mike Pink, Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand

Send your queries and replies to jeffreymazo@hotmail.com or by post to the Society address (see foot of page).

Recent articles from the Society published in the *South Wight Chronicle*

In January 2015, the Editor of the *South Wight Chronicle* asked the Society to take on writing the weekly 'Local History' page. If you have a subject that you think would make an interesting story, please do let us know. The articles published in the last three months include:

'A Hundred and Twenty Years of Entertainment', Evelyn Knowles, *SWC*, no. 1255, 14/1/16, p. 8.

'The Emperor of Ethiopia has had a Very Nice Time Indeed', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1256, 21/1/16, p. 8.

'Ventnor & Bonchurch Literary & Scientific Institution (1) Disgraceful Acts and Misbehaviour', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1257, 28/1/16, p. 8.

'Ventnor and Bonchurch Literary and Scientific Institution (2): Fossils and Sunday Schools, Geology and Religion', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1258, 4/2/16, p. 8.

'Ventnor on the Dance Floor 1: Julia's Night Club', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1259, 11/2/16, p. 8.

'Ventnor on the Dance Floor 2: The Winter Gardens', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1260, 18/2/16, p. 8.

'Time Closes on Florence Villa', Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1261, 25/2/16, p. 8.

'The Ventnor Town Band', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1262, 3/3/16, p. 8.

'The Bijou Cinema', Evelyn Knowles, *SWC*, no. 1263, 10/3/16, p. 8.

'Local Names for Ventnor Places: Part 1', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1264, 17/3/16, p. 8.

'Local Names for Ventnor Places, Part 2', Richard Downing, *SWC*, no. 1265, 24/3/16, p. 8.

'Behind the Scenes: Combe Wood in the 1890s', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1266, 31/3/16, p. 8.

'Vanishing Ventnor: Balmoral to Monte Carlo', Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1267, 7/4/16, p. 8.