



## The Lowtherville Story

In the mid-to-late 1800s the upper part of the town of Ventnor began to grow, and as a tribute to the principal landowner, Captain Francis Lowther (1841-1908), the area was named 'Lowtherville'. It still is Lowtherville, but is more commonly called Upper Ventnor, except by the locals who have always called it 'Up Shute'.

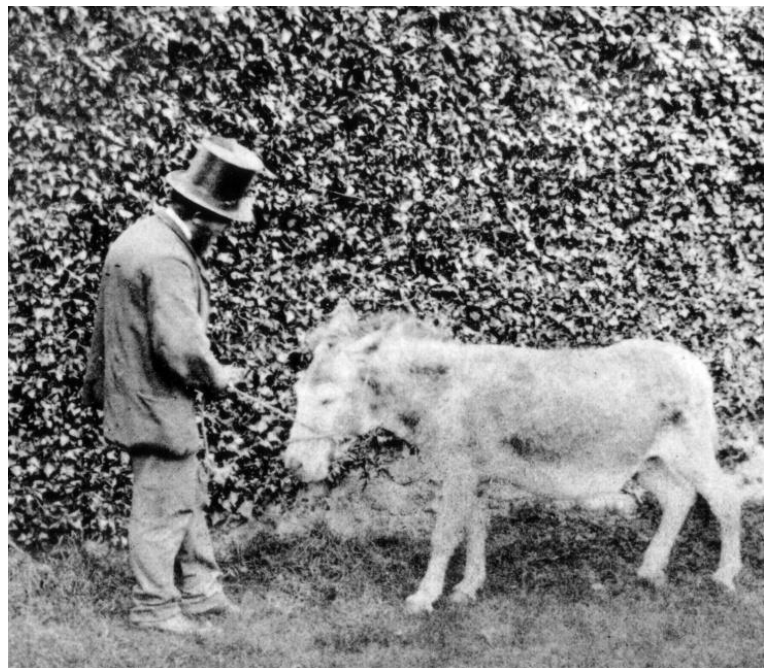
The area grew from a handful of houses and just four roads in 1880 to over four hundred houses today and more than twenty roads. One of the first buildings, in Lowtherville Road, was the 'Ventnor & Undercliff Isolation Hospital' which was built away from houses for obvious reasons. Just down the road, not too far away, was St. Margaret's Church and School, the first school in the area, opened in 1883 - the photograph here shows it as it was in 1898.



By the early 1900s there were over a dozen shops and businesses catering for most people's needs. Sadly, there are now only two shops. But while shops and services have disappeared, one thing that has bucked the trend is the number of schools, rising from only one in the 1880s to two in 1957 and remaining that way today.

Steephilldown Road, one of the original roads, was famous for dirty washing water running down the street earning it the nickname of 'Soapsuds Alley'. And one piece of hidden history that most people are unaware of is the 'Lowtherville Tunnel' - a 1750 foot-long sewage tunnel stretching from Newport Road to St. Alban's Steps. It was opened in 1898 and was closed for good in 1985.

Lowtherville was not short of its share of colourful characters among them 'Donkey Milligan', shown here with one of his donkeys. He who provided donkey-cart rides on the Esplanade, and lived in Lowtherville Road, his donkeys quite often allowed to roam freely on the Downs to graze. And there was George Grant and his son, Horace (Dido) who lived a few doors from 'Donkey' and ran a horse-drawn scrap metal business - Ventnor's own Steptoe & Son! Annie Bucket was famous for taking in laundry and the area outside her house was always called 'Annie Bucket's' and still is today. Last, but not least, was Pietro (Pete) Cortesi who came to Ventnor as a POW during WW2 and set up his shoe repair shop at the top of The Cut running down to Ocean View Road. There were probably very few residents of Lowtherville who did not have their boots and shoes mended by Pete in their lifetimes!



Upper Ventnor was also the home of RAF Ventnor, one of the vital 'Home Chain' Radar Stations which were invaluable in detecting enemy bombers approaching from the sea during the Battle of Britain. An unfortunate result of this success was that the pylons up on the Downs became the target of frequent enemy air raids, causing damage and tragic loss of life in Ventnor Town below. The RAF huts were in Downside, off Down Lane, and from 1953 a new camp was built off Lowtherville Road, in the area where the Free School and the houses around St Margaret's Glade now stand. The National Servicemen stationed up in Lowtherville often walked down to enjoy the famous Saturday night dances at the Winter Gardens, when big bands played until midnight to crowds from all over the Island.

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