



**The Central Kitchen: providing school meals for the Ventnor district**



During the Second World War, children at Ventnor secondary school were evacuated to Steephill Castle for their safety as the existing school buildings were directly under the flight path of German bombers coming across the Channel from occupied France to attack the RAF radar station on St. Boniface Down. Luckily, the school was not hit, and at the end of hostilities, the pupils were able to move back to their original site. However, they had lost the catering facilities that were provided at the Castle and so an alternative source of regular cooked meals had to be found.

As early as 1944, it was decided that a new purpose-built facility was needed, so a decision was made by the Education Department of the Isle of Wight County Council to provide a building in Ventnor to produce hot meals for all the local schools. Plans for the new building were approved by the County Planning Department in December 1944. The site chosen was at the top of Lowtherville

Road at the western end of the grass playground of the adjoining St. Margaret's Church and School. This was the area previously occupied by the 'Tin Tabernacle' - the temporary church, made of corrugated iron and timber, that had been dismantled in 1889 and re-erected in St. Alban's Road and named 'St. Alban's'. The new building was constructed by local firm, Henry Ingram & Sons of Albert Street, at a cost of £6,000, and was opened in 1946 as the 'Central Kitchen'.

Posing for the above photo in the 1960s, the Central Kitchen cooks and support staff take a well-earned break from providing over 500 meals, five days a week, to five schools in the Ventnor area. Shown above are drivers, Reg Arnold (back, centre) and his assistant (name?), with Ivy Urry to his left and Mrs Croad next to her. In the front row (from left) is another Mrs. Croad, with Rene Hartley and Ruby Westmore.

In 1977, an advert in the County Press was looking for a new 'Cook Supervisor' for the Central Kitchen, to work 5 days a week, starting at 7.30 in the morning, on a salary of £1,605 p.a. plus supplements, including the benefit of not working in school holidays.

The Central Kitchen was known locally as 'The Canteen'. In later years, and after many months of hard work by volunteers, the 'kitchen' was re-opened in January 1995 as 'St. Margaret's Hall', shown in the photo on the right. Prior to this, the old Air Training Corps hut, just down the road, had been used for community purposes and was really the first St. Margaret's Hall.



*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis – photographs from the Society archives*

