



Beach Hotel Soda Fountain



The image is from the 1920s and shows the newly-named Beach Hotel on the Esplanade at Ventnor. Up until the end of the Great War, this was the Esplanade Hotel and Family Boarding House. It had begun as the very first large hotel on the sea frontage, with an opening date in the later 1840s and subsequently extended in the same style. The re-branding of the hotel occurred around 1922. At some point during the Great War, it seems to have been used as an annexe to the adjacent Hotel Metropole (just visible left of the picture), with both under the ownership of Southern Hotels Ltd. In Edwardian times, an enclosed sun lounge had been added along the hotel's entire frontage where previously there had been a long Italian-style loggia. What is especially interesting about this particular image is the signage on the right that proclaims a Café and a Soda Fountain.

The Soda Fountain was an American innovation, used for the dispensing of carbonated drinks. They often consisted of ornate bars, some in semi-baroque style, that served not only soda beverages, but ice creams and light lunches. The Fountain itself was a large metal lined chamber containing artificially carbonated water with a pump connected to a bar dispenser. The water could be mixed with orange, lemon or other juices or syrups at the bar and sold under various names. They became very fashionable in city department stores in America from the early twentieth century, typically as part of their in-store cafés or else as part of ice cream parlours. By the 1920s, the Soda Fountain had found its way to Britain and, within a short time, large city stores like Selfridges in London and Lewis's in Leeds had opened Soda Fountains that seated more than 100 people. The trend was soon copied in seaside resorts, and Ventnor, with its long history of fashionable visitors, was no exception. It is unclear quite what form the Soda Fountain at the Beach Hotel took, or how long the Hotel continued to maintain it. In fact, the specific signage had disappeared from the hotel frontage by the later 1930s. However, the nearby Gaiety (the old Summer Pavilion and later the Hippodrome) was advertising a Soda Fountain in 1952, along with its Walls ice cream, super dodgem cars and a ghost train. The likelihood is that this was in the form of a soda and ice cream bar. However, it was already the case that American-style carbonated drinks were coming in bottles and, later, in cans, and the day of the Soda Fountain was soon fading from view. In some venues, the Soda Fountain became nothing more than a drinks-dispensing machine. These were not very different from those we see today.

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



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