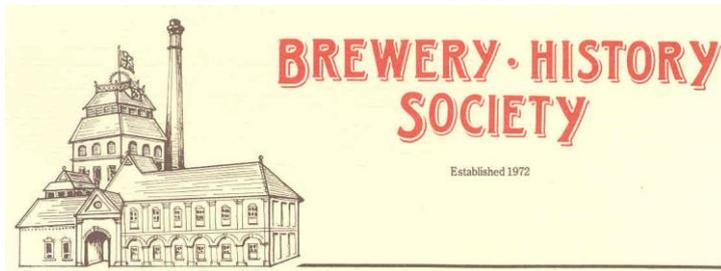


# Ventnor Historic (Beer) Walk



IW Branch CAMRA



*An historic stroll through the social history of Ventnor in its rise as a significant and important health spa town during the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, marked by its social development in its pubs and breweries, and the growth of the fashionable accompaniments that came with it.*

# Contents

## Introduction

Welcome to the first Ventnor Pub and Brewery walk. We do hope that you enjoy the day and we would welcome feedback so that we can improve it for the future. This walk has been prepared by members of The Brewery History Society, Ventnor Heritage Centre and the Isle of Wight branch of CAMRA, all of whom would be happy to receive any questions that you may have.

## The Establishment of Ventnor

A small fishing hamlet in the 19th century, Ventnor grew as a town of repute as a resort for respite and cure from diseases of the lungs, especially tuberculosis, due to its peculiar microclimate once publicised in a treatise by Sir James Clark Bt, MD, in 1830. He later became the doctor for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. This statement stimulated the interest of the Victorians, who descended on the town in their throngs and it may have been this demand that extended the Isle of Wight Railway to the town in 1866, which at one time ran a non-stop service straight through between Ryde and Ventnor, establishing Ventnor as both a health resort and fashionable tourist resort, with shops and facilities that rivalled the most fashionable locations in the Country; Ventnor was known as *Little Mayfair*.

The National Cottage Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest opened in 1869, with 130 separate south-facing bedrooms for its patients. The hospital closed in 1964, made obsolete by drug treatment of tuberculosis, and was demolished in 1969, now being the site of the Botanic Gardens.

The town reached its zenith in the in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century, when steam packets operated between Southsea and the town's pier. At one time, a non-stop train from Ryde to Ventnor, named *The Invalid Express* for the consumptive patients being taken to treatment at the, now renowned, hospital there. One train was reputed to have completed the journey in a little over twenty minutes. The relatively small sandy beach was ideal for bathing, and is still popular today. Victorian era hotels in the town's suburbs and near the sea, such as Ventnor Towers Hotel, remain popular with tourists.

## The Route Described

The following pages describe the various buildings and sites that we shall be talking about on our route.

## Recommended Reading & Further Information

For much more detail on each of the many public houses that once graced Ventnor consult *Inns and ale from Bonchurch to Chale* by Vincent Chambers, 1985 and available from Ventnor Heritage Centre.

## The Brewery History Society – ([www.breweryhistory.com](http://www.breweryhistory.com))

Formed in 1972 to research and record the history of brewing, the BHS has around 500 individual and corporate members who enjoy a range of visits and meetings throughout the year. The Society publishes Journals, Newsletters and a range of books

## Ventnor and District Local History Society – (<http://ventnorheritage.org.uk/>)

A voluntary group dedicated to recording and publicising the history of Ventnor and the surrounding district through exhibitions and publications.

## The Isle of Wight branch of CAMRA – ([www.wightwash.org.uk](http://www.wightwash.org.uk))

CAMRA – The Campaign for Real Ale, was formed over 40 years ago and has since become one of Europe's most successful pressure groups with almost 200,000 members. The Island branch holds social meetings, surveys pubs and publishes a quarterly magazine, Wightwash.

## Walk Compilers

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## Crab & Lobster Tap, Grove Rd

Originally the *Tap* to the Crab and Lobster Hotel (hotels then could not sell alcohol, so opened a tap nearby to do so) Inns and Ale (p.13) says that the old Crab & Lobster licence was transferred to the new Tap site in the 1920s

## The Masonic Hall

Opposite the Crab & Lobster Tap, noticeable by its iconic Masonic square and compass symbol on the front wall, the building was constructed as a cinema in 1924 with an orchestra pit and a rather surprising special feature – a sliding roof that was opened on fine evenings.



## The Crab and Lobster Inn (former)

Not to be confused with the Tap, the Inn was where now stand Crab Cottage and Lobster Cottage. The forecourt was the location for an annual Crab Fayre, where wrestling matches are said to have been amongst the many traditional attractions.

The Crab and Lobster Tap is contender for the oldest pub on the Island. There is a story that King Charles I visited the Inn, which is why the hotel next door was renamed as The King Charles Hotel in the 1950s.

**Ventnor Heritage Museum** - a goldmine for history and information on Ventnor.

## Spring Hill - Mary Groves Inn (former) & St Boniface Spring

The cottages on the left at the bottom of the hill dated 1832 are some of the oldest in Ventnor. At the top of the hill, inside the grounds of Hillside Hotel but visible from the pavement to the road outside, on the corner, can be seen one of the spring wells from St Boniface down which served the Ventnor breweries.

The St Boniface Well is situated higher up on steep and inaccessible slopes of the down, within the National Trust estate. St Boniface is reputed to have preached in Bonchurch in 710AD. An annual custom took place over many centuries, where young people would visit the well on the saint's day to garland it with flowers.

Hillside Hotel was built in 1810, as the New Inn, also known as the Mary Groves Inn.

On the right-hand corner opposite, looking back down Spring Hill, is Lawnswood, a fine example of the Victorian architecture that flourished in Ventnor.

## St Boniface Road, Ninestones Steps, & Karl Marx

Before the Ninestones Steps, leading down to High Street opposite Madiera Road, the buildings now called Mertoun and Caithness were once a convalescence home, illustrating the extent of that business in Victorian Ventnor.



Further along St Boniface Road, at no 1, at the junction with Leeson and Trinity Roads, there is a blue plaque that denotes that Karl Marx stayed there for the winters of 1881/2 and 1882/3, in convalescence before his death in 1883.



## Old Ventnor High Street/ Madeira Road

Well above the British Legion and the old brewery evidence remains of how far the High Street shopping extended, right up to the Madeira Road junction. Ventnor was referred to as *Little Mayfair*, in its day.

On the corner of Madeira Road, where Trinity Road meets the High Street, the striking wedge-shaped building built in around 1850 as St Johns House, now known as the Corner House, was never a pub but was occupied by a series of shops and, at one time, a solicitor's office.



## St Boniface Arms (closed)

Built on the site of a blacksmith's in 1840 as the Freemason's Tavern, it was not until under Whitbread's ownership it was given its current name, the St. Boniface Arms, with a couple of short-lived changes since; the Landsdowne Arms in 1991, before returning to St. Boniface Arms by locally celebrated businessman Graham Perks (currently of Perks bistro bar).

## Ventnor British Legion

Built as a private dwelling then later becoming a guest house, the building was donated to the Royal British Legion in 1963 by Mrs Dorothy Sargent.



## Ventnor Brewery Site (closed)



A brewery has been on this site since the 1840s, using water from the local spring on St Boniface Down. Its first incarnation as Burt's Brewery ceased in the 1980s, but the site re-opened in 1996 with a new venture, Ventnor Brewery, producing cask ales until it closed in 2009.

The present building was re-constructed following war damage, and maintained the traditional tower brewery form, where the process starts at the top and progresses, using gravity, to the bottom. There were wine cellars in the original brewery, but these were filled in when the brewery was rebuilt.

The present building was re-constructed

## Other Breweries (former)

Ventnor had at least two other breweries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- The Spring Hill Brewery, at the lower end of Spring Hill on the south side, was owned by Lane & Hickman (who was also at the Wheatsheaf, Spring Hill), advertising themselves as 'Mild Ale, Porter & Stout Brewers' in 1871.
- John Bull was at the Wellington Brewery, a brewpub, in the 1850s, but became bankrupt in 1862.

## The Walmer Castle (former)

The strange anomaly is that the Walmer Castle was named after a boat, wrecked off the coast of Ventnor some 20 or more years before the tragic event occurred, and, even before the vessel was named the Walmer Castle, itself!

Permission to build was granted in 1853, the pub was known as the Walmer Castle Inn in the period around 1871, and was acquired by Albert Phillips, for Burts in 1906. In the period up to 1936, it was also locally known as the Drum and Monkey, after the character landlord at the time, one Frank 'Moke' Sivell.



## The Volunteer Arms

Originally a dwelling house, the first record of sale as an inn dates from 1877 and was sold by Whitbread to Burts in 1920. Now a free house, owned by Ventnor's Graham Perks, after a brief closure in 2017.

It has been a several times local CAMRA Pub of the Year contender.



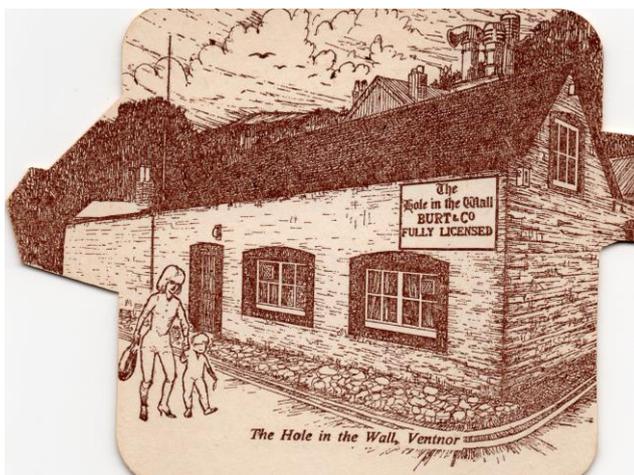
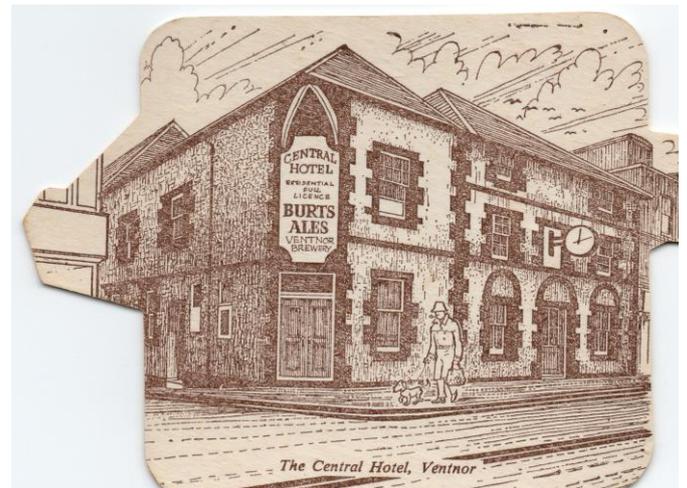
## Coconut Grove

Built as the Undercliff Assembly Rooms in 1877, it had a stage for shows and plays. Other uses included the Ventnor Town Hall, offices of the Ventnor Urban District Council and periods as a factory for clothing and wig making. In the 1970s it was the Coconut Grove night club. A fire in 1978 left

it derelict until converted to flats in 1994 with the frontage retained..

## Central Hotel & The Hole in the Wall (former)

Formerly the Freemasons Commercial Hotel and Posting Establishment and first owned by James Corbould, a newly arrived schoolmaster from Berkshire who was establishing a wine and beer merchant business in Ventnor, and who also acquired Ventnor Brewery about this time - 1844. The back door to the Central led to the Hole in the Wall, where ostlers would be served out of hours. Drunks were often wheeled away in wheelbarrows!



In 1860, Charles Farrow was granted a beer licence for the Commercial Tap (Hole in the Wall) followed by the Reed family. Then, in 1866, Frederick Corbould and John Burt. In around 1895 it was called Sims Commercial Hotel and in 1906 it was acquired by the Phillips family, then owners of Burts brewery until it closed.

In the area behind these establishments, in Pound Lane, up to 300 horses were at one time stabled.

## The Blenheim

Until recently known as Blenheim House, where the Corboulds had their wine and spirit business, along with various bars located within the building, which was used to this effect by a succession of owners, including Burts, Longs of Southsea, Brickwoods, then finally Threshers. It was when Thresher's relocated to Pier Street that Whitbread, their owners, decided to open it as a pub.



The Courbould name lives on in the mosaic at the entrance to the pub.



## Hursts

Previously Ellis' and Scotts, a business established by Mr Lancaster, carried on by William Ellis and sold to Mr Scott in 1870. The shop is notable by its ornate Victorian shop front.

## The Rose



The first record of license appears in 1859. The original Rose was No 19 Mill Street and was purchased by Mew Langton and Company in 1927, who enlarged it with the purchase of the neighbouring property. It is now renumbered as 18 & 20 Pier Street.



## Winter Gardens

Ventnor Urban District Council bought the Vicarage on this site and demolished it in 1936 to construct the present Winter Gardens building, a cause of some upset at the time, due to its 'modern' style. It has been used as a Cinema, Ice Rink, and for shows, dances, concerts, exhibitions and festivals, and has also been known as Cascadia. Wrought with financial problems from the start, the site was sold, by the IW Council, in 2010, for £1, to Hambrough Hotel Group who still own it in 2017. It is due to have its first-floor balcony and restaurant officially opened in time for the 2017 round-the Island race, on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July.



## Temperance Fountain

Just at the bottom of Shore Hill, where it meets the Esplanade, sits an often-overlooked font with an interesting, if not remarkable, history of origin as it is a fountain erected by the Temperance movement.

## The Mill Bay



In 1842, under lease of the land from Benjamin Mew, brewer, Mill Bay Cottage was built by CP Cundell, also a brewer, and was sold in 1844 to James Corbould, who lived there until his death, 42 years later, in 1886. In 1866 the house was listed as the

Pier Inn, but reverted to Mill Bay Cottage in 1871. After a succession of other owners, it was acquired by William Phillips of Burts Brewery in 1920.

Of particular note are the glass panelled beer engines, visible at the bar.

## The Gnomon & Clock

The Gnomon (sundial post) was presented to the town in 1851 by Sir Thomas Brisbane, whose name is given to that location in Australia. It casts a shadow on the line on the pavement at midday GMT. A clock was positioned nearby in 1870, so that the time would be known even in overcast conditions.



## The Spyglass

Built as Undercliff House c1840, a bath house for the Royal Hotel. In the 1970s when known as Waters Edge, it was badly smoke damaged by fire. Since then it has become a landmark inn.



## Coastal Path

The rugged path from La Falaise (car park),

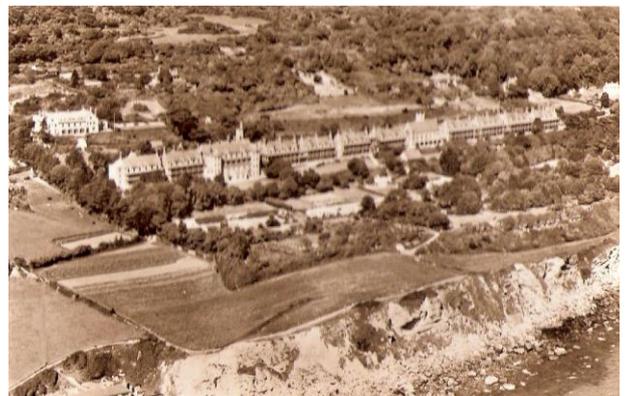
above the Spyglass, is a 30-minute walk along the cliff to the Botanic Gardens, passing Steephill Cove and the Cricket Club.



## National Cottage Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest

The hospital was founded in 1867 for treatment of tuberculosis, and other chest diseases. The Hospital closed in 1969, in decline due to advances in medicine.

The Council acquired the land and the old Hospital had to be demolished. But, the lovely grounds were landscaped and opened to the public, initially as the Steephill Pleasure Grounds and then, in 1975, reopened as Ventnor Botanic Garden. Following the effects of the 1987 Hurricane, the garden was remodelling to a themed layout, showcasing many rare and exotic plants from around the world, some unique in Britain.



**The Botanic Garden** has a hop field, the hops are used in the Garden's Botanic ales brewed by Island breweries.

