



VENTNOR & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## Ventnor's 'Umbrella Surgeon'



The range and variety of goods that could be bought in Ventnor's shops over the first one hundred years of the town's existence seldom ceased to surprise its visitors. You could buy or rent almost every kind of musical instrument. You could obtain exotic fruits. You could buy examples of some of the best European china and porcelain.

Meanwhile, at Mr. Wightman's shop, 51 High Street around 1900, you could not only buy an umbrella but have one repaired. He would have enjoyed a lively trade, for Victorians and Edwardians used umbrellas as much in the sun as in the rain, keenly illustrated in early photographs of summertime on Ventnor beach where there are often swathes of large black umbrellas under which visitors can be seen to be sheltering.



Richard Wightman was 40 years old at the time of the 1901 Census, living over his shop at 51, High Street with wife Ellen and five children. Successive generations of the same family seem to have been in business in the town as umbrella makers, for in 1876, a Wightman was listed as an umbrella surgeon in Mill Street.

Richard Wightman, though, appears to have had another business activity on the side, for he was arrested in January 1905 and charged with using his premises as a betting shop. At the subsequent petty sessions, he was fined £20 plus costs, or face two months in prison. From the photograph, Wightman looks the most upright of townsmen, his wife peeping out at the photographer from the window above.

Michael Freeman, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, notably the index compiled by the late Fay Brown.



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](http://www.ventnorheritage.org.uk) / [Ventnor & District Heritage Facebook Group](https://www.facebook.com/Ventnor-District-Heritage-Facebook-Group)

