

# VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Newsletter 48

January 2026

## INTRODUCTION

Time slips by and here we are into 2026 – all at the Heritage Centre wish you and yours the very best for the New Year.

The window displays do not undergo major changes very regularly, but the Christmas tree does have an appeal and contributes to the community festive spirit. Thanks to those volunteers who took the time to decorate it. This, for example, like so many things associated with

the upkeep of the museum and the 'behind-the-scenes' work, could not be conducted unless we have consistent backing from you, our members. For this we thank you. It is genuinely appreciated. There is an opportunity to meet up and mix with other supporters at the January member's meeting (see below).

### *In your January 2026 newsletter:*

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## URGENT APPEAL

As this will be last newsletter before the 2026 Annual General Meeting on 27 March, we'd like to repeat our call for new volunteers and especially for anyone interested in becoming a Trustee. The Society relies absolutely on our volunteers, with a lot of admin to be done behind the scenes simply to keep the Society functioning, as well as keeping particular aspects of our work (the archive, the museum, the monthly meetings/talks) available to members and the general public.

Before the pandemic, we had twelve Trustees and enough volunteer Stewards to keep the museum open six days a week in summer. We are now down to six Trustees and we struggled this year to keep the museum open three days a week. This is simply not sustainable, especially since many of us are older and face various health issues and other calls on our time.

If you are interested in helping out and want to find out more, please contact Lesley Telford on [lesley.telford@ventnorheritage.org.uk](mailto:lesley.telford@ventnorheritage.org.uk) or Jeff Mazo on [jeffrey.mazo@ventnorheritage.org.uk](mailto:jeffrey.mazo@ventnorheritage.org.uk).

In particular we urgently need a new Treasurer: Paul Kingswell has paid his dues, serving as Treasurer for 5–6 years, having originally only committed to 2 years, and is now working as our Curator). We also need someone to organise the monthly

meetings/speaker rota, someone to organise the Stewards' rota, and someone to coordinate publicity for the Society. All of this is now being done by various Trustees on top of their other roles.

And of course more Stewards and archive/research volunteers are always welcome – that is the more fun stuff – but the need for people to cover the essential admin/running of the Society is really urgent.

For anyone interested in becoming a Trustee, the minimum commitment is attending the Trustee meetings every six weeks or so, but Trustees usually also take on other regular or ad hoc roles, so a reasonable estimate for the commitment would be up to four hours a week on average. Some roles do take more time, or have busier and quieter periods during the course of the year.

But above all, it is vital that we identify a new Treasurer before the AGM in March, when Trustees and Officers are elected for the year. As a Registered Charity, we cannot operate the Society without a Treasurer.

As always we are of course, very grateful for all the work of the existing volunteers, as well as the continued support of all of you all as members of the Society.

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL**

Thanks to all of you who have already renewed your membership for 2026. If you haven't yet renewed, you can do so in person in the Heritage Centre (winter hours: Saturdays 10–1) by cash, card or cheque or online by card or PayPal at <https://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk/vhc-membership>. The rate remains fixed at £15 and membership runs from January to December.

## **JANUARY QUIZ NIGHT**

For our January monthly meeting on the 30th, we are trying something new (for us): a Ventnor History Quiz Night. It will feature around 50 questions organised into two general Ventnor knowledge rounds, a Pub Quiz round about local drinking establishments, a picture round, and a trivia round. The questions will range from easy(ish) to fiendishly obscure. We hope it will be both fun and informative. You will be able to compete individually or in teams up to four people. The winning person or team will get awesome bragging rights, a £20 credit in the Heritage Centre shop and maybe additional prizes. The bar in the Masonic Hall will be opened, as we did for one of the meetings last year.



As usual, the meeting (and quiz) is free to members and £4 for non-members. Invite any non-member friends who might find it fun – it should be a good way to get people to join. The meeting is at the Masonic Hall on Grove Road at 7:30 pm on 30 January.

In addition to the quiz we will be offering a selection of surplus duplicate or non-Ventnor related items on a 1st come, 1st served basis in return for cash/card donations. Be sure to get there early to have a rummage and pick up a heritage bargain!

## THE TRUTH ABOUT VENTNOR RESIDENT PHYLLIS TWIGG

In the last newsletter, we mentioned a research query about Phyllis Twigg, aka Moira Meighn, a Ventnor woman who, among other things, wrote the first radio play broadcast on the BBC, on Christmas Eve 1922.

What we couldn't tell you then - it was still confidential and unconfirmed - was that 'Drama on 4' was going to feature a new radio play about Phyllis. Starring Tamsin Greig and Rory Kinnear, it went out at 2:15pm on Christmas Eve.

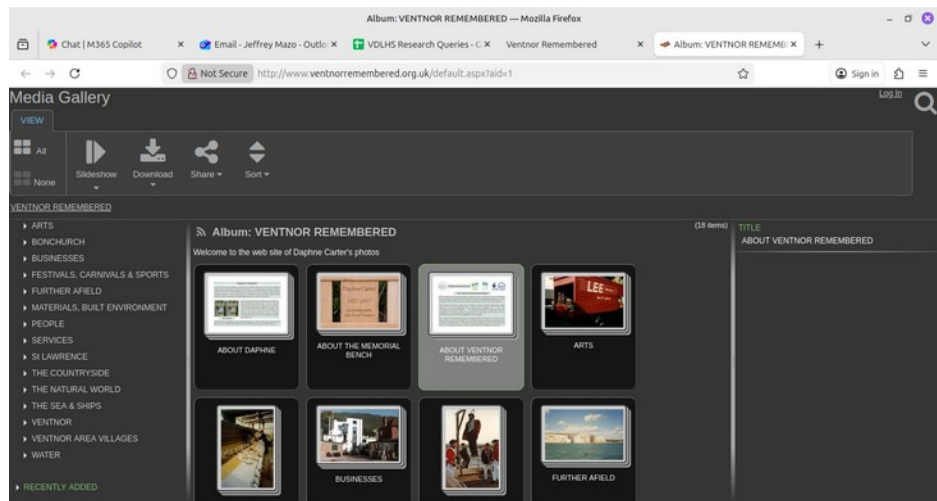
Phyllis was a formidable and creative woman who, amongst other accomplishments, wrote and broadcast many children's stories. She lived in Ventnor with her GP husband, Dr Garnet Wolsey Twigg, from 1913 to the early 1930s. In 1922 her radio drama "The Truth about Father Christmas" - the first ever radio drama - included Arthur Burrows, the BBC's first newscaster and first Director of Programmes, as Father Christmas himself. As Burrows says when Mrs Twigg says her husband's work makes it hard for her to write the play in time, "we must hope the people of Ventnor stay healthy".



## VENTNOR REMEMBERED

The Friends of Ventnor Library's project, "Ventnor Remembered", entails archiving the remarkable photographic record left to the Island by Ventnor resident Daphne Carter who died in 2017. The collection comprises almost fifty albums, containing thousands of her photographs of the people, buildings and landscape in and around Ventnor taken between the 1980s and early 2000s. The photographic collection is now accessible to the public on its own website, [www.ventnorremembered.org.uk](http://www.ventnorremembered.org.uk), and provides an invaluable record of the social history, local architecture and natural landscape of the Ventnor area. It is of interest to residents in the area, new and old, and forms an important educational and research resource for scholars and students.

The "Ventnor Remembered" project is supported by the Ventnor and District Local History Society, and was awarded a grant by Down to the Coast, a landscape partnership scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



## BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP

In a recent review, the Trustees decided that a closer relationship between the Society and the local business community could be mutually beneficial. Consequently, the society has initiated a Sponsorship Scheme for local businesses. In return for an annual donation of £50 minimum, a sponsoring business will:

- receive a framed certificate for display in their premises confirming their sponsorship, which summarises the Society's work and encourages a visit to the Heritage Centre
- be listed on a display board in the Heritage Centre with a brief account of their products and service
- be featured on the Society's website.

As of the beginning of the year, the following business have joined the scheme. We are grateful for their participation and support.

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Burfields Antiques, Art & Design,<br>38 High Street | Quality antiques bought & sold.<br>Contemporary fine art gallery. Studio<br>pottery & art cards.                                       | jackieatburfields@gmail.com                     |
| Carnaby Diner & Bowie's Bar, 66<br>High Street      | A retro diner offering home cooked food<br>and a bar.  | Tel: 01983 629551                               |
| Chiverton's Fishing Tackle, 70<br>High Street       | Fishing Tackle   | Tel: 07553 347644                               |
| Crave Ice Cream, 5 Spring Hill                      | Unique Ice Cream   | yummy@icecream.co.uk                            |
| Five a Day, 34 High Street                          | Locally sourced produce. Free local<br>home delivery.  | Tel: 07891 716820                               |
| Luchelle Boutique, 28 High Street                   | A family run boutique bursting with<br>clothes, jewellery, accessories,<br>homeware and more! We are proud to<br>be a part of Ventnor. | Tel: 01983 717902<br>www.luchelleboutique.co.uk |
| Premier Store, 37 High Street                       | Newspaper shop. Home deliveries.   | Tel: 01983 716820                               |
| Ventnor Butchers, 23 High Street                    | Traditional butchers. Excellent service.<br>Quality meat.  | Tel: 01983 854330                               |

## The Rugen, Park Avenue: Recollections

In response to Michael Freeman's 2024 *SWC* article on the Rugen (Park Avenue), the fact that Jill Wearing and Fay Brown both attended school there, VDLHS member Joyce Watkinson has sent us her own recollections:

I was very interested to read your article on The Rugen. I too went to school there. My classroom was 1st floor, far right with the balcony. Friday afternoons music lesson and we all congregated on the ground floor, right hand side, directly under our classroom above, French doors wide open. The whole of Park Avenue full of tanks and lorries hidden under the trees. I believe the soldiers were 51st Highland Division billeted in the Royal Hotel. However one Friday afternoon a couple of soldiers appeared at the French doors and politely asked the teacher (a Miss Clark ??) if we would sing some Scottish songs. Of course we did, and repeated the request for the next 2-3 weeks, with the audience steadily growing. We left school one Friday afternoon, all the troops with their parked lorries, yet the following Monday the road was completely empty. D-Day. I have often wondered how many, if any, of those charming, polite men survived.

Bearing in mind around 60 girls, age group around 10 years old walked Park Avenue 4 times a day to and from school, there was NEVER any problem or implied threat from the hundreds of troops gathered around. It would be a different story today, sadly.

Thanks, Joyce. Your own memories of D-Day in particular chime with other Ventnor residents' as quoted in our publication *Oh Day of Days!*.

## ISLE OF WIGHT MERCURY

These articles come from the issue of the *Mercury* dated Friday 25 August 1961. The paper's news about Ventnor centred on the Carnival of that year. The event had been challenging because of the many changes in the main officers of the Association.

However, the paper noted that the event "was completely in accord with Ventnor's past high tradition of Carnivals". The first Ventnor Carnival had taken place in 1889, only a year after the very first one in Ryde.

Miss Marion Macleod was the Carnival Queen, ably assisted by two of her sisters, Margaret and Mavis. Four of the six girls in the roles were sisters that year - with *The Mercury* stating that this must have been unprecedented in the history of Carnivals anywhere!

In the Winter Garden around 150 children wore fancy dress. The winner was the



daughter of Mr and Mrs Reed of the "Hole in the Wall" public house in Market Street. Marian, aged nine, wore a costume entitled "Mademoiselle de Paris", which was described by the judges as "perfect in every detail". The Queens toured the town in cars lent by Fr. Swanton and Mrs Barnett.

Elsewhere, there was a "waiter's race" won by Mr Melville Cotterell (Metropole) with Mr Massimo Doveri (The Beach) coming second. There was no waitress race for lack of entries! Special awards went to St Catherine's School for a model of a Union Pacific engine, nicknamed "Wheezy Anna". Valerie Peters, in a wheelchair, was noted for her mermaid outfit. A mention is also made of the costume worn by Colin Burgess. It was "a skit on the portrait recently stolen from the National Gallery", so he was dressed as a girl. The slogan read, "Not exactly priceless - but I hope I'm snatched!" The Royal Hotel "kindly" entertained the Queen and her attendants to lunch. In the afternoon the procession made its way through "dense crowds" to the Park. The float with the Queen on, was described as "tastefully finished in deep red and purple" and "the most attractive ensemble Ventnor has had for several years".



It was led by the WRAC band, who also gave a display at the park. The day finished with dancing for around 400 people at the Winter Gardens, which went on until 2 am!

How times change, even within living memory.

Of further interest is the report that the Employment Exchange in Salisbury Gardens reported that only 34 people were out of

work. These comprised of 20 men, 4 women, 6 boys and 4 girls. It also reported that during "peak periods" around 150 coaches run around the island. Twelve independent coach operators are described, and they look after "thousands of visitors" each year.

One visitor to the town was footballer Terry Venables, who played for Chelsea. He spent a week's holiday, staying at Barbary House, in Southgrove Road. He had entertained the children at St Catherine's Home with his miming act. This year he had been offered a £100 a week to appear weekly at the Pigalle in London. He is reported as saying that he "liked entertaining", and that although this was three times the amount he earned as a footballer, the latter had to come first. The *Mercury* finishes the article by stating, "We must wait and see". WE DID and WE DID SEE!

Finally, there were other minor articles, but all remind us of past priorities, memories and ways-of-life. The paper mentions that "Ban the Bomb" posters "mysteriously" appeared around the town earlier in the week. The Rex, the Royal Hotel and Holy Trinity all had the posters, as did one of the fair wagons in the park!

Birds were also in the news. The first three racing pigeons back to Ventnor from Penzance belonged to Mr G. Wood, and were reported at velocities of 1208, 1203 and 1198 yards per minute. "To-morrow's Ventnor Pigeon Club race will be from Guernsey, it is reported". Meanwhile, the 1st Wroxall Scout Group had arrived at their annual camp in the New Forest. The news that they had arrived safely was conveyed to the island by a homing pigeon released at 12.15 pm and landing in its loft in Downlands Crescent, Upper Ventnor at 1.30 pm. Appropriately, the Kestrel patrol won the Haver's Progress Trophy for the third consecutive year!

The accompanying picture (right) shows a *Mercury* advertisement. Of interest is the simplicity of the telephone number, the fact that the office was in Pier Street, and that they were willing to forward the paper throughout the world. All of this was only 16 years after the end of the Second World War, and at the start of a decade that would see foreign package tours increase , a downturn in the Ventnor economy and



the closure of the railway.

Finally, in August 1961 Ventnorians had the choice of these films (left). The Rex opened throughout the year including Christmas time. A missed venue.