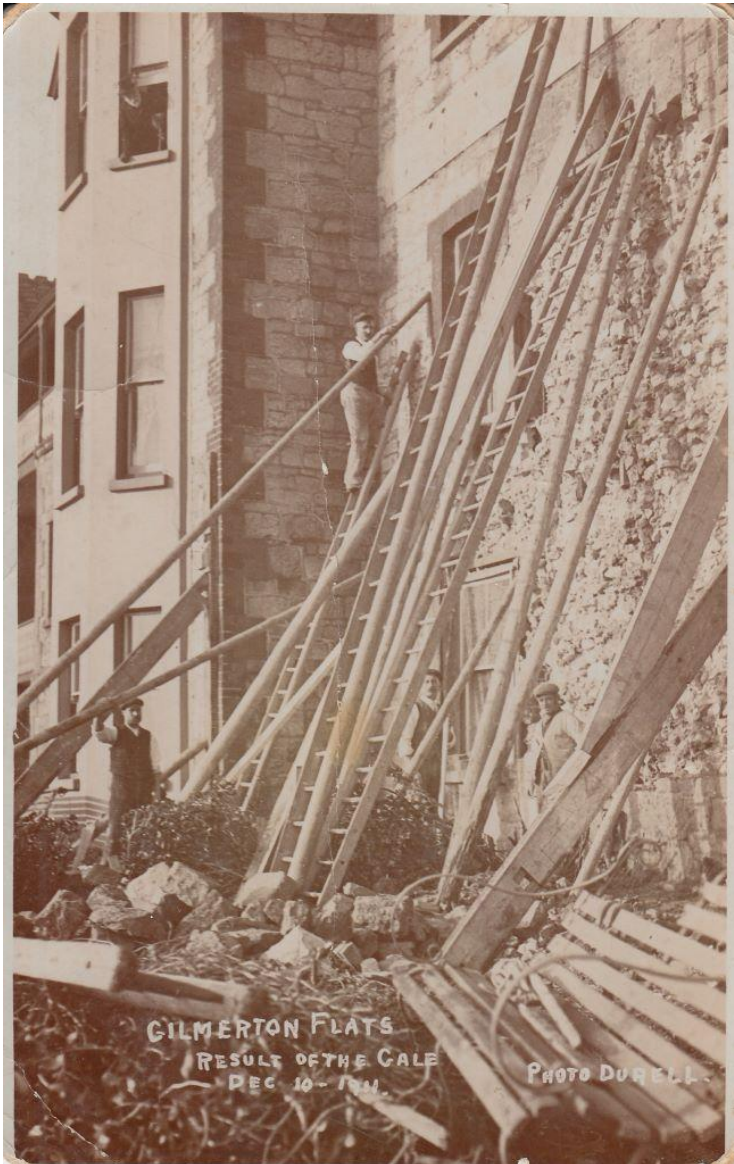




Gilmerton House, Madeira Road



It is mid-December 1911 and local photographer, J. Durell, of Pier Street, has captured the aftermath of a winter gale at Gilmerton Flats, formerly Gilmerton House. Local builders are busy propping up parts of the south elevation where the facing stone appears to have fallen away, almost certainly the result of intense driving rain penetrating behind it. The men look to be preparing to erect wooden scaffolding so that urgent repairs can be effected. And one cannot help but be struck by the length of the wooden ladders in use, one of which seems to reach the window level of the third storey.

Sunday December 10th had seen a severe gale strike Ventnor. The winds were due south and the *Isle of Wight Mercury* reckoned that it had been many years since so fierce a storm had hit the resort. The seas were mountainous, breaking over the pier and washing the sea wall from end to end. Repairs to the landing stage had been under way for some weeks and the contractor suffered severe losses. New piles stacked ready for driving were soon washed into the sea, some later striking the pier's iron columns. A few intrepid onlookers who had ventured out along the pier neck were forced into a hasty retreat when one of the side screens snapped.

Gilmerton House was erected sometime in the 1870s, one of the many lodging houses that had been springing up in Ventnor over the preceding 30 or 40 years, a reflection of the town's runaway expansion as a winter health resort. It seems to have been divided into 6 apartments from the outset, the lowest floor allocated to the lodging-house keeper who serviced the apartments, including the provision of meals and other domestic needs. In the 1881 Census, there was a retired army colonel living in one or more of the apartments, together with his wife and four children. At some point prior to this date, Richard Pearson, assisted by his wife Jane, had come to hold the

position of lodging-house keeper and they subsequently re-named it as the Edinburgh Hotel, joining it up with Salopia, the property next door. By the time of the 1891 Census, Emma Quadling was running the establishment, the wife of Edwin Quadling, a former engineer who had worked on projects all over the world and had retired to Ventnor for health reasons.

The description of Gilmerton as 'flats' is a label that first appears with reference to this building around 1900. Generally, usage of the word 'flat' can be traced to the 1820s, referring to a suite of rooms all on one floor that were self-contained. But it was not until the start of the twentieth century that the term began to come into common usage across Britain. At Gilmerton, the name stuck, perhaps helped by the fact that more and more of those living there were by now not seasonal visitors but local people, permanently resident.

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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