



Karl Marx and Ventnor Doctor James Mann Williamson (1)

Karl Marx spent the last two winters of his life in Ventnor, lodging at 1 St Boniface Gardens which was rented by Miss McLaren. His first visit was in the winter of 1881-82, shortly after his wife had died. He was accompanied by one of his daughters, Eleanor. Marx and his wife had visited Ryde in 1874 when they took a paddle steamer around the Island.

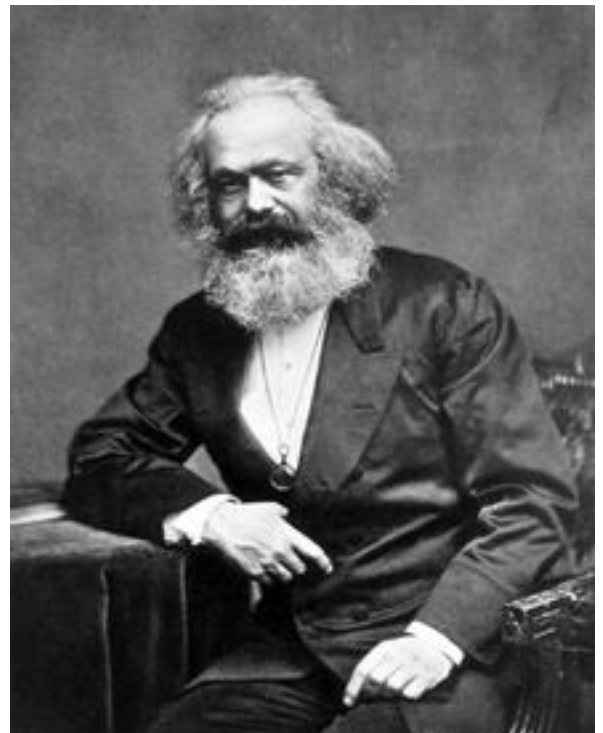
Following censorship of his radical newspaper in Cologne, Marx and his wife moved to Paris in 1843 where he co-edited a radical leftist newspaper. It was here that he met his lifelong friend and patron Friedrich Engels. Marx was expelled from France, at the request of the Prussian King, and he moved to Brussels 1845-48.

In July 1845 Marx and Engels visited England to meet with socialist Chartist leaders. In 1848 there was a mass Chartist meeting in London when 20,000 protesting Chartists were met by 90,000 police. Marx and Engels published their *Communist manifesto* in 1848 which ended with the famous lines "The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. Workers of the world, unite !"

Expelled from Belgium and France, Marx and his family moved to London in 1849 where he wrote for newspapers, helped to establish the Communist League and started work on his most famous work *Das Kapital* in the 1860s.

Marx had never enjoyed good health and his visits to Ventnor in winter reflected the town's reputation as a health resort following the publication of James Clark's book *The influence of climate in the prevention and cure of chronic diseases* in 1830. This book recommended the Undercliff climate as suitable for chest complaints and Ventnor developed rapidly to accommodate them.

Marx suffered liver and gall problems exacerbated by an unsuitable lifestyle. The attacks often came with headaches, eye inflammation, neuralgia in the head and rheumatic pains. A serious nervous disorder appeared in 1877 and protracted insomnia was a consequence, for which Marx took patent medicines, many of which contained opiates. The illness was aggravated by excessive nocturnal work and faulty diet. Marx was fond of highly seasoned dishes, smoked fish, caviar, pickled cucumbers, "none of which are good for liver patients" said his physician. He also liked wine and liqueurs and smoked an enormous amount of cheap cigars which, he claimed, enabled him to keep working at night. In 1881, Marx developed a catarrh that kept him in ill health for the last 15 months of his life. It eventually brought on bronchitis and pleurisy.



Next week we consider his last visit to Ventnor and the incident that brought contact with the Ventnor doctor J.M. Williamson.

Richard Downing, [Ventnor and District Local History Society](#). I am indebted to the booklet *Prometheus bound: Karl Marx on the Isle of Wight* by A.E. Insole and A.N. Noble, 1981. Other sources include Ventnor Heritage Centre archives and Alan Champion's valuable website.