



In December 1906, 26 year old Philip Bagwell wrote to his fiancé Nell Aldrich that he had found the ideal shop for their future - the newsagent and stationers shop at 74 High Street in Ventnor. He bought it in 1907. It is in the centre of the picture here, with the sign 'Daily Papers', and the building is still recognisable, now *Distinctive Designs*, although the Congregational Church and the Globe Hotel that stood opposite are now gone.



Philip and Nell were from Kent, and family responsibilities meant that Nell stayed working there as a telephonist until June 1910 when they were finally able to marry. They spent a week in Llanberis in Snowdonia, knowing that running the shop would mean they would have to take future holidays separately.

They ran the business together, as well as sharing the raising of their three children, Joan, Gwen and Philip, and it was hard work. Parcels of papers came each morning by train and boat from London to Ventnor Station, and were wheeled down the hill to the shop by a man with a long barrow. It was then a great rush to get the papers unpacked ready for the regular orders and repacked into parcels for the surrounding villages. Daughter Joan wrote: *'one of us would run down towards the bus with the Niton parcel - down the high street, left down Market*

*Street, and then up the other side to Albert Street for the bus . . . the driver would wait for you if someone saw you coming - he knew the Niton people wanted their morning papers.'*

On the left hand side of the shop front was the shop door, and on the right was another narrow door, with a step up from the street - this was the side entrance for the family, and it led into a passage running all the way to the back of the building. There was a door into the shop, and a steep staircase leading up to the first floor rooms - two single bedrooms at the front, and at the back two more bedrooms facing south. Between the front and back bedrooms was a passage with a wash stand, a basin, a can for carrying water, and a slipper bath hung on the wall - water was carried up daily from the kitchen to fill the bath. On Saturday nights, crowds of men waiting for a copy of the Football Mail would queue up in the shop, and then, once they had taken and paid for their paper, they would leave through the door into the passage, and then out of side door into the street. The sound of their tramping feet and excited voices were a familiar sound to the young children in the upstairs bedroom.

The newspaper business was supplemented by producing postcards, and selling stationery, Christmas cards and fireworks. And the last few years before the first world war were good ones for Ventnor and for the Bagwell family, with fine weather, plenty of visitors and pleasant social events like the golden wedding celebration held in 1913 by John Morgan Richards and his wife *'a banquet for 200 people in the Congregational Hall. Each man present was given a new briar pipe and an ounce of tobacco. They all 'lit up' after the meal. Each of the ladies in attendance was given a half pound of tea.'*

All that changed with the outbreak of war.

Philip and Nell were both deeply religious. They frequently walked five miles to the Niton Baptist Church, and Philip in particular was interested in the 'New Theology' of J.R. Campbell, who wrote: *'We must establish a social order wherein a man can be free to be his best, and to give his best to the community without crushing or destroying anyone else. In a word, we want collectivism in the palace of competition . . . Charity is no remedy for our social ills . . . the only remedy is a new social organisation on a Christian basis.'*

Philip believed that war was contrary to the teaching of Christ. He would not support the war either directly (in the armed forces) or indirectly (as a stretcher bearer or clerk); he refused to put on uniform or attend a medical. He was court-martialled in January 1917 and served 27 months in prison, including hard labour. He was not released until April 1919.

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