



When holiday coaches once crowded Ventnor's streets



In the early autumn of last year, I was ambling up Shore Hill towards Pier Street when my eyes alighted upon the astonishing sight of a large coach, full of passengers, beginning to make a left turn out of Albert Street into Pier Street in order to proceed down to the Esplanade. The 'regulars' sitting outside 'Tinto's' were already gesticulating, indicating that this was prohibited, but the coach driver appeared to take no notice and continued to edge his vehicle round and it took several nearby pedestrians (including me), standing at the cab window, to persuade him to abandon the attempt

and reverse back into Albert Street and then turn right instead. He had seemed oblivious of the signage stating 'unsuitable for coaches'.

The recollection prompted me to explore some of the late Fay Brown's files and I came across a piece she wrote in 1988 that remembered a time, in the 1950s, when Ventnor itself sported three separate coach companies (Randall's, Crinage's and Nash's) and when coaches from many other parts of the Island regularly crowded the town's streets. In one report of July 1952, an impromptu census had found 44 vehicles one lunchtime and traffic gridlock as they had sought to find places to park. There were 23 in the Grove car park, 15 up on Church Street and Alpine Road, 4 in the Winter Gardens car park and 2 more on Albert Street. Nor was it unusual at the time to find the smaller coaches occasionally negotiating Shore Hill right down to the Esplanade. In fact, some ten years later, in 1963, a Newport coach operator successfully negotiated the Cascade with a brand new 52-seat Vega Major vehicle that was 36 feet in length and over 8 feet wide, powered by a six-cylinder Leyland diesel. Earlier vehicles, though shorter in length and lesser in passenger capacity, would often struggle on the Cascade by virtue of poor braking and more limited engine capacity for the climb back up.

The picture shows one of Randall's pre-war built vehicles on a 'Round the Island' trip. Their garage was in the High Street and their coaches were turned out in a blue and cream livery. The coaches belonging to Crinage's, based on Church Street, were wine and cream in livery, while Nash's from Pier Street were green and cream. Crinage's would typically line their coaches up each morning on the corner of Hambrough Road and Pier Street where, as Fay Brown recalled, 'Harry the Tout' would endeavour to persuade visitors on their way to the beach to buy tickets for any one of the many different tours run by the company. Further up Pier Street, at Nash's garage (where the Co-op is now), the blowing of a Post Horn would herald the imminent departure of its 'Round the Island' excursion, with first stop at Blackgang. Many of these various coach tours were still going in the 1970s, the 'Round the Island' tour costing 80p for an adult, an afternoon tour to Alum Bay and the Needles costing 50p, and a variety of evening tours costing just 30p. You would be lucky now to buy a few sweets for that!!!

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



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The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

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