On Friday 29th January 1954, during the lunchtime closing hour, a fire was started on the premises, 53 High Street, Ventnor, when the cat knocked over a small electric fire behind the shop counter. There was nobody in the shop at the time and few people in the street, so it was a while before an alarm was given out. When local Fire Station officer, George Pitts, arrived, part of the shop was well ablaze and a large stock of men's clothing had been either burnt or damaged. As the firemen sought to gain control, members of the public, assisted by Police Constable G. Parslow, helped to salvage undamaged stock and take it into nearby adjacent premises as well as the Central Hotel and Nigh's shop opposite. Meanwhile, Wally Zuber's café and the WVS supported the firemen with refreshments. The Newport fire crew came with breathing apparatus, but it did not prove necessary to use it. Mrs Gibbs Senior, who lived above the shop, was fortunately able to get out of the building unaffected. The one casualty was the cat, probably overcome by smoke and fumes.

Some £3,500 worth of damage was done to the business, to the building as well as its contents, the price of a small detached house at the time. A number of valuable antiques were lost to the inferno, including several fine oil paintings and a model ship made of bone that had been carved by a French prisoner-of-war some 150 years before, i.e. about 1800.

The shop re-opened later that year and the business remained active until 1962 when closure was announced, with a huge pre-Christmas sale.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, especially the voluminous Index compiled by the late Fay Brown.