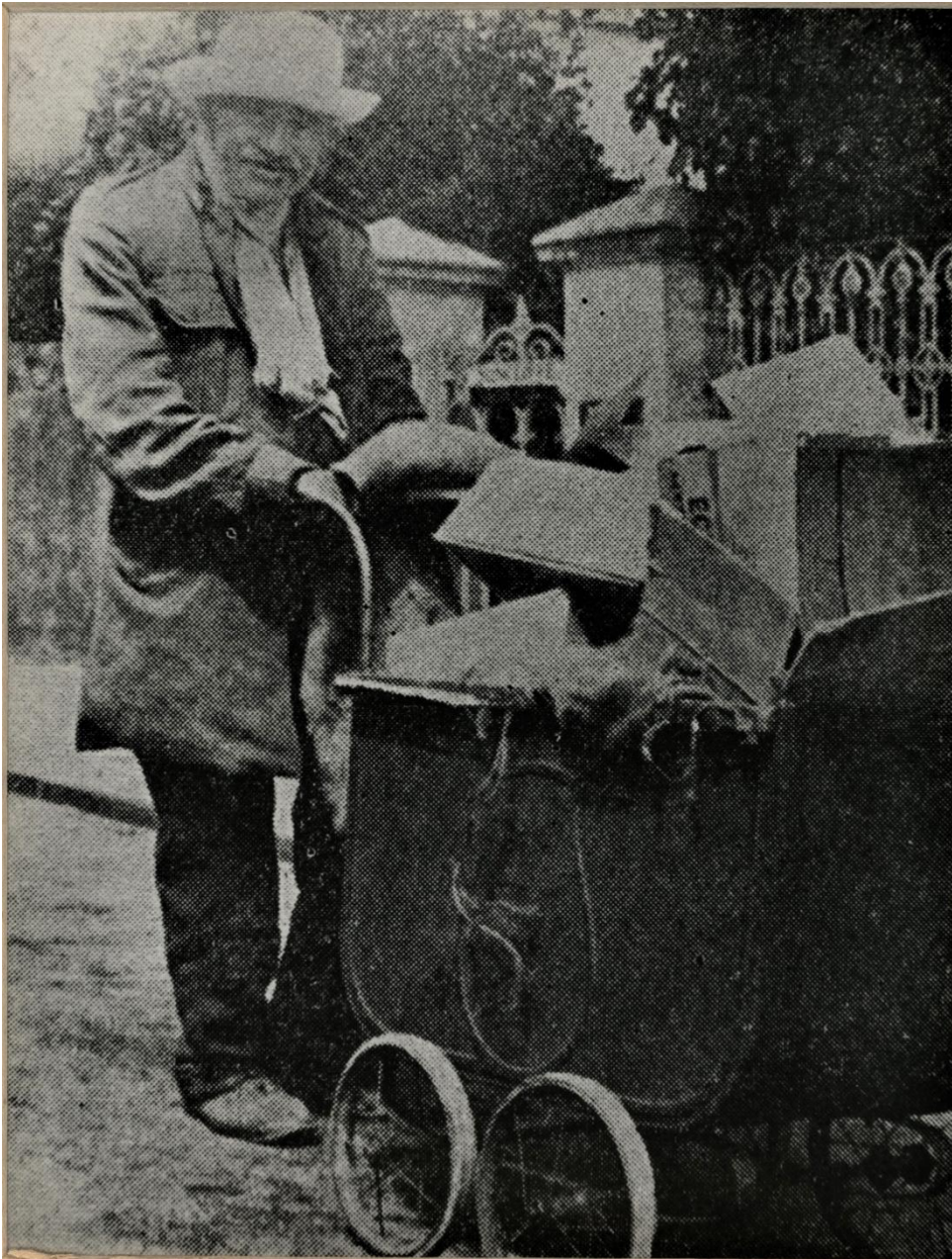




Frankie Shag, bric-a-brac seller, circa 1940s



This is a sight that a few residents now in their eighties or nineties may recall. A somewhat dishevelled-looking gentleman pushes an ancient pram, long since used for its original purpose, along a residential street. It might be somewhere in Ventnor but it might be in Shanklin or thereabouts. There is a name visible on the gate, but no end of digital adjustment has helped to read it. The sandstone walling and elaborate gate pillars, the iron work and the road slope, do suggest somewhere in Ventnor, but we cannot be sure.

The man is 'Frankie Shag', which is partly a nickname, of course, his proper name being Frankie Ballard who lived in Sandy Lane, Shanklin. The 'Shag' suffix came from his father, Stanley Ballard, who was familiarly (or otherwise) known as 'Shagger Ballard'. He lived at 7, Percy Road Sandown, registered as such in Kelly's Directories of both 1935-6 and 1951.

We know a little about Frankie's life. He worked originally for Carpenters, builders in Shanklin. However, he suffered injury after a fall from scaffolding and was never quite right in the head again, so his father

claimed. This is where the seller of bric-a-brac came into being. Looking at the contents of the pram, it mostly seems to comprise cardboard boxes, but maybe these hid a variety of useful household wares. Itinerant salesmen of this kind were common on British streets after the Depression of the inter-war years, and likewise during the austerity years after the war. They probably made little money, but for those without pensions or family in support, it helped to eke out some sort of existence, perhaps aided by kindness from the people they met on their rounds. If anyone recalls Frankie, please write in with your memories.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, with help from Jill Wearing and friends.



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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