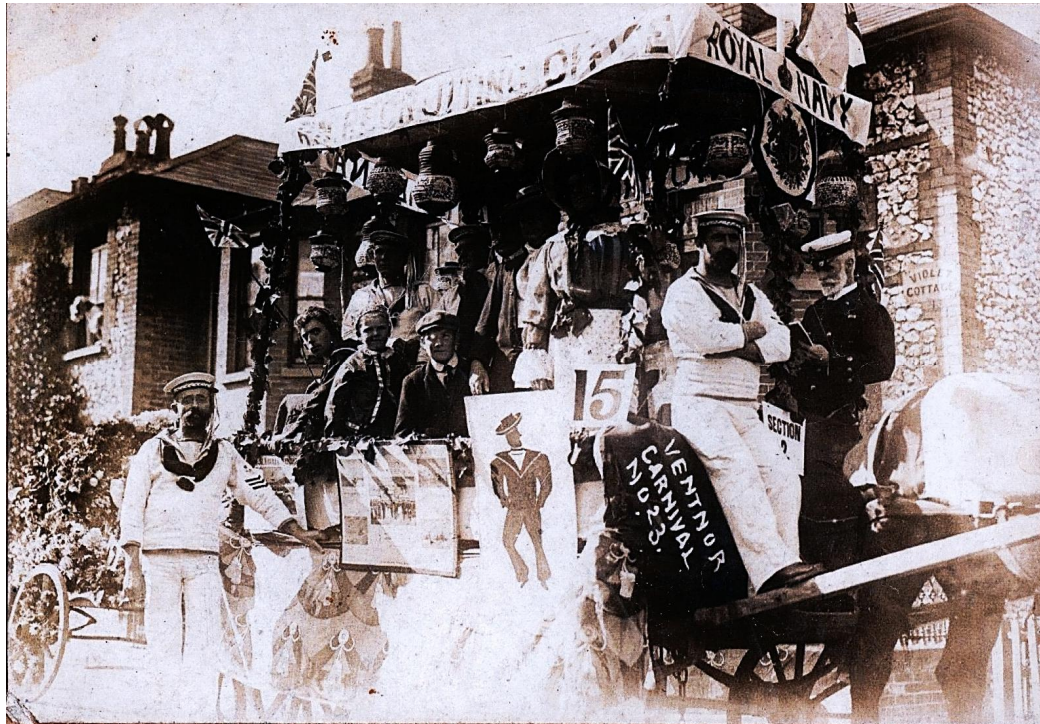




A Ventnor Carnival float of over a century ago: the Royal Navy



The year is 1911 or 1912 and Carnival float no. 23 has been paused in Clarence Road, Ventnor, for a photographer to record the display. Behind can be seen some of the stone and flint cottages that remain on this town street today. The name of the dwelling to the right of the picture is *Violet Cottage* and it is possible that one or more of the group on the float lived there. The cottage occupied a position near to the junction with East Street.

It is hard to imagine the Royal Navy figuring in a carnival procession in the 21st Century. What the float reveals is the scale of enrolment in the armed forces within the working population, the Navy especially, even more so given the proximity of the Portsmouth Naval Dockyard. Around 1914, the Royal Navy had some 200,000 men, whereas today it has a mere 30,000.

The image above was added to the Heritage Centre collection in 2014, courtesy of Ted Higgins. It shows his father, Sidney Higgins, as a young boy, third from left in the front line, his back to the radio operator (you can just about make out the operator's headphones). Second from left, standing behind Sidney, is his father Edward who was originally in the Navy, but transferred to the Coastguard in 1901, stationed at Brighstone. There he married and started a family. From 1909 to 1913, he moved on to Ventnor, and then briefly to Southsea, only to be called back into the Navy on the outbreak of war in 1914. Edward's wife and children then moved back to Brighstone, to the New Inn there, which had earlier been the family home. Tragically, Edward lost his life at the Battle of Jutland in 1916

Returning to the image again, the float itself is somewhat curiously decorated. A series of strange pots, for example, hang from the canopy, while fronting the edge of the horse-drawn dray is a poster depicting a young sailor in jaunty pose. Just above the poster stands a woman wearing a large bonnet, with the numeral 15 visible just in front of her skirt. She may have been a family member.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



Ventnor & District Local History Society is a registered charity, working to preserve and record the history of our area and make it available to the public in the Ventnor Heritage Centre.
The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

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