



Giles and Ponder

GILES AND PONDER,
 (WAVELL KNIGHT, PROPRIETOR.)
 — PIANO AND MUSIC WAREHOUSE. —
Pianofortes for Sale or Hire.



Makers, Tuners and Repairers. Dealers in all kinds of Musical Instruments. All the Newest Music. Hire System Terms, or Liberal Discount for Cash.
 London Music Parcel Daily.
 Telephone No. 1a.

3, SPRING HILL, VENTNOR.

Giles & Ponder established their music warehouse in Ventnor in the year 1881. But they remained with the business for just 7 years, disposing of it to Mrs. W.J. Knight, a member of the bookseller, library and stationer dynasty founded by Stephen Knight in 1849. Mrs. Knight appointed her son, Wavell, to run it, a man already well-known in local circles as a music entrepreneur who laid on concerts and other amusements. By 1897, he had become lessee of the new Summer Pavilion on the Esplanade, in partnership with Hubert Cloots, who was then proprietor of both the Queen's Hotel (later the Metropole) and the Royal Hotel.

This particular picture is taken from Mate's Guide to the town, dated 1905. The building is, of course, very much intact today, its curved façade eminently recognisable, the shop premises now a launderette.

Giles & Ponder did not, in fact, establish at this location. They were first at the rather handsome 15 High Street. Here there was a suite of showrooms in which were displayed pianofortes by celebrated makers such as Broadwood, Erard and Bechstein. They also had

'yacht' pianos, American organs, together with a whole variety of stringed, reed and brass instruments. The business was renowned, too, for its collection of sheet music, with parcels arriving almost daily from publishers. If you needed your piano tuned or repaired, Giles & Ponder could oblige, using a skilled in-house staff.

The Island gentry and aristocracy formed the core of the company's clientèle. When Wavell Knight took charge of the business in 1889, the premises at 15 High Street were part of the deal and he is recorded in the 1901 Census as living there with his wife Helen and little daughter Theodora. Within a few years, though, Knight's had vacated 15 High Street, replaced by Williams & Co., Ironmongers, an import from Shoobred & Co., London. It was then that Giles & Ponder moved to 3, Spring Hill, but in 1912 the business moved again, this time to 95 High Street. This seems to have become the focus of the piano and organ repair business, still overseen by Wavell Knight who had originally been a trained piano tuner. He remained, though, in charge of Knight's sheet music business, which was carried on at the Knight's long-standing premises at 147/149 High Street.

Sadly, Wavell Knight died in 1916, aged only 51. The sheet music business was continued by a member of the Knight family until 1937 when it was wound up. Whether the business of selling pianos and organs ceased on Wavell's death is unclear. But it is evident that the well-off families and visitors that had once been such important patrons were, by the 1920s, far fewer in number. Many of Ventnor's leading businesses, all with their fine premises, were seeing profits dwindling. As Bart Russell remarked, the proprietors who once paraded outside their premises in immaculate morning dress, displaying manners that would have graced any company, were fading fast.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman. From files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



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 / telephone 855407

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