

New in the Heritage Centre

Thanks to the £31,800 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (see January newsletter) the Heritage Museum is taking on a new look – above and beyond the improvements that were made last year.

Most obvious are the two new tall glass display cabinets and wooden stands for the older glass cases. There is also new LED track lighting in the museum and tube lighting in the office/archive. Self-draining dehumidifiers have been installed, and are already proving their worth in protecting the collections. There is a new 40-inch monitor for the DVD display, and the old monitor will be used for a slide show.

Other upgrades will be less visible, but no less valuable. New IT equipment is on order, including a flatbed scanner and an overhead scanner for digitising our collections, new PCs and a laptop which will be networked through improved wifi, and new photo- and video-editing software.

–Jeffrey Mazo

New Website

A major part of the Heritage Lottery Fund award is the funding for our new website, which will make it possible for more people to enjoy exploring the history of our area – many of those who grew up here now live many miles away, often overseas. The website will include photographs from our collection as well as information on local history, and we will be constantly adding new material. In time we are hoping to make our collections database available, as well as slide shows based on our Museum exhibitions. The website has now been constructed, and we are about to start testing it – we hope to ‘go live’ in May, but will let members know when the great day arrives.

– Lesley Telford

New Members

The Society would like to welcome the following new members:

Veronica Giblin, Longdown, Ventnor

Indigo Hart, Lowtherville, Ventnor

Melvin Hurst, Bonchurch, Ventnor

Mark Phillimore, Shedfield, Southampton

– Womble Wendy, Membership Secretary



Sponsor the Museum's New Victorian Artisan's Kitchen Display

For £30, you can become a sponsor of our new tableau that will be broadly representative of the kitchen of an artisan household in Longdown around 1900. Longdown is the old name for the area centred on North, West, South and East Streets. Artisans were tradesmen such as bricklayers, joiners, plasterers, plumbers, watchmakers, silversmiths, and so on. They were often referred to as ‘the aristocracy of the working class’.

The Heritage Lottery Fund grant has underwritten the costs of constructing a large, timber-built mobile pallet upon which we are forming the tableau. We are now seeking sponsors to ‘furnish’ the tableau. Sponsors’ names will be recorded on the display.

As a centrepiece, a member has loaned a small cast-iron kitchen range. We are now looking to add a floor covering, a fireplace surround with overmantel, and a table at which will stand a young girl making bread. The latter will mean buying another manikin like the two presently in the window display.

We are also appealing for the gift or loan of iron pots and pans, a flat-iron, candle-holder and other appropriate implements. The final touch will be a collection of bottles, jars, packets or cartons. It is surprising how many of the brands we know today were around in 1900.

The two displays we developed last year for the front windows have attracted the attention of passers-by in a way we had not experienced before. We hope the new kitchen display will build on this success. We also hope to use the kitchen project interactively, in particular for use by children and school groups.

– Michael Freeman





Mark Norman, nineteenth-century Ventnor diarist.

Museum Volunteers: Carol Dashwood

Another in our series about 'backroom volunteers' who you don't get to see in the Museum.

Carol has been part of the Museum Review Committee, which makes decisions on whether to keep items donated to the Museum archives. Her role is to record the items and the decisions.

She has also been doing two 'one-off' tasks at home. One, already completed, was to type an electronic copy of our *General Information File* which is a quick reference A-Z source of basic facts about Ventnor and its people. It is very useful when answering enquiries and will be made available on our new website.

Currently Carol is typing the manuscript diaries of Mark Norman, who was a prominent and interesting figure in nineteenth-century Ventnor. There are nine volumes of diaries but Norman included the recollections of local people going back to the eighteenth century.

– Richard Downing

2017 Annual General Meeting

The Society's 2017 Annual General Meeting took place in the Masonic Hall on Grove Road on Friday 31 March. It was followed by a showing of an early cut of the film 'Ventnor Unseen', first presented at the Ventnor Fringe last year.

At the AGM the Chair, Leigh Geddes, reported on the Society's activities over the past year, including the refurbishment of the Heritage Centre, the Heritage Lottery Fund Grant, and the weekly articles in the *South Wight Chronicle*. She announced that this year the Society intends to publish a collection of these articles as a book, and that there are other books in the pipeline.

The Society is applying to be an Arts Council accredited Museum, which will give us access to the larger museum community and to more expertise and funding. We are also reviewing all our policies and documentation to improve the organisation.

Leigh thanked the members and volunteers for their support. In particular, she thanked honorary accountant Martin Flux, Michael Freeman for leading the transformation of the museum, Evelyn Knowles for coordinating the stewards, and Vi and Michael Vokes for their years of service. The Vokes were offered lifetime memberships as a 'thank you'.

The Treasurer, Yvonne Hardy, reported a deficit of £718.90 for the year ending 31 December 2016. Income had increased due to the rise in the admissions price for the museum (with footfall relatively constant), the new postcards and A4 and A3 prints, sponsorship and donations. But costs had also gone up for printing, publications, exhibitions and publicity. The new railings outside with museum, with the musical notes, cost about £1,600, with £700

covered by dedicated donations – so the remaining £900 was approximately equal to the deficit.

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

– Jeffrey Mazo

Society Talk: Extracts from a Naturalist's Diary, 2015–2016

On 27 January, Andy Butler spoke on his observations of Island wildlife in the past two years, in the context of overall trends. He has been keeping diaries since the 1950s (although the 1990s have gone missing). He and his friends regularly cover sites throughout the Island.

Andy's wide-ranging and illustrated talk mostly covered birds, butterflies and dragonflies, with the occasional adder. Although he focused almost entirely on Isle of Wight sites, he discussed a colony in the New Forest of the rare Pearl-bordered Fritillary, which died off on the Island about five years ago.

A similar butterfly, the Glanville Fritillary, is even rarer in the UK, confined almost exclusively to the Isle of Wight. Andy discussed a colony at Shippards Chine, where Glanville Fritillary caterpillar webs have been monitored for the last 34 years. Andy has coordinated this effort for 20–21 years. They are also found along the cliffs between Ventnor (Whealers Bay) and Bonchurch (Horseshoe Bay) – they emerge here earlier and last longer than elsewhere on the Island. This colony was established in 1991 when Andy and his wife introduced caterpillars from another Island site. Andy's first sighting of a Glanville Fritillary in 2016 came on 4 May.

– Jeffrey Mazo

**Copy Date for Next Issue:
Friday 17 July 2017**

Co-op's Local Community Fund Awards V&DLHS £2,113.82

In the six months to 8 April 2017 the V&DLHS was one of three local causes Co-op members could designate as the recipient of 1% of their spend on Co-op branded goods and services. The total amount raised for the Society was £2,113.82. The funds will go towards upgrading the volunteers' office to make the working environment more pleasant as we educate the public and promote local history.

The work will take place over the coming winter, to avoid disruption to the office/archive over the summer season.

– Jeffrey Mazo



(L–R) Jez Harmer (Store Manager), Anne Mundell and Margaret Davidson (V&DLHS Publicity Officers), Nick Greenhalgh and Sheila Thompson (Co-op staff)

Ventnor and District Local History Society: The Early Years

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Ventnor Heritage Centre on Spring Hill. It was the crowning achievement of a group of dedicated volunteers who founded our Society.

In January 1980 there was a public meeting in Ventnor 'to discuss the formation of a Local History Society'. The speakers were the Rev. Walter Fancutt and Mr Ernest Biggin. In a file of papers relating to the early years of this Society, held in our archive, there is a letter from Mr Biggin to Rev. Fancutt dated 30 October 1979 suggesting the formation of such a society. There is also a sheet advertising a course of ten lecture-discussions (part of the Workers' Education Association programme) beginning in October 1979 by Rev. Fancutt and Mr Walter J. Roberts MA on 'The South Wight: An Introduction to its Historical and Literary Associations'. The timing suggests that the idea of a Local History Society may have been first discussed at the WEA meetings.

By 1982 the Society was up and running. The 1983 Annual General Meeting agreed a constitution drafted by Mr Biggin, the Hon. Secretary. The Chairman at that time was Doris Ross and the Rev. Fancutt was President. The Annual Report presented at that meeting mentions monthly meetings, town walkabouts by Rene Howe, outings and the first plaque unveiling. A collection of artefacts and documents was kept in a room at Salisbury Gardens. Some exhibitions were mounted in various locations and the first publication was produced.



The constitution included the objective of establishing a Heritage Centre in a suitable building. A Heritage Centre Sub-Committee was established pending the approval of the constitution by the Charity Commissioners. The Annual Report for 1983 notes that several abortive attempts were made to find premises for a Heritage Centre at around £25,000. It was pointed out that the Society would need to raise some money itself if it expected other organisations to contribute.

The 1984 Annual Report notes the large number of enquiries that had been answered and the publication of well-received town trails. A public appeal for Heritage Centre funds was launched at the AGM and by the end of the year £1,570 had been raised. The Society's Patron, Mrs Betty Williamson, donated £2,000.

The 1985 Annual Report notes that an offer to purchase the old car showrooms in Spring Hill had been made. By the end of 1985 the Fund had £2,795. The car showrooms were purchased in August 1986, by which time the Fund had reached £9,500. Grant aid of £3,500 was made by New Horizons, an organisation that encouraged projects which would use the skills of retired people. The Town Council contributed £1,400. A well-wisher gave an interest-free loan of £7,000 and many donations followed.

A Building Sub-Committee was established to plan conversion and restoration and a Display Sub-Committee was appointed to plan the first exhibition, the plan being to open the Centre in May 1987. The centre opened in 1987 and the Society Newsletter for November 1988 reported that visitors to the Centre were 50% higher than the year before.

With all the improvements to the Heritage Centre we have seen in the last few years, it is good to remember the debt we owe to those who established it three decades ago.

– Richard Downing

(left) Ernest Biggin; (right) Rev. Walter Fancutt

Upcoming Society Meetings and Speakers

26 May	Keith Bowers – ‘Imperial Exile: Haile Sellassie’
30 June	Janet Griffin – ‘The Ventnor Connection’
28 July	Richard Downing – ‘Ventnor Saved my Life’
August	No meeting
29 September	Roger Silsbury – ‘50 years of Railway Preservation on the Isle of Wight’
27 October	Mei Trow – Title to be confirmed
24 November	Jonathan Collins – ‘Researching Sailors and Royal Marines of the First World War’
December	No meeting

All meetings to be held at 7:30pm in the Masonic Hall, Grove Road, Ventnor

Society Talk: Researching British Army Soldiers of the First World War – An Introduction

On Friday 24 February Jonathan Collins gave a brief description of his work as a Military and Naval Historian and how the digitisation of records from the First World War means that laymen, especially those doing family history research, can now do much research themselves.

Jonathan explained how to get information from photographs by looking at cap badges, insignia, belts and so on. Other sources of information include medals, personal papers and newspaper cuttings. Jonathan discussed the different medals awarded and how to find out more by putting in specific information where possible.

Useful online sites include the National Archives, Ancestry.co.uk, FindMyPast and the *London Gazette*. These sites provide Medal Index Cards, Medal Rolls, Service Records, Commonwealth War Graves and War Diaries.

– Margaret Davidson

We want your old film and video!

People often think that their family videos of everyday events wouldn't interest anyone else, but these are important records of life as it was lived 20 or 30 years ago – including buildings now long gone. Please get in touch if you have any home video or film tucked away in lofts or cupboards – it doesn't matter how old it is. We would also be interested to hear from anyone who was involved in any of the films shot around Ventnor in the past (helping with costumes and so on). ‘The Trespasser’ (1991), starring Alan Bates, for example, was filmed in the old Botanic Garden.

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

If you have a subject that you think would make an interesting story, please do let us know. The articles published since the last newsletter include:

‘When Steamers returned to Ventnor in 1953’, Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1307, 26/1/17, p. 8.

‘May 1955: The Pier Re-opens’, Michael Freeman, *SWC* no. 1308, 2/2/17, p. 8.

‘The Undercliff Isolation Hospital’, Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1309, 9/2/17, p. 8.

‘Steephill Castle: Schooldays’, Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1310, 16/2/17, p. 8.

‘The First Devonshire Terrace’, Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1311, 23/2/17, p. 8.

‘The Mill Pond’, Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1312, 2/3/17, p. 8.

‘A Family Day in Godshill during the 1914–1918 War (1)’, Joy Draper and Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1313, 9/3/17, p. 8.

‘A Family Day in Godshill during the 1914–1918 War (2)’, Joy Draper and Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1314, 16/3/17, p. 8.

‘Pip Squeak Ventnor No. 10’, Michael Freeman, *SWC*, no. 1315, 23/3/17, p. 8.

‘Vanished Ventnor: The Globe Inn’, Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1316, 30/3/17, p. 8.

‘Vanished Ventnor: The Prince of Wales’, Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1317, 6/4/17, p. 8.

‘Life in Service at Godshill Old Vicarage – Part One’, Joy Draper and Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1318, 13/4/17, p. 8.

‘Life in Service at Godshill Old Vicarage – Part Two’, Joy Draper and Lesley Telford, *SWC*, no. 1319, 20/4/17, p. 12.