



Theodore Ridley Saunders designed many houses in and around Ventnor – probably the most impressive and recognisable being the terrace known as Alexandra Gardens. The eight houses each have a story to tell – two in particular, and we'll look at these later. Beforehand, we will examine the other varied projects in and around Ventnor that he was involved in.

Many of his commissions were for Public Works, notably the water supplies for the Isle of Wight Rural District Council, involving the villages of Whitwell, Brightstone, Wroxall, Niton, Godshell and St. Lawrence.

Other public works in the Ventnor district included The Battenberg Block at the Royal National Hospital, Capital and Counties Bank (acquired by Lloyds Bank in 1918) and, as mentioned in part 1, St. Margaret's Church. He has also been identified with the development of St. Lawrence Hall, Craigie Lodge, St. John's Church, Wroxall, the Artillery Drill Hall, Steeple Castle Stables and the main roads; Ventnor to Whitwell, Whitwell to Niton and Leeson Road, Bonchurch.



Beside these numerous public works, Theodore was commissioned to design many private residences, including in Park Avenue, in St. Boniface Road, Trinity Road and the whole of Alexandra Gardens. His designs were grand villas of a distinctive style that are easily recognisable, usually built of local stone and yellow bricks, the latter not dissimilar to the London yellow brick stock, the buildings then crowned with imposing, grey slated roofs, finished in silver lead flashing.

To take advantage of the spectacular views from Alexandra Gardens and to allow light to flood into the rooms, each floor had a bay window in the principal rooms. The top bays are adorned with hexagonal, turret shaped roofs, some broad and stocky, as if stretched out to cover a larger area, others tall, as in Alexandra Gardens, giving a Gothic appearance. The turret shaped roofs were finished with a cast iron finial, many of which have been lost over time.

Unlike most of the houses in the street, which quickly became apartments or small hotels, Alexandra House (No.1), on the corner with Pier Street, started life as home to a solicitor, William T Way Buckell, who lived in the house from 1886 until his death in 1902. William Buckell was the son of the first solicitor to open offices in Ventnor in 1847. William Buckell was a partner in Buckell and Drew Solicitors, (now part of Glanvilles in Newport), with offices at No.1 High Street, Ventnor. No.1 became a dentist's in 1910, continuing until 1948 when it was converted into the Alexandra Private Hotel.

Even more famous is No.3 which was where Sir Edward Elgar, one of Britain's greatest composers, spent his honeymoon in 1889. The couple originally came to Shanklin after their marriage, but during a visit to Ventnor soon after their arrival on the Island, they decided to move to Alexandra Gardens. There is a Blue Plaque on the front wall of No.3 commemorating Elgar's stay.

Below are examples of Theodore Saunders' work – from left to right - St. Boniface Road, Park Avenue and Trinity Road, with the main photo, above, No.1 Alexandra Gardens.



Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis (with acknowledgements to www.alexandragardens.co.uk for a lot of the content and photographs). Additional information is from the Society archives. A publication entitled "The History of Alexandra Gardens" is available at the Ventnor Heritage Centre in Spring Hill, priced at £3.



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