



**Directorate of Community Services**  
Director **Sarah Mitchell**

## **Historic Environment Action Plan The Undercliff**

**Isle of Wight County Archaeology  
and Historic Environment Service**

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**01983 823810**  
*archaeology@iow.gov.uk*

## HEAP for the Undercliff.

### INTRODUCTION

This HEAP Area has been defined on the basis of geology, topography, land use and settlement patterns which differentiate it from other HEAP areas.

This document identifies essential characteristics of the Undercliff as its geomorphology and rugged landslip areas, its archaeological potential, its 19<sup>th</sup> century *cottages ornés/marine villas* and their grounds, and the Victorian seaside resort character of Ventnor. The Area has a highly distinctive character with an inner cliff towering above a landscape (now partly wooded) demarcated by stone boundary walls.

The most significant features of this historic landscape, the most important forces for change and key management issues are considered. Actions particularly relevant to this Area are identified from those listed in the Isle of Wight HEAP Aims, Objectives and Actions.

### ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

#### **Location, Geology and Topography**

- *The Undercliff* is identified as a discrete *Landscape Character Type* in the Isle of Wight AONB Management Plan (2004, 132).
- The Area lies to the south of the *South Wight Downland*, from which it is separated by vertical cliffs forming a geological succession from Ferruginous Sands through Sandrock, Carstone, Gault Clay, Upper Greensand, Chert Beds and Lower Chalk (Hutchinson 1987, Fig. 6).
  - The zone between the inner cliff and coastal cliff is a landslip area
  - This landslip is caused by groundwater lubrication of slip planes within the Gault Clays and Sandrock Beds.
  - It comprises a thin coastal strip less than 1 km wide on the southeast side of the Island, running from Blackgang almost as far as Shanklin.
  - The core area described in the Isle of Wight Coast Shoreline Management Plan runs from Rocken End to Dunnose and is 12km in length (Halcrow and Partners Ltd 1997, 2.4.1).
- Dramatic vertical line of the inner cliff gives it a highly distinctive character.
- Fairly low-lying zone, rising from the coastal cliff to a maximum altitude of 69m OD below the inner cliff at St Lawrence.
- Part of the Area consists of unstable and broken ground although elsewhere there are zones of more stable and level ground.
- Small streams flow southward to coast.
- Coastline varies.
  - Unstable coastal slope from Blackgang to St Catherine's Point.
  - Coastal cliff ranging in height from 10m to 80m between St Catherine's Point and Bonchurch.
  - Unstable coastal slope between Bonchurch and Luccombe.
- There are several small bays, including Ventnor Bay, with sand and shingle beaches.
- All surviving agricultural land is Grade 5, indicating poor quality land.
- The sheltering inland cliffs and southern aspect of The Undercliff provide a temperate microclimate.

## Defining Attributes and Principal HEAP Types

### Geomorphology and Coastal Defence

- Largest inhabited *rotational landslide* in Western Europe, of major geological and ecological importance (Isle of Wight AONB Partnership 2004, 132).
  - The Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliff is a comparable landscape feature of similar length (c. 11 km) but differs from the Isle of Wight Undercliff in being uninhabited and is a National Nature Reserve.
  - There is another section of Undercliff nearby in East Devon, running from Beer to Branscombe and on to Sidmouth.
  - The Folkestone Warren Undercliff in Kent is somewhat smaller, comprising a coastal strip 3.5 km in length and up to 600m in width  
[http://english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/NA\\_HabDetails.asp](http://english-nature.org.uk/science/natural/NA_HabDetails.asp)
  - Other English Undercliffs include those on the North Yorkshire coast and one at Walton on the Naze, Essex.
- The Undercliff is subject to a range of landslide processes including multiple rotational slides and compound slides, mudslides and rockfalls (Moore et. al. 1995, Chapter 2).
  - There is a striking contrast between the highly unstable Undercliff from Blackgang to Rocken End and its relatively stable continuation from St Catherine's Point eastwards (Hutchinson 1987, 129-130).
  - Some parts of The Undercliff are still at risk from landslips, including built-up areas (McInnes et. al. eds. 2000, Geotechnical Study Areas 1-8).
- Coastline from Blackgang to Steepphill Cove is undeveloped and largely free from coastal protection works except for the 550m long rock revetment on the foreshore at Castlehaven completed in 2004.
- Artificial defences protect the coastline from Steepphill to Bonchurch. See <http://www.coastalwight.gov.uk/coastaldefenceschemes.htm>
  - The Victorian defences were upgraded at Steepphill Cove in 1992/93 with further work on the seawall in the centre of the bay completed in 2006.
  - At Castle Cove a rock revetment allowing vehicular and pedestrian access, slope stabilisation and drainage was completed in 1995, considerably changing the landscape character on and around the coastal footpath.
  - At Western Cliffs, Ventnor a rock revetment of Somerset Limestone was placed at the base of the cliffs in the 1990s.
  - The existing seawall at Wheelers Bay was replaced by a new revetment in the 1990s and the slope behind the revetment was stabilised.
  - Monks Bay, Bonchurch is defended by a rock armoured revetment of Norwegian Granite against the existing seawalls, together with an offshore breakwater and beach nourishment scheme (completed in 1990s).
- There is another area of undefended coast from Bonchurch to Lucombe.

### Principal HEAP Types and other defining attributes

- The largest settlement in the Undercliff is Ventnor, a small town and seaside resort of 19<sup>th</sup> century origin.
  - There are smaller clusters of settlement at Niton Undercliff, St Lawrence and Bonchurch.
  - Outside these main settlement areas there is low-density settlement throughout much of the Undercliff except in land slip zones.
- The built character of Ventnor, Niton Undercliff, St Lawrence and Bonchurch is mainly Victorian.
  - There are isolated large houses of mainly 19<sup>th</sup> century date between Niton and St Lawrence.
  - Development between St Lawrence and Ventnor is of a more 'suburban' character with properties mainly of 20<sup>th</sup> century date.

- Many of the larger 19<sup>th</sup> century Undercliff properties are surrounded by gardens of the same date.
- Tourism is significant within the Area, with tourist accommodation concentrated mainly in and around Ventnor and Bonchurch and the main tourist beach being at Ventnor.
- Blackgang Chine is a theme park that forms a major commercial tourist attraction.
- Relatively little active agriculture within this Area. Where fields survive they are small and usually irregular.
  - There is a small area of market gardening to the east of Niton.
- This is the only HEAP Area (except limited parts of *South Wight Downland* and *South Wight Downland Edge*) where stone walls define boundaries.
- Landslip areas at Blackgang and Luccombe are Open Access Land.
- Substantial amount of *secondary woodland* but no *ancient woodland*.
- Main communications route is the A3055 that traverses the Area from Shanklin to Niton, known as 'The Undercliff Drive'.
- The long distance coastal path traverses this Area from Shanklin to St Lawrence, running along the top of the coastal cliff from Bonchurch to Woody Bay, where it turns inland and runs along the top of the inner cliff.
  - From Woody Bay public footpaths run along the top of the coastal cliff as far as Rocken End but between Binnel Bay and Castle Haven these paths are subject to long term closure because of land instability.
- Rights of Way other than the coastal path are generally short and include routes such as 'Cripple Path' and 'St Rhadegund's Path' that climb the inner cliff, linking the Undercliff to the rest of the Island.
- Luccombe Chine is accessible via Right of Way SS3 (steps leading down to the beach) but beach access has not been possible at Blackgang Chine since erosion in that area during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Principal Historical Processes

### The formation of the Undercliff

- The Undercliff is of geologically recent origin but its formation was a complex process.
  - Weathering and mass movement processes operating on the Island's southern downs during the Late Glacial stage of the *Quaternary* Period (20,000 years or so ago) produced large aprons of fine landslide debris extending southward over the former sea bed (Hutchinson 1987, 132; Moore et al 1995 Halcrow 1997, 2.4).
  - The rise in sea level after the ice melted in the Post-Glacial period some 8500 to 7000 years ago exposed the debris to marine erosion and removed it, cutting into the existing cliff strata.
  - A new debris apron was then formed as the result of two further episodes of landsliding which took place prior to 4,500 years ago and from about 4000 years ago (Insole et. al. 1998, 80), burying the existing sea cliff and pushing the high tide mark well to seaward.
  - Insole et. al. (1998, 80) suggest that the present compound slide between the debris apron and the inner cliff may have occurred after the *Iron Age*.
  - However, Tomalin (2000, 10) cites archaeological evidence from the *Bronze Age* to Roman periods to suggest that no movement on this scale took place after the formation of the debris apron.
  - There have been major landslip events in historical times, notably in 1799 and 1928 (Moore et. al 1995, 7-10; Insole et. al. 1998, 68-80; Colenutt 1928).
- Tomalin (2000, 8) refers to a *Neolithic* soil horizon on consolidated debris at Binnel Point where humans were burning trees. Charcoal from this deposit has produced a calibrated radio-carbon date of 3774-3028 BC (Preece 1986).

- Various other archaeological deposits and finds from the Undercliff dating from the Early *Bronze Age* to the Roman period have been recorded and are described by Tomalin (2000, 1-21)).
  - However, the Area may still have been subject to episodes of landslip and some of the archaeological material recorded may not have been found in its original position.
  - In these circumstances it is unclear whether settled agriculture could have existed in many parts of the Undercliff although coastal resources appear to have been exploited.
  - The only definite structural evidence of prehistoric occupation is at Gills Cliff Road, Ventnor where a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century excavation uncovered the floor of a small hut dating from immediate pre-Roman period c. AD 10-43 (Benson 1953). The site was occupied for only two or three decades but during this period was overwhelmed at one time by a flow of hillwash.

### Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods

- In early Christian times large Anglo Saxon estates seem to have run across parts of the Island from the Solent to the English Channel and some early parochial units may have followed the same pattern (Margham 2000, 121-123).
  - The Undercliff seems to have been a marginal area at this time and may have been divided between a few large estates.
  - The late Anglo-Saxon estate of Wroxall is recorded in a charter of AD 1043 or 1044. This included land within the Undercliff lying within the later medieval parishes of Godshill and Newchurch (Margham 2007).
- Before the Norman Conquest Bonchurch may have formed part of the original *mother parish* of Newchurch.
  - Alternatively, the old church may possibly be on the site of an independent chapel originating in the early years of Christianity on the Island.
  - The church is dedicated to St Boniface and is alleged to have obtained its dedication as a result of a visit by this 8<sup>th</sup> century missionary
  - There is also a tradition that the original church was built by 8<sup>th</sup> century monks although the oldest surviving work is Norman (Margham 1997, 93)
- The only manors within the Undercliff recorded in Domesday Book were Bonchurch and Luccombe.
- The Undercliff was relatively isolated from the rest of the Island until the 19<sup>th</sup> century but some present day motor routes and Rights of Way that ascend the inner cliffs probably date back at least to early medieval times.
  - These routes include Niton Shute, Cripple Path, St Rhadegund's Path, St Lawrence Shute and Bonchurch Shute.
  - The pre 19<sup>th</sup> century route from Wroxall descended the cliff at the bottom of Rew Down and continued to the hamlet of Steephill with a branch to the hamlet at Ventnor. Routes in this area changed with the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of Ventnor.
- By the Middle Ages no less than eight parishes held land in the Undercliff (Chale, Niton, Whitwell, St Lawrence, Godshill, Newchurch, Bonchurch and Shanklin) but with the exception of St Lawrence most of the land belonging to these parishes was outside the Undercliff.
  - The shape of these parishes, as shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6" OS maps of 1862, indicates that some of these were 'daughter' parishes: Niton, Whitwell and St Lawrence had been taken out of Godshill, Bonchurch (possibly) out of Newchurch and Shanklin out of Brading.
  - The boundaries of the medieval parishes reflected secular land divisions to some extent, ensuring that communities had access to the sea and land resources of the Undercliff.
- The 'Cripple Path' linked the Undercliff portion of Niton Parish with the village and church.
  - The name was first recorded in 1608 and comes from an Old English word for a narrow passage (Kökeritz 1940, 182)

- St Rhadegund's Path linked the Undercliff portion of Whitwell Parish with Whitwell Church, which bore the unusual dedication to St Rhadegund.
  - However, the path was called 'Radegang' in AD 1285 and Kökeritz (1940, 284) has suggested that the original meaning was 'bridle-path', with the modern form being a corruption due to popular etymology.

### Medieval and post-medieval settlement

- Medieval and post-medieval settlement in the Undercliff seems to have been in the form of small manorial complexes and subsidiary farm holdings (Whitehead 1911).
  - In Niton Parish there were Undercliff holdings associated with Niton Manor at Knowles, Buddle, Beauchamp and the Orchard.
  - In Whitwell Parish there were Undercliff holdings at Mirables, Old Park (alias South Wath), Wrongs and Wolverton at Wath
  - In St Lawrence Parish the chief holding was South Wath St Lawrence.
  - Steephill, in Godshill Parish, was first mentioned in 1272.
  - The chief Undercliff holding in Newchurch Parish was Holeway which seems to have corresponded to the later farms of Ventnor and Littleton.
  - Bonchurch Manor had become divided into the farms of Bonchurch, Macketts and Mare Pool by 1729.
  - Luccombe, also within Bonchurch Parish had become a *grange* of Quarr Abbey by c. 1200 and would probably have been used as grazing land.
- As well as the dispersed holdings mentioned above, the OS 1793 map shows small settlement clusters or hamlets at Niton Undercliff, St Lawrence, Steephill, Ventnor and Bonchurch (of which Bonchurch was the largest).
- The only two medieval parish churches within the Undercliff were at St Lawrence and at Bonchurch. Both were very small. The church at St Lawrence was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, originally as a manorial chapel.
- A recent excavation at Flowers Brook, Steephill located up to 40 inhumations with the remains of a possible chapel and nearby settlement remains of late Saxon and medieval date.
  - This site could be associated with the medieval manorial holding of Steephill and may have been abandoned as a result of landslides.
  - *Ridge and furrow* of unknown date has been recorded from the Flowers Brook area.

### Land Use

- In the central part of the Undercliff the OS 1793 and 1862 maps show a strong north-south orientation in the boundaries between The Orchard, Beauchamp, Mirables and Old Park.
  - These boundaries related originally to medieval holdings and the shape of the holdings was dictated by the limited width of land available for settlement and exploitation, ensuring that land was shared equitably and possibly suggesting the creation of medieval holdings from former manorial common land.
- Parts of The Undercliff may have remained as rough unenclosed land in medieval and later times.
- John Speed's 1611 map shows 'St Laurence Park' occupying most of The Undercliff.
  - However, field-names on the Whitwell Tithe Map of 1838 refer to 'The Warren' and 'Green Park' within the Old Park estate and it would seem that the park may have occupied this more limited area.
  - In medieval times the holding of Old Park, then known as 'South Wath', was part of the manor of Whitwell but by 1604 it had become part of the Appuldurcombe estate owned by the Worsley family.
  - The first recorded mention of the name 'Old Park' was in 1628.
  - The holding was probably so-called to distinguish it from the Worsleys' newly created deer park at Appuldurcombe but Old Park itself may have been used for hunting purposes only after its acquisition by the Worsleys, since in 1559 there was a tenement within the holding referred to as a 'house of husbandry'.

- The use of the holding as a hunting park may have been short-lived since 'The Parke at Wath' was let to John Harvey in 1613 (Worsley Rent Roll).
- Old Park may have been an area of open land used for hunting rather than an enclosed park. No park pale is shown on John Speed's map for 'St Laurence Park' although his map shows 'Waching Park' and 'Wootton Park' elsewhere on the Island enclosed by pales.
- However, the rocky, land-slipped ground in this area may have needed very little pale-building to close off escapes and make a neat deer park. It could even have deliberately used the natural land forms to create a designed landscape, suggesting an early start to an appreciation of the Undercliff's special qualities.
- It is possible that the boundaries of the Old Park estate shown on the OS maps of 1793 and 1862 may have equated with the boundaries of the deer park. A stone-revetted ditch recorded in the HER could be associated with the deer park or with the 19<sup>th</sup> century designed grounds at Old Park.
- Rough open grazing survived into the 19<sup>th</sup> century at Chale Common (near Blackgang Chine) when it was enclosed by Act of Parliament.
- The Landslip between Bonchurch and Shanklin belonged to Bonchurch Farm and was called 'East End' on a 1729 map of Bonchurch.
  - It is shown as rough grazing land rather than woodland on the OS 1793 map although the SSSI designation for the Landslip refers to ashwoods that 'appear largely to be primary' and states that there are many very old examples of oak and beech as well as ash.
  - Tree cover within the Landslip is first shown on the OS 25" 1862 map.
- There is some archaeological evidence of post-medieval cultivation within the Undercliff in the form of narrow *ridge and furrow* within an area of uneven and broken ground near St Catherine's Point and also to the west of Woody Bay.
  - The ground near St Catherine's Point seems unsuitable for even a small area of ploughing and it is possible that the ridge and furrow could represent *lazy beds* (small plots cultivated by spade). However, there is evidence from Hulverstone within the *South-West Wight Coastal Zone* that the cultivation of strips took place in very unfavourable conditions on the cliff-edge (HEAP South-West Wight Coastal Zone Document, 4).
- The OS 1793 map shows tiny fields in some parts of The Undercliff.

### The sea and the coast

- There are records of shipwrecks on the treacherous rocks near St Catherine's Point from medieval times onwards but the medieval lighthouse above the Undercliff on St Catherine's Hill was ineffective because of frequent sea fogs.
  - In 1838-1840 a new lighthouse was built at St Catherine's Point
- Sea fishing and the collection of shell-fish took place from prehistoric times but appears to have been a small-scale activity in historic times and may have been combined with farming in the medieval and post-medieval periods.
  - Small fishing settlements on the shore developed at Steephill Cove and Luccombe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The insubstantial fishermen's cottages at Luccombe disappeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - However, at Steephill Cove there are several cottages on the shore and fishing boats still operate from the cove.
  - The life of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century family of fishermen and longshoremen at Castlehaven is described in an unpublished memoir by George Haynes (1979)
  - At Wheelers Bay to the east of Ventnor the Wheeler family carried out similar activities (Hutchings 1975).
- Fishing and smuggling frequently went hand-in-hand and the Coastguard Service was originally a smuggling prevention service.

- In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the coastguards were stationed at Mount's Bay but the coastguard station was moved in 1855 (Whitehead 1911, 177).
- Coastguard stations are shown at Ventnor, Orchard Cove, Woody Bay, Niton (overlooking Reeth Bay) and Blackgang on the OS 25" 1862 map.

### Tourism and settlement from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century

- By the later 18<sup>th</sup> century The Undercliff had become a *Picturesque* location much visited during tours of the Isle of Wight by upper class visitors.
  - Steepphill Cottage, built in the 1770s by Sir Hans Stanley, twice Governor of the Island, was an early example of a *cottage orné* with designed grounds (rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Steepphill Castle).
  - From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century existing small farmhouses were transformed into *cottages ornés* and *marine villas*.
  - Sea Cottage was one such transformation carried out by Sir Richard Worsley in 1791-1792 (Boynton 1996, 122) and Mirables was also converted into a gentleman's residence in the 1790s.
  - This process continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the remodelling of existing properties or the construction of new buildings in various locations outside the main settlements, including Puckaster, Old Park and Lisle Combe.
  - 'Gentlemen's residences' were also built at Niton Undercliff and at Bonchurch.
  - Gardens were created around these residences, taking advantage of the warm microclimate. Old Park and Steepphill Castle had particularly large grounds (Champion and Downer 1997, Lambert 2001).
- Prior to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the landscape of The Undercliff was open, with relatively few trees. However, in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century planting by wealthy landowners and natural secondary growth transformed the landscape character of the area, with the Undercliff Drive and surrounding areas becoming well wooded.
- The Royal Sandrock Hotel at Niton was associated with the earliest phase of tourism in the Undercliff.
  - It was built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to house visitors to the nearby chalybeate spring, which had alleged health-giving properties (Champion and Downer 1997, 20).
- Blackgang Chine was a tourist attraction from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. .
  - <http://www.blackgangchine.com/history.asp>
  - By the 1860s the area around Blackgang was developed with the Blackgang and Royal Sandrock hotels, a mansion (Southlands) and some large villas.
  - During the 20<sup>th</sup> century Blackgang continued to develop as a tourist attraction. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the site had a large car and coach park and road works were undertaken to assist traffic management.
- Ventnor, previously comprising only a few fishermen's cottages and a mill, was promoted as a health-giving location and developed as a holiday resort from c.1830.
  - The development of the town was very much driven by commercial considerations and little thought was given to town planning (Whitecliff 1911, 124-139). Its rapid growth can be traced in 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings and engravings (McInnes 1990, 102-111).
  - Bonchurch developed in a different fashion with the construction of substantial properties in spacious grounds although commercial speculation also played a part in the development of the old settlement as a genteel adjunct to Ventnor (McInnes 1990, 96-101).
  - The attractions of Bonchurch included Bonchurch Pond, created from a former *withy bed* in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the picturesque old church. However, the increasing number of residents led to the building of St Boniface New Church in 1847-48.
  - An increased population also made the tiny church at St Lawrence inadequate and a new church designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott was built in 1878.
- The Royal National Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, built in the 1860s to the west of Ventnor, was a very substantial development having a considerable impact on the late 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape (Laidlaw 1990).



- It continued to accommodate many patients from the mainland in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before TB was treatable with antibiotics.

### The Undercliff in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

- Knowles Farm, St Catherine's Point, was used by Marconi to make pioneering radio transmissions from 1900 to 1902.
- During the 20<sup>th</sup> century major instability affected parts of the Undercliff (Moore et al. 1995, Chapter 1; McInnes et. al. eds. 2000, Geotechnical Study Areas 1-8).
  - Following a major cliff fall in 1928 the road from Blackgang to Niton was rerouted along the top of the cliff.
  - The houses around Blackgang were gradually abandoned or were occupied by 'squatter' communities.
  - Some properties in Ventnor became unsafe and were demolished.
- Demolition of the Royal National Hospital in the 1960s allowed the development of the Ventnor Botanic Garden from 1972.
- The National Trust acquired the Knowles Farm Estate at St Catherine's Point (the most southerly tip of the Island) in 1967.
- Late 20<sup>th</sup> century development has been mainly of low intensity
  - However, development of a higher density has significantly modified the character of The Undercliff between St Lawrence and Ventnor e.g. in the vicinity of the demolished 19<sup>th</sup> century Steephill Castle.
- In the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the loss of the railway line in the 1960s and changing holiday patterns, Ventnor became less prosperous and some shops in the town centre closed, affecting the visual character of the town.
  - There appears to have been increased economic activity in the last few years and some new development has taken place.
- By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Undercliff Road had become unstable near St Lawrence.
  - A new section of road was created in 2002, involving the demolition of Beauchamp, a 19<sup>th</sup> century property.
  - There were unresolved problems with road instability and the Isle of Wight Council drew up proposals for a further Undercliff Drive Reinstatement Scheme. However, these proposals were abandoned in 2008.
  - Various options for Undercliff Drive are now being investigated which may include maintaining single lane working, closing the road at particular points or investigating options for developing a "green way" along the Undercliff Drive.

<http://www.iwight.com/undercliffdrive/default.asp>

### **Archaeology and Historic Landscape Features (details in HER)**

- Much of the archaeological material recorded from the Undercliff was found a long time ago but an archaeological coastal audit in 1999 provided new evidence for a strip of coastal land stretching some 100m inland from the sea cliff. New sites and finds were recorded in the HER.
  - *Palaeoenvironmental* and archaeological material has helped to date landslip events within the Undercliff (Hutchinson 1987, 123-135; Tomalin 2000).
- Four *Palaeolithic* flint hand axes of *Acheulian* type have been recorded from the Undercliff, three having been found on the beach and one in a field.
  - The axes found on the beach may derive from coastal strata deposited as a result of land slips in post-glacial times.
  - The axe found in the field close to 'The Orchard' could have been from an undisturbed deposit within a block of ground subject to later land movement.
- Material of *Neolithic* and Early *Bronze Age* date includes the following:
  - A soil horizon from Binnel Point with a calibrated radio-carbon date of 3774-3028 BC (Preece 1986). A black lens from the same site but at a higher level has produced Bronze Age pottery sherds, bone, shell, burnt stone and plant material (Coastal Audit 1999).

- An assemblage of about 200 sherds of *Beaker* pottery from St Catherine's Point, found in association with bones of cattle, pig and sheep, charred plant remains and shells of oysters and Winkles (Allen 2005, 233 and 244).
- Early *Bronze Age* cremation urn from Flowers Brook.
- Late Bronze Age material includes a Bronze axe from St Lawrence and 30 socketed bronze Axes from Steephill.
- More *Iron Age* material (other than coins) seems to have been recorded from the Undercliff than from other HEAP Areas. This is perhaps surprising, in view of the unstable ground and unsuitable conditions for agriculture. Iron Age finds may reflect the presence of a specific coastal community but the unstable ground itself may account for the discovery of more material than in other Areas.
  - In the St Lawrence area recorded material includes a flexed inhumation with a sword and shield, two crouched burials of possible Iron Age date, and two iron *currency bars*.
  - A body found with Iron Age pottery at Steephill may have been overwhelmed in a local landslide.
  - A significant amount of Iron Age and early *Romano-British* pottery has been found, some of it with associated bones or shell-fish in so-called *midden* deposits, implying stratified accumulations of domestic rubbish from nearby occupation sites.
  - These deposits have been found at St Catherine's Point, Binnel, Steephill and Gills Cliff, Ventnor. The remains of a late Iron Age hut have also been recorded from Gills Cliff (see above).
- A skeleton found with a Roman bracelet at Ventnor may have been buried in a land fall.
  - A 3<sup>rd</sup> century Roman coin hoard is recorded from Castle Road, Ventnor.
  - A Roman brooch found at Gore Cliff was buried in a hill wash deposit that had arrived on the site from higher land situated to the south-west, indicating large-scale land slippage at this point in the Roman or post-Roman period.
  - A *Romano-Celtic* carved stone head was found on the beach at Luccombe.
- Traces of a late Saxon/Medieval settlement, burials and a possible chapel have been recorded at Steephill (see under 'Principal Historical Processes').
- Medieval *middens* have been recorded from St Catherine's Point, Woody Bay, Rosecliff Court & Luccombe.
- Post-medieval narrow *ridge and furrow* has been recorded near St Catherine's Point and at Woody Bay.
  - *Ridge and furrow* of unknown date has been recorded from Flowers Brook.
- The medieval parish boundary between St Lawrence and Godshill, which also formed part of the western boundary of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Wroxall estate, can still be traced on the ground.
  - It is followed by a modern boundary between Ventnor Botanic Gardens and the Cricket Ground, by a road and boundary between Steephill Road and Castle Close and then by another boundary between Castle Close and the inner cliff.
- Boundaries which appear to define the medieval holdings of Mirables and Old Park are shown on modern OS maps.
  - The western boundary of Mirables before the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the Niton/Whitwell Parish boundary and is still a civil parish boundary.
  - The boundary between Mirables and Old Park is shown as a continuous boundary on the modern map.
  - The boundary between Old Park and Wrongs is also a continuous boundary and was recorded as a stone wall in the 1998 Coastal Audit.
- Post-medieval and modern archaeological remains and landscape features include the following:
  - Remains of a mock battery erected on the cliff-edge in grounds of Sea Cottage by Sir Richard Worsley in late 18<sup>th</sup> century.
  - St Lawrence Well – early 19<sup>th</sup> century stone well head over a spring that was apparently dedicated to St Lawrence from early times (Whitehead 1911, 171).

- Remains of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century sea wall, esplanade and harbour at Binnel Bay built by William Spindler, the owner of Old Park. The remains of a mill can also be observed close to the shore at Binnel Bay.
- Remains of St Lawrence WW2 Radar Station on the cliff edge south of Old Park.
- The Old Blackgang Road between Niton and Chale was constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century below the inner cliff but was truncated by the 1928 landslide.
  - The eastern part survives as Sandrock Road, leading to the National Trust car park. Short sections survive in the landslip area between the car park and Blackgang on unstable ground (Currie 2001 Vol 2, 54-55). The western end of the route survives in the area of Blackgang Theme Park.

### **Built Environment (details in HER)**

- The earliest standing buildings in the Undercliff are the medieval churches at St Lawrence and Bonchurch and the ruins of a small 13<sup>th</sup> century stone manor house at Woolverton, St Lawrence (Lloyd and Pevsner 2006, 252).
- Only four 17<sup>th</sup> century dwellings are recorded in the HER, these being Woolverton Manor House, Bank End Farmhouse, The Old Cottage (later incorporated in Sea Cottage/Marine Villa) and Old Park Cottage.
- 42 buildings of 18<sup>th</sup> century date are recorded in the HER, mainly farmhouses, farm buildings and cottages but including the 'Old Manor House' at Ventnor and the Buddle Inn at Niton Undercliff.
- *Cottages ornés* and *marine villas*, often with substantial grounds, occur throughout the Undercliff. These were built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century but, as mentioned above, sometimes incorporated modest existing buildings.
  - Surviving examples of note outside the main areas of settlement include Puckaster House, 'The Orchard', Mirables, Old Park, The Old Cottage/ St Lawrence Cottage (formerly Sea Cottage alias Marine Villa) and Lisle Combe.
- Niton Undercliff was also developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - This area around Sandrock Road, St Catherine's Road and Cattlehaven Lane still has a strong historic built environment character with a predominance of substantial gothic-styled stone built properties although some properties and their grounds have been lost e.g. the Royal Sandrock Hotel.
- The Victorian character of Bonchurch is even stronger. There are numerous notable properties of 19<sup>th</sup> century date including East Dene, Compton Undermount, Undermount Lodge, Under Rock, Woodlynch, Madeira Hall, Winterbourne, Pulpit Roack, Westfield House and Peacock Vane.
  - In many cases these properties still stand in substantial gardens.
- Ventnor has the character of a small Victorian seaside town, built mainly in the local greensand stone but also having buildings of brick and of flint.
  - Properties are generally more modest than in Bonchurch and Niton Undercliff but on the western fringe of the town there are larger houses close to Ventnor Park, an attractive public facility of late 19<sup>th</sup> century origin.
  - The town centre retains much of its Victorian period character but has been affected by shop closures in the recent past.
  - From the town centre Shore Hill descends steeply in a zigzag past the Winter Gardens and the Cascade Garden to the Esplanade and the beach.
  - Ventnor Cascade Garden was created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, utilising the waterfall which originally descended from the mill when Ventnor was still a hamlet (Lloyd and Pevsner 2006, 287; Whitehead 1911, 120-121).
  - The Winter Gardens building in 'modern movement' style is a dominant and interesting example of the inter war period when seaside holidays were very popular. See Ventnor Character Appraisal [http://www.iwight.com/living\\_here/conservation\\_and\\_design/images/Ventnor\\_CA\\_CharacterStatement.pdf](http://www.iwight.com/living_here/conservation_and_design/images/Ventnor_CA_CharacterStatement.pdf)

- St Catherine's Lighthouse, built in 1838-1840, survives as a prominent local landmark although it is not now manned.
  - Lighthouse keepers' quarters of the same date also survive.
- 19<sup>th</sup> century coastguard cottages survive at Blackgang, Reeth Bay, Woody Bay, Ventnor (West Street) and Orchard Bay (almost unrecognisable).

### Relationships with other HEAP Areas

- The Undercliff was quite isolated from other parts of the Island until wealthy tourists started to visit in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century but the territories of parishes and estates demonstrate that there were important religious, tenurial and agricultural links with other HEAP Areas from Anglo-Saxon times.

### Time-Depth

- In geological terms the Undercliff is of recent origin but, paradoxically, it provides visual evidence of great time-depth in land-slide events dating from late glacial times to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Routes leading from the Undercliff to the rest of the Island are likely to be of great antiquity.
  - The 'Cripple Path' and 'St Rhadegund's Path' are examples of ancient paths that have survived as modern Rights of Way.
- Some existing boundaries have ancient origins including:
  - A boundary that formed part of the western edge of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Wroxall Estate and also the St Lawrence/Godshill parish boundary.
  - Boundaries demarcating the medieval estates of Mirables and Old Park, the original western boundary of Mirables also being the Niton/Whitwell parish boundary.
- Surviving areas of *field patterns* and individual surviving field boundaries are fairly limited and are difficult to date but require further study.
- The medieval churches of St Lawrence and Bonchurch are of interest in their own right and mark the sites of medieval manorial settlements.
- The ruin of the tiny 13<sup>th</sup> century Woolverton Manor is the only secular medieval building to survive.
- The surviving early *cottages ornés* and *marine villas* with their grounds, dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, represent an important 'layer' in the time-depth of the Undercliff.
- Large Victorian properties and their grounds, especially in Bonchurch and Niton Undercliff, are visually important.
- The street pattern of Ventnor is Victorian, as are most of the buildings within the town.
- A 19<sup>th</sup> century/early 20<sup>th</sup> century fishing settlement is preserved at Steephill Cove.
- Other 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings relating to the sea include St Catherine's Lighthouse, the lighthouse keepers' cottages and coastguard cottages.
- The site of Ventnor Botanic Gardens is on that of the Royal National Hospital, founded in the 1860s, and the grounds retain features of the hospital era.
- Some parts of the Old Blackgang Road between Chale and Niton survive.
- Later 20<sup>th</sup> century residential development occurs mainly between St Lawrence and Ventnor.

### Contribution of Historic Landscape to Present Landscape Character

- Historic landscape features of some antiquity have contributed to present landscape character e.g. historic roads and rights of way, medieval holdings and their boundaries and the locations of early settlements and churches at St Lawrence and Bonchurch.
- However, present landscape character is influenced most strongly by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century development of the Undercliff as a *Picturesque* landscape with gothic-style buildings and designed grounds.

- When viewed from the top of the inner cliff, the 19<sup>th</sup> century seaside town of Ventnor is quite dominant in the landscape but blends harmoniously with the less developed parts of the Undercliff.
- The smaller 19<sup>th</sup> century settlements of Bonchurch and Niton Undercliff also contribute very significantly to present landscape character.
- The *secondary woodland* of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century date is a dominant feature in the present landscape.
- Stone boundary walls are a distinctive landscape feature.

### Values, Perceptions and Associations

- The Undercliff has been valued from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century for its picturesque and dramatic landscape. This landscape is still valued today.
- *Secondary woodland* that has developed from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is now perceived by many people to be an important aspect of the Area's landscape character, particularly on either side of the Undercliff Drive.
- In Victorian times The Undercliff (and Ventnor in particular) was perceived to have health-giving properties.
- Bonchurch has literary associations with Charles Dickens, who stayed briefly at Winterbourne whilst writing *David Copperfield*, and with Swinburne, who was born at East Dene.
- Two 20<sup>th</sup> century writers lived and worked in the Undercliff (Champion and Downer 1997, 40-41).
  - In 1936 H de Vere Stacpoole published a book of poems called 'In a Bonchurch Garden', based on his home at Cliff Dene.
  - The poet Alfred Noyes lived at Lisle Combe and his book 'Orchard's Bay' (1939) drew its inspiration from his garden and the nearby coast.
- Knowles Farm near St Catherine's Point is associated with Marconi's pioneering radio transmissions made between 1900 and 1902.
- Today, Ventnor is valued as a highly distinctive small seaside resort.
- The Ventnor Botanic Garden is valued for its important collections of plants from temperate locations around the world and is included in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.
- Local people and visitors value the coastline and beaches.
- The beaches at Ventnor and Steephill Cove each have a strong but distinct period character. Ventnor Beach retains the feel of a traditional small seaside resort. Steephill Cove still retains the character of a small fishing community.
- The visual impact of Blackgang Chine Theme Park and its car park is quite dominant in a limited area when viewed from above the inner cliff.
- In recent years Undercliff Drive has become a busy summer tourist route and this has had an impact on the peace and tranquillity of the Area.
- Sea defences have had an impact on the natural feel of the landscape.

### Research and Documentation

- The Historic Environment Record is the basic resource for archaeology, built environment and historic landscape character (includes HLC layer).
  - The results of the 1999 coastal audit are incorporated in the HER.
- Various geomorphological Studies of the Undercliff have been referred to above (Halcrow 1997; Hutchinson 1987; Insole et. al. 1998; Moore et al 1995).
- *Sandown Bay and Undercliff Coastal Defence Strategy Study* is in preparation.  
<http://www.coastalwight.gov.uk/studies.htm>
- Some of the most significant archaeological discoveries in the Undercliff are discussed in Tomalin (2000).

- There are also archaeological and historical surveys of the National Trust's St Catherine's and Ventnor Downs estates which include material related to the Undercliff (Currie 2001; Currie 2002).
- *The Undercliff of the Isle of Wight* by J L Whitehead (1911) is useful for tenurial history and local detail, although dated in many respects
- The Undercliff is an important area for research into the *Picturesque Movement* of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Properties influenced by this movement have been studied by Boynton (1996).
  - The area was exceptionally well recorded by artists and engravers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see McInnes 1990, 1993).
- The Isle of Wight Gardens Trust Register (unpublished) describes the main Undercliff houses and their gardens.
- *Character Appraisals* have been prepared by the Isle of Wight Council for the *Conservation Areas* of Ventnor and Bonchurch.
- The Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society have carried out a pilot survey of Undercliff boundaries for the HEAP Project and hope to do further work in the future.

### **Amenity and Education**

- Long distance coastal path runs from Luccombe to St Lawrence.
- The National Trust holds land at St Catherine's and the Landslip to which the public have open access.
- The Bonchurch Landslip has been used for public recreation from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and was developed as a public open space by Ventnor Urban District Council in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is now crossed by the coastal path.
- Ventnor Botanic Garden (Isle of Wight Council) has an educational display geared to the needs of school parties.
  - The Council also operates the Coastal Visitors Centre at Ventnor which has a display exploring the Island's coast and its management.
- Displays at the commercial Blackgang Chine Museum explain the history of local landslips and the development of the chine as a tourist attraction.
- St Catherine's Lighthouse is open to the public at certain times.

### **Features of Particular Significance within this HEAP Area**

- Highly distinctive geomorphology with evidence of past landslip processes.
- The archaeology of the Area has distinctive features in relation to that of other HEAP Areas and offers potential for further archaeological discoveries, especially on the coast.
- Historic Rights of Way and boundaries.
- The Undercliff as a 'cultural landscape' - affecting and being affected by aesthetic sensibilities from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century properties sometimes occupy the site of earlier estates and a few have pre 19<sup>th</sup> century building phases.
  - Many of these properties have significant designed gardens.
- Blackgang Landslip - a wild area of broken ground to the west of St Catherine's Point - offers a dramatic contrast with the more developed parts of The Undercliff.
  - This area contains significant archaeological traces of former land use, 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, and the old Blackgang Road.
- The Bonchurch Landslip - a significant area of open landscape.
  - Used as open grazing by the Manor of Bonchurch until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Developed in Victorian times as a picturesque woodland walk, complete with the natural horrors of 'The Devil's Chimney' and 'The Chink' as well as the romantic 'Wishing Stone'.

- The Victorian seaside townscape of Ventnor and the more genteel and romantic Victorian character of Bonchurch.
  - Although Ventnor contains relatively few buildings of great architectural merit it has the advantages of a dramatic, highly attractive and unusual setting.
- Fishing Village at Steephill Cove.

## **VULNERABILITY**

### **Rarity and Typicality**

- The Undercliff is an unusual landscape feature that can be paralleled only in a few other coastal areas of England.
- The *Picturesque* Undercliff properties and their grounds offer an unusual concentration of high-class 19<sup>th</sup> century holiday residences.

### **Coherence**

- The Area retains a basically coherent 19<sup>th</sup> century character despite later development, the loss of some significant buildings and change caused by ground instability and coastal erosion.
  - Ventnor has retained its coherence as a Victorian town despite some wartime bombing, post-war demolition and suburban development.
- Earlier land use remains are more fragmentary although it has been demonstrated how they underpin the 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape.

### **Condition and Fragility**

- Ground instability and coastal erosion, whilst it has exposed many archaeological sites, also causes the continuing loss of these sites, often unrecorded.
- Several properties of historic significance have been lost to ground instability.
  - Several other historic buildings and their grounds will also be lost in the medium-term.
- Undercliff Drive is still classified as an 'A' road but is already restricted to one-way traffic controlled by traffic lights at one point and may become unviable as a motor road at some time in the future.

## **CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

### **Forces for Change**

- Ground instability and erosion is a major force for change.
  - Erosion has led to the closure of Rights of Way, including paths following the coast from St Lawrence to Niton.
  - The character of Undercliff Drive will change in the future if it becomes unviable as a motor road.
  - The attractions at Blackgang Chine are gradually being moved further inland and are also changing in character as fewer families with young children visit the Island.
- *Secondary woodland* may continue to develop except where managed.
- Traditional 'bucket and spade' tourism in Ventnor is declining but new tourist-related businesses are developing, such as coastal pubs and bookshops.
- There may be pressure for building developments in significant 19<sup>th</sup> century gardens attached to large houses.

## Management Issues

- Need to maintain coastal archaeological monitoring, including further research into the relationship between archaeological features and earth movements.
- Need for a research project to study the historic landscape of The Undercliff as a whole in order to understand the development of the Area more thoroughly.
  - This should comprise both documentary research and fieldwork, including the examination of surviving field patterns and estate boundaries as well as the further examination of stone boundary walls.
- All surviving areas of fields and open land should be managed to prevent further spread of *secondary woodland*, both in order to maintain the varied landscape character of the Undercliff and to preserve elements of historic land use.
- Need to maintain historic field boundaries and estate boundaries.
- Need to maintain rights of way whenever possible within an Area affected by ground instability.
- Need to maintain largely undeveloped aspect of inner cliff and to be aware of the impact of inappropriate development on views out from and into the Undercliff.
- Need to conserve large 19<sup>th</sup> century properties and gardens wherever possible.
- Need to record significant properties and their grounds where these are threatened by ground instability or coastal erosion.
- Possible need for re-evaluation of the Area's historic buildings.
  - Some significant 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings are unlisted and the true significance of other buildings may not be reflected by their Grade II Listed Building status.
- Need to maintain Ventnor's character whilst encouraging sustainable new investment in the town.
- Need to maintain character of Steephill Cove.
  - It may be appropriate to carry out a *Character Appraisal*, leading to the possible designation of a *Conservation Area*.

## Conservation Designations

- AONB includes western half of Undercliff as far as Steephill (excluding built-up area of St Lawrence) and land from northern end of Landslip to outskirts of Shanklin.
- Tennyson *Heritage Coast* includes western section of Undercliff coastline as far as Steephill.
- No *Scheduled Monuments* within this HEAP Area.
- *Conservation Areas* at St Lawrence, Ventnor and Bonchurch.
- 125 Listed Buildings, of which five are Grade II\* (The Cottage/Old Cottage alias Sea Cottage, Old Manor House at Ventnor, Lisle Combe, Madeira Hall Hotel, East Dene), the rest being Grade II. The listed buildings include the medieval churches of St Lawrence and St Boniface, a 17<sup>th</sup> century manor house and associated medieval ruins (Woolverton), cottages ornés and marine villas of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries such as Puckaster House, Mirables and Compton Undermount, 19<sup>th</sup> century urban buildings at Ventnor, a few vernacular farmhouses and cottages and the 19<sup>th</sup> century St Catherine's Lighthouse.
- Ventnor Botanic Garden is included in the *English Heritage Register* of Historic Parks and Gardens.
- Puckaster House, Old Park, Ventnor Park, Ventnor Cascade Gardens and Luccombe Chine House are listed as historic *parks or gardens of local interest* in the Isle of Wight Council Unitary Development Plan.
- Undercliff coastline falls within South Wight Maritime SAC.
- There are two SSSIs within the HEAP Area ('Compton Chine to Steephill' and 'Bonchurch Landslips').
- There are 16 SINC's within the Area, covering much of the coastline and several sections of the inner cliff.



## **FUTURE MANAGEMENT**

The Isle of Wight HEAP Objectives and Actions are set out in a separate document. These objectives and actions are generic and many of them are relevant to all HEAP Areas. Actions that are most relevant to this HEAP Area are cited below.

A10. Completion of Coastal HEAP.

A11. Seek funding for long term coastal archaeology recording project.

A12. Complete Field Patterns HEAP.

A13. Identify field patterns of significance.

A14. Complete Rural Settlement HEAP.

A15. Complete Urban Settlement HEAP.

A16. Complete character appraisals for all existing and potential Conservation Areas.

A17. Investigate and record condition of all archaeological earthworks within the Open Land and other HEAP Types.

A22. Complete HEAP for Parkland/Designed Landscapes.

A23. Complete HEAP for Roads, Lanes, Tracks and Rail Lines.

A24. Complete field survey of historic Rights of Way.

A28. Complete Boundaries HEAP.

A35. Promote conservation of historic farm buildings and ensure that character is maintained if converted.

A39. Promote the retention of significant historic Field Patterns.

A48. Promote the conservation of historic buildings and their settings.

A51. Support the conservation of historic parks, gardens, cemeteries and public open spaces.