



Aratrum Villa, High Street

The picture depicts one of Ventnor's earliest buildings, located on the north side of the High Street a little way before the junction with Madeira Road. The name means plough in Latin, a light wheel-less variety that was favoured by the Romans. The name may have been chosen because, at the time, this was where Ventnor's principal street largely petered out amidst ploughed fields, part of an area that was then known as Madeira Vale.



This particular image dates from the 1930s when the villa offered 'homely board residence' under the proprietorship of Mrs H J Adams. She offered 'a liberal table, luncheons packed and own garden produce'. Terms were from 35 shillings a day. Very sadly, Mrs

Adams became a casualty of war in January 1943 when bombs from a sneak German air raider landed in the area around Ventnor Brewery. She had just alighted from a bus when they exploded. Other local people also lost their lives in that same raid.

Aratrum Villa seems to have been erected in the early 1840s, built of the local sandstone. It offered accommodation for visitors from the very beginning, for the *Ventnor Diamond* of 27th March 1847 had a Mr and Mrs Bolland listed as visitors, guests of Mr and Mrs James Hunt. In Moor's *List of Visitors* of November 1858, published by Fletcher Moor, a Mr and Mrs Hamilton and their daughter were recorded as staying at Aratrum Villa, still apparently in the charge of Mr. Hunt. This, of course, was at a time when Ventnor had acquired a singular reputation as a place of winter resort. Mr. Hamilton and his daughter appear again as visitors there in 1900, on this occasion according to an entry in *The Ventnor Times*. They reflected a pattern common throughout the Undercliff in season: the desire to treat Ventnor as a sort of secondary home, welcomed by hosts almost as members of an extended family.



In the autumn of 1883, Aratrum Villa featured in the property columns of London's *Times* newspaper. This 'most desirable property' was to be sold by auction at the Marine Hotel in Ventnor. Particulars were available from the famous London Auction Mart in Token-house-yard in the City.

By the time of the 1891 Census, the son of a local builder had established residence at Aratrum: James C Newnham and his wife Fanny had seven children (including stepchildren). Newnham was a carpenter and joiner by trade, as was one of his sons. In 1907, alterations were made to the property under the direction of the builder, E.W. Vincent.

The Adams family took over the house in 1931. Herbert (Bertie), the husband, was well-known as Musical Director of the Ventnor Musical and Dramatic Society. After the 1939-45 war, Captain Frank Boville lived at Aratrum with his wife. They had come to Ventnor in 1934 to manage the Hotel Metropole on the Esplanade. Frank also became a well-known artist.

Today, the building once known as Aratrum Villa is subdivided into three, with just one of the properties retaining the unusual name. It is not easily recognised as the once desirable residence of the *Times* advert of the 1880s.

Michael Freeman, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](#), from records in Ventnor Heritage Centre including the extensive files of the late Fay Brown.