



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



The *Enterprise* motor launch



The picture shows Blake's and Spencer's motor launch *Enterprise* hauled up on Ventnor beach in the later 1960s. Standing in front are, left to right, Viv Spencer, Fred Blake, Jim Blake and Laurie Spencer.

This fine launch was built by Jim Blake and Viv Spencer over the winter of 1963-4 in the boathouse at the top of Alma Road in Ventnor. It was the first boat to be built after the amalgamation of the boating and bathing businesses belonging to the Blakes and the Spencers. The *Enterprise* first took to the water on Good Friday of 1964.

The *Isle of Wight Mercury*, reporting in mid-February 1964 as the boat was nearing completion, thought that it was probably the largest hand-built wooden boat ever constructed in Ventnor. The *Enterprise* was 23 feet long and specially designed for local conditions, with a high bow and 'beamier' than the *Endeavour*, the boat it was replacing. Silver spruce and elm were the woods used in the build and the vessel was powered by an 8 hp engine. It was intended for carrying visitors on trips along the coast and the 'maiden voyage' was undertaken on the Easter Monday when it took a group of Watford school children out. However, 'trippers' were not to be the boat's sole purpose. It was also intended to be 'on call' to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution for emergencies that might arise off the south coast of Wight in reasonable weather conditions.

The first motor launch to be used on Ventnor beach was in 1900 with the vessel named *Alpha*. It belonged to the Spencers. Previously, all the boats had sails. Since that time, there had been various other motor vessels, including *Kathleen*, *Lady Jane*, *Natalie* and also the strangely named *XPDNCY*. Those dumbfounded by these letters were told to say them aloud, making the word 'Expediency'.

By October 1964, the *Isle of Wight Mercury* was more than happy to record that the *Enterprise* had had a very good season, taking hundreds of passengers a week out along the coast. The *Enterprise* continued in service until 1973.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, with much help from Mike Tigg who loaned the image for this article and is a former longshoreman. There is a new exhibition about Ventnor's longshoremen in the Heritage Centre this season. Open Wednesdays and Thursdays 10 till 1, Fridays 10 till 4, Saturdays 10 till 1.



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.

www.ventnorheritage.org.uk / telephone 855407

