



Pietro (Pete) Cortesi

In 1939, at the beginning of the Second World War, 19-year-old Pietro Cortesi signed up to join the Italian Army. Little did he know that one day, he would become a well-known resident of Ventnor!

His daughters take up the story: *During the war he was captured by the Allies, and put into a prisoner-of-war camp, but he complained about the conditions (!) and was classed as a troublemaker, so was told that he would be sent to the Isle of Wight. He arrived on a beautiful sunny day and he thought 'Why have they sent me here?' This started his love affair with the Isle of Wight.*

He was billeted in the large Manor House in Strathwell Park in Whitwell where he became cook for the other fifty-three POW's. Most of the other detainees were put to work on the land as they had no useful skills but 'Pete' was an accomplished leather worker (as well as a cook, apparently), specialising in shoemaking and repairing. He soon put those skills to good use in the community and it was because of his expertise as a shoemaker, that he met his wife Pat (known to the family as 'Noni'), after he made a pair of sandals for her mother!

Pete and Noni were married in St Thomas's Catholic Chapel on December 27th 1947. They had three children, Carla, Mara and Enrico (known as Nikki). Carla was the only one to stay in Ventnor and straight from school worked in the family shoe shop on the corner of Albert Street and Dudley Road. Pete opened this 'drop-in' shop whilst he had the workshop in Upper Ventnor, so that customers could take and collect shoes for repair without going 'up shute'.



Pete had opened his first business, which he called 'Express Repairs', in 1951, in a building in Newport Road, at the top of The Shute. When he closed this shop in Upper Ventnor, he re-located to the old fish & chip shop in Spring Hill (opposite the Heritage Museum – which is now the Spring Hill Garden site). At the same time, he went into partnership with Mr Wright of Ryde Surgical Stores, which not only meant the supervision of the manufacture of surgical footwear, but also involved him in running several orthopaedic clinics on the mainland as well as St Mary's Hospital, Newport.



When the Spring Hill premises were demolished he moved to Victoria Street, where he remained until his retirement. At one time he had contracts with St Catherine's Home (now called St. Catherine's School) and RAF Ventnor, plus repairs from three retail shops in the town.

After retirement, he sold his equipment to local locksmith, Tony Adcock, who, with his wife, Viv, ran a shoe shop in the High Street, enabling Tony to continue to offer a local repair service. In addition to Tony, Kevin Garlick (still with a shop in the High Street) and Jason Mansel (with a shop in Shanklin), were also able to benefit from Pete's extensive knowledge and expertise.

Pete died on October 22nd 2013 aged 93, but his legacy lives on.

The top photo was taken in 1939 when he joined the Italian Army. The lower photo, which is how we all remember him, in his workshop in Victoria Street.

Colin Beavis, Ventnor & District Local History Society, with thanks to Pete's two daughters, Carla Haygarth and Mara Fraser, for information and photographs.