



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



The Rugen, Park Avenue, Ventnor



Many residents will recognise this building as *Park View*, the rather grand late-Victorian house that stands at the western end of Park Avenue in Ventnor, looking south across to Ventnor Park. Some may be puzzled by the name given to it in this article, but this was its name until just after the 1939-45 war. The house was built about 1890 by the well-known local architect, Theodore Saunders, for his own occupancy. It had three reception rooms, a sun room, seven bedrooms, two bathrooms, as well as accommodation for servants. It came up for auction with Francis Pittis in May 1939, but found no buyer. The agent suggested that it would make a high-class boarding house, or else might easily be

converted into flats. The outbreak of war, however, decreed an altogether different outcome. It became the place of evacuation for the pupils of Albert Street Junior School. Jill Wearing and the late Fay Brown both attended school there.

But what about the puzzle of the name? The house was called after the Isle of Rugen which lies in the Baltic Sea just off the North German coast. It is, in fact, Germany's largest island, though few have heard of it. Roughly twice the size of the Isle of Wight, it became a famous summer resort in the last years of the nineteenth century, visitors attracted by its high chalk cliffs, many small peninsulas and sandy bays. It seems that it was Theodore Saunders's wife Margarete, daughter of William Spindler, the German industrialist at Old Park, St. Lawrence, who selected the name, following her marriage to Theodore in 1889. She obviously saw parallels between her adopted island and the one off the Baltic coast.

But there is another interesting potential twist to this story about the name and it relates to a young Ventnor man named Frederick Baker. Baker was a 'fly' proprietor in the town according to the 1881 Census, employing two men. His work brought him into contact with the town's often wealthy visitors and, among them, was a German with connections to the Prussian royal family who happened to own the Isle of Rugen. While the gentleman was staying at St. Augustine Villa one year, Baker was persuaded to go back to Germany with him as a postilion and huntsman. In the event, Baker stayed for some 5 years, becoming fluent in spoken German and, on various occasions, taking his master on winter journeys by a 'four-in-hand' across the sea ice to Rugen. When Baker returned home in the later 1880s, he set himself up as a posting master, with a well-equipped establishment in the town. Soon he was a member of Ventnor Local Board and began to rub shoulders with some of the leading townsmen. His fluency in German made him popular with Ventnor's many German visitors and he would inevitably have become acquainted with Theodore Saunders's German wife Margarete, as well as with the architect himself, who was also acquiring an increasingly public role. The Rugen ended up becoming emblematic of the town's popularity among German international travellers, alongside Ventnor's many German hotel waiters, its regular German bandsmen and the smart Ventnor hotels that had sections in their guide-books translated into German.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, with additional help from Jill Wearing.



Ventnor & District Local History Society is a registered charity, working to preserve and record the history of our area and make it available to the public in the Ventnor Heritage Centre.

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

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