



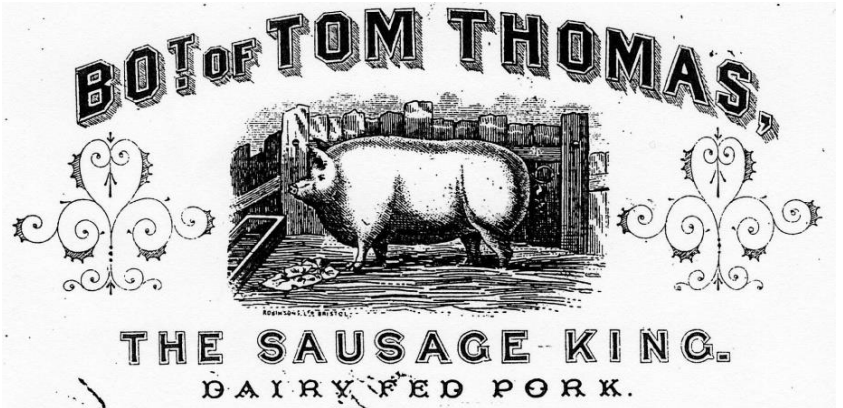
VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



## 'Golden Oldies' – recollections of Ventnor from the *Mercury*

The *Isle of Wight Mercury* was Ventnor and the Undercliff's very own newspaper, first published in 1855 and in almost continuous print until 1985. For most of its existence, the *Isle of Wight Mercury* had an eye for the evolution and progress of the town of Ventnor. The place grew so fast in the middle decades of the nineteenth century that editors often felt compelled to remind readers just how far their lives had been transformed. Recollections and reminiscences thus became a staple of its columns at different times. In the 1970s, these were featured as 'Golden Oldies', comprising first-hand accounts of life in Ventnor some 40 or 50 years before, provided by townsfolk then mostly aged in their 70s and 80s, including quite a number who had moved away from the Island altogether but still loved to read the *Mercury*.

Christmas time invariably brought back memories, even though money for food and presents was often short among ordinary residents. Tom Thomas's famous pork butcher's shop at 56 High Street, as well as having parts of its frontage hanging with carcasses, had a custom at Christmas time of placing in its window a pig's head with a lemon in its mouth. There was one Christmas when the head was said to bear a resemblance to a member of the local council and became a talk of the town, much to the fury of the individual concerned who was reported to be considering a libel action.



Many youngsters in those days were perpetually hungry. If you went into Drover's Fruit Shop on the corner of Albert Street, you could get a pennyworth (a 'Penn'orth') of 'pecked fruit' that would last you all day. A further penny would buy a hunk of stale cake from Albert Booth's confectionery and bakery on Church Street. Another favourite place was Mr. Bishop's sweet shop on Trinity Road, conveniently placed on the walk to the Council School in St. Boniface Road higher up. Here, in the 1920s and 1930s, you could buy sherbet fountains, gob stoppers and telephone wires (strings of liquorice) all at a farthing or a halfpenny each. (For those not old enough to know, a farthing was a quarter of an old penny). The Bishop family ran the shop for 51 years, beginning in 1889 and not closing until 1940. In the early days, it was renowned for its home-made confectionery. Bullseyes were manufactured on the premises, according to an 1897 advertisement in the *Mercury*. By the later interwar years, the shop was overseen by Mrs Bishop, a genial and much loved figure among hundreds of children: her door never seemingly closed.

Traffic on Ventnor's streets in those days was light. Delivery carts and delivery wagons (most nearly all horse-drawn) were quite common sights outside many shops and on roads through the town, as well as out to St. Lawrence and Bonchurch. Their paths would sometimes be impeded by livestock being driven along streets, as when red bullocks arrived by cattle truck at Ventnor West station, to be herded from there to the slaughterhouse in Pound Lane, prompting pedestrians to dive in fright into shops or doorways or gardens.



Brown's Bus had long been a regular sight on Ventnor's streets, carrying people from the main railway station to and from their lodging or boarding houses. In the 1920s, it charged one shilling a head, including luggage. Established as long ago as 1877, people often recalled the sight of its two horses struggling on Ventnor's steep hills. It was later replaced by a motor-bus, G.K. Nash eventually becoming the proprietor, and William (Bill) Turner, for many years the driver.

When the continuation of the bus service was challenged by Southern Vectis in 1949, it was remarked that Bill Turner was known to hundreds if not thousands of visitors: 'he seemed to know where they stayed year after year and warmly welcomed them', so one supporter recorded. Happily for many, Brown's bus was retained: Southern Vectis could not take its place.

Michael Freeman, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](#), from our records, including the local history index of the late Fay Brown