



Theodore Ridley Saunders – Architect and Civil Engineer – Part 1

Many locally well-known people are buried in our local churchyards and in the Cemetery in Upper Ventnor. Recently I was visiting my parents' grave and I came across what I am sure is the largest plot in the whole of the cemetery! It was about the width of seven or eight normal single plots with a full-width headstone as seen in the photograph.

The grave was that of Theodore Ridley Saunders, whose name I remembered from an article entitled 'The Lowtherville Story' which was published in the Chronicle a few years ago. It mentioned Saunders as the architect of St. Margaret's Church in Lowtherville Road, which opened in 1883.



Since the grave was so impressive, I decided to investigate further and the following is what I discovered about Theodore Saunders, his life, and the many buildings and other civil engineering works around Ventnor and, indeed, many other parts of the Island, that he was responsible for.



Theodore was born in Bethnal Green, London in 1850 and came to Ventnor at the age of 22 and was articled to his brother R.J.H Saunders, later becoming partners until his brother's death in 1883. Theodore took over the business and retired in 1917 after 45 years as an architect and civil engineer with an impressive portfolio of projects over some four and a half decades.

He married Marie Clara Margarete Spindler in 1889, daughter of Theodor Julius William Spindler of Berlin, Germany and Old Park, St. Lawrence. They had three sons: Julius William, born in 1890, Cyril Richard Theodore, born in 1894 and Victor Clare Lindon born in 1901. Cyril pre-deceased his father by 18 years, dying in 1911 at the age of just 17. Theodore died at the age of 79 in 1929 and Margarete died ten years later at the age of 76.

Theodore was 13 years older than Margarete when they married, and William, Margarete's father, was uncomfortable with the marriage. The extent of this ill feeling meant William would not allow Theodore to manage his estate, as was the case before the marriage. However, William Spindler died in the same year as the marriage. He suffered a cerebral apoplexy at the age of just 52.

Margarete and Theodore's home was 'The Rugen' in Park Avenue, a house that Theodore designed. It was large, with live-in servants, the 1901 census listing the occupants as: *Theodore (50) Margarete (37) Julius (11) Cyril (6) and Victor (2 months). The servants were Mildred Jenkins (27), the cook, from East Cowes, Alice Ash (20), housemaid, from Ventnor*

and a visitor, Minna Diederiche (29) from Germany.

The massive headstone of the grave in the top picture has three distinct sections: the centre (main) one being for Theodore and Margarete and the right hand section being for Cyril. The left-hand section is empty. (it is believed that these were intended for Julius and Victor, but both are probably buried on the mainland).

As I mentioned at the beginning, Theodore was involved in numerous building and civil engineering projects all over the Island, including the Brading Harbour Railway (the branch from Brading to Bembridge, via St Helen's), the Royal Spithead Hotel and the Isle of Wight (Newport Junction) Railway. He was also engineer for the reconstruction of Sandown Pier, Ryde Tramway and Promenade Piers and Ventnor's Royal Victoria Pier completed in 1887. In part 2, we will look at more of Theodore's projects.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis (with acknowledgements to www.alexandragardens.co.uk for a lot of the content and photographs). Additional information and Grave photograph is from the Society archives.



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