



## Lowtherville Shops in the 1940s and 1950s - part 1

Upper Ventnor – or as it was known in the early days, Lowtherville, has changed beyond all recognition in the last 70 or 80 years, not least of all the shopping habits of the residents and the shops they would regularly use.

The population has grown, of course, due to the huge increase in road and housebuilding in the area since the war. In the early 1940s there was no Downlands Crescent, no Gloucester Road and no Cornwall Road, while York Road was just a short, unmade track. Downside was created by the sale of the RAF accommodation in the 1960s and Littleton Close and Rew Close came even later. Finally, the St. Margaret's Glade estate was not constructed until the 1990s.

In the early years after WW2 most people did not have cars which meant that they needed to shop locally for their groceries, etc. and, fortunately, the area was well served by a large selection of retail establishments. Believe it or not, there were almost a dozen shops and retail establishments in the area in the 1940s & 1950s, extending from the top of St. Alban's Steps to the Wroxall-end of Newport Road, catering for most people's everyday needs.

At the junction of Gills Cliff Road and Newport Road, was **Newberry's** (officially The Grocery Store) run by E. & C. Newberry from 1919 to 1957 when they sold to Mr & Mrs. G. Reeves (this shop is now Ocean View Fish & Chips). Around the back of the fish & chip shop building, at the southerly junction of Newport Road and Steephilldown Road, was **Black's Drug Store**, opened in 1934 by Albert E Black. After Mr. Black's death, his widow continued to run the business, but in 1956 she was declared bankrupt, citing **the recently opened Rowridge television transmitter! She claimed that people were spending all their money on TV sets and not buying goods from her shop! Remember it was a CHEMISTS shop!!!** Constant land movement at the site resulted in eventual demolition.



On the northern side of this junction was **Lowther Post Office** – not just a post office but a thriving grocery shop trading as part of the “SPAR” franchise under the ownership of Mr. F.G. Morris. (*Note: this post office, was always 'Lowther' not 'Lowtherville' Post Office, even when it re-located to 29 Newport Road in the 1970s*)

At the top of the “Old Shute” (always known as “the Cut”) was Pietro (Pete) Cortesi's shoe repair shop, fronting on Newport Road (now part of Ventnor Auto Care) which he opened in 1951 under the name of **'Express Repairs**. Pete was an accomplished leather worker, specialising in shoe-making and repairing, who came to the Island as an Italian prisoner-of-war, met and married his wife Pat (known in the family as Noni) in 1947 and settled in Ventnor.

Further up the road, at the junction of Down Lane and Newport Road, was **Burt's Off-License**. The original building was opened in 1870 by “The Carrara Monumental Company” to provide headstones for the graves in the cemetery opposite. In 1936, Mr W. A. Phillips of Burt's Brewery bought the premises and applied to the IW County Licensing Magistrates to transfer their license from 17 Pier Street to this building. *Before the license was granted, the local vicar, the Rev A. G. Woodnutt, and a group of prominent businessmen, strongly objected to the proposal, saying they did not want the open sale of alcohol opposite the Cemetery gates, and Mr. G. A. Jessop objected to “his doorstep being used as a dumping ground for a redundant license!” Asked how far away his doorstep was, he said “40 yards”. The Magistrate, Sir Godfrey Baring, said “That's a long doorstep” ....and promptly granted the license!* The off-license closed in 1992, and reverted to private accommodation.

Adjacent to the off-license is the **Ventnor Social Club** in Down Lane, which came into being in 1961 having been known as 'Lowtherville Social Club' for the previous 32 years. At the very top of Down Lane was **Sprack's Garage** run by brothers Alf & Bill Sprack, with occasional help from 'Beau' Wheeler. Although not strictly a 'shop', the garage was busy with the gradual increase in car ownership in the 1950s. The site of the garage is where the first bungalow in Littleton Close is now situated. (*Part 2 next week*)

*Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis (Acknowledgement: Between 1992 & 2002 the late Fay Hewitt Brown published five booklets for the Society, entitled 'Lowtherville Life' & 'Up Shute', These have enabled me, along with my own memories, to compile this article for the South Wight Chronicle).*