



Montpellier House, Ventnor



On first looking at this picture, most readers will wonder where on earth this building was located. It is an Alfred Brannon print, taken from an engraving made circa 1840. When you next visit the Co-op supermarket at 1 Pier Street and are looking for your favourite cereal, you will be standing somewhere within the footprint of this grand house (actually a pair of houses), named after the town in the south of France. The supermarket building was erected in 1970 and involved demolition of what then remained of the structure. Previously, it had been largely hidden from view when the single storey building that became Nash's Garage was erected around the early twentieth century along the building's street frontage.

Montpellier House came up for auction with Francis Pittis and Son in October 1878 and the auction details survive in the Heritage Centre's archive. The building had four floors, including an extensive basement. There were two drawing rooms, a dining room, a library and seven bedrooms. Below stairs, there was a large kitchen, housekeeper's room, scullery and all usual domestic offices. At the time, one other ground floor room was in use as a doctor's surgery, for the entire building had been the residence of Dr H.B. Tuttiett for some ten years or more up to his death in August 1878. The property was set within a very extensive piece of ground, extending rearward to Pound Lane, with a stream running through it that had been turned into an ornamental water feature. The perimeter was screened by mature trees and shrubs and, along the Pound Lane boundary, were stabling, harness room and coachhouse. A sweeping drive served both front and rear of the property.

The late Fay Brown had a reference to Montpellier house as early as 1832 when it was 'kept' by a Mr. Whiskard. By the 1841 Census, Ann Whiskard, aged 10, presumably a daughter, appears to be under the charge of Mary McKean as governess. Quite a few others were also listed as living in the house which the Census describes as a Hotel and seems to comprise just one half of the house. These included a housekeeper, Louisa Yates, and a number of boarders who were all given as of independent means. Separately, the Census records the other half of the house as Montpellier Tap, occupied by George Butcher, an ostler, together with his wife and four young children. Dr Tuttiett first appears at Montpellier in the 1861 Census, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and Licentiate of the Apothecaries Hall in London. He is unmarried and living with him are Edward Russell Woodford, aged 20, a medical apprentice, Jane Matthews, housekeeper and Isaac Cavell, groom. By the 1871 Census, though, Tuttiett has a wife, Louisa, youngest daughter of the Hon. Hugh Percy.

Looking back at the picture, you can make out the line of what was then Mill Lane, with a small cottage the only dwelling. The lane was notorious for being a sea of mud in winter and ladies would often lose their galoshes and more ordinary folk their clogs. The cottage was for a long time the home of Tom Dyer, much later to be affectionately known as 'old father Dyer' whose hoary locks seemed to maintain a perpetual presence sitting on his garden wall. The cottage and garden formed part of land once called 'Miller's Mead'. Dr Tuttiett seems at some stage to have acquired much of this land on the eastern side of Mill Lane, for in January 1873 he informed the local Board that he was prepared to sell it for £4000 for a Town Hall to be built, together with some fine shops.

At the 1878 auction sale, Montpellier House was bought by George Jackman to become the Royal Undercliff Posting Establishment.

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