



## Shopping in Ventnor one Friday morning in 1972... but under candlelight

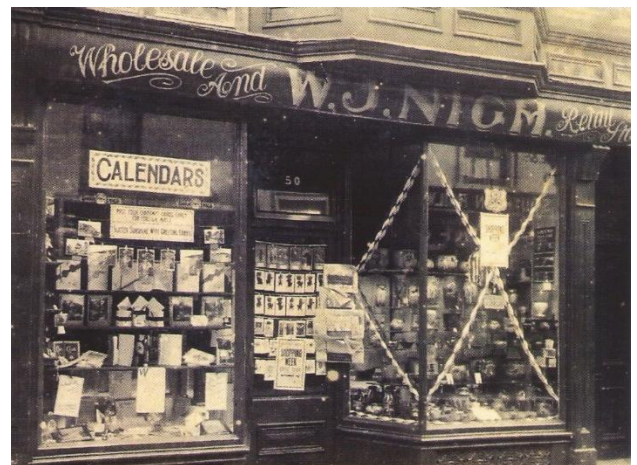


For those old enough to remember, this was the time of Prime Minister Edward Heath's Conservative government, and, more especially, the miners' strike of January-February 1972. The interruption of coal supplies to power stations forced the government to ration electricity supplies, both to industry and to households. All across the country, ordinary consumers found themselves periodically cast into darkness as the power went off according to pre-announced times. Stanley Cotton was a regular writer (or columnist) for the *Isle of Wight Mercury* and early in 1972, he contributed a piece entitled 'Ventnor under Candlelight', a story about what happened on one of his regular Friday morning shopping trips to Ventnor from Niton where he lived.

*Richway's* was his first port of call, the grocery store located where the present Co-op stands. But, oh dear, the closed signs were up, owing to the power being off. 'Shades of shoplifters' was his rather droll remark. Next he tried *International Stores*, located between *Boots* and the *Blenheim*. They were indeed open, but practically no trade was being done. Candles had been set up at strategic intervals all over the shop giving it 'the appearance of an ancient crypt'. He wondered whether he should break into a hymn,

but did not have courage enough. Next stop was across to *Field's*, menswear. He had his eye on some 'sale' pyjamas from a previous shopping foray. He had wondered if the price may have been reduced further from the last week's £1.65 (decimal money). But no luck, they were still '82 and a half pence per leg', which Stanley deemed 'rather a lot'.

*Nigh's* was another port of call, at 50, High Street. Here the gentleman in charge was rather apologetically presiding over a counter illuminated by a hurricane lamp. Stanley thought it gave a rather cosy appearance. What he went there to buy was unrecorded. He now doubled back to *Barnett's* the butchers at 38 High Street. Here Stanley turned mischievous. There were two candles and a feeble nightlight on display, but the main illumination, so he claimed, came from the lady who regularly presided, often sporting the kind of cap once worn by mariners, known as a 'cheese-cutter'. Stanley left this lady nameless, but good authority tells me that it was Dorcas Barnett, the butcher's wife, who was typically to be seen manning the little ticket window towards the rear of the shop where you paid for your bacon, sausages or faggots served from across the counter.



Meanwhile, back across the road from *Barnetts*, Stanley could not help but notice the rather palatial brick premises of the *SEB* (Southern Electricity Board). No lights here at all!!! The ultimate insult. Just a large banner saying 'Red-hot bargains in the Firelight Festival'. Poor Stanley was not impressed.

For the benefit of the more youthful readers of the *Chronicle*, the miners' strike eventually turned into a wider touse about who governed Britain, or, at least, this is how Prime Minister Heath sought to cast it. He called an election on the issue and lost his parliamentary majority, allowing the Labour Party under Harold Wilson to gain power again early in 1974.

*Ventnor & District Local History Society*: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre, with help from Lynne Siequien and Colin Beavis. The upper image is from the late Fay Brown, the lower one is courtesy of W.J. Nigh & Sons.



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.

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