



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Wyatt's Stores: the village shop that survived



Yes, this little village store is still there: on Newport Road in Lowtherville. In fact, the frontage has not altered a great deal from the time the premises were erected late in the nineteenth century, its flint facings wholly characteristic of many of the buildings on Newport Road that formed the core of the village of Lowtherville, later to be commonly known as Upper Ventnor.



The business was started by William Wyatt sometime in the mid-1890s. The 1891 Census records him as then aged 35, with a wife, Belinda, aged 28, and two infant children. He came originally from Wiltshire and worked as a journeyman baker in Ventnor before setting up the store. The photograph comes from the late Fay Brown's collection and there is a note that says it might be about 1913. Looking at the people in the photograph, a fair guess is that William stands in the doorway on the right and that the girl standing close to him is his younger daughter Frances (then aged about 14), for this is the entrance to their home. Her father would then have been about 53 which does not quite fit the face, so it is possible that the photo was taken a few years earlier. The identity of the young man in the shop doorway is unknown.

Generally, the shop windows and the paved yard in front conform to a pattern that was by this time common to most general village stores of this type. The right window appears to be stacked with biscuit tins, as biscuits were sold loose, the broken bits that were left at the bottom of the tin often sold to hungry youngsters for a penny or less. All the crates outside are probably for empty beer bottles, while on the right side you can make out some galvanised buckets that nearly every household possessed. The signage in the windows for Fry's Cocoa and chocolate and for Cadbury's chocolate were near universal, such was the success of these two proprietary brands by this time.

William Wyatt died in 1920, aged 60, but his widow continued the business until her death in 1943, helped by her two daughters. In more recent time, the shop has been run by a succession of different people, invariably struggling against the tide of supermarket shopping. But, happily for those who live today in Lowtherville, it remains a convenience store.

Michael Freeman, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre. This article first appeared in the *South Wight Chronicle* on 20 August 2020.



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

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