

## Frazer Armitage Growing Up and Working in a Family Guesthouse in Scarborough

### Interviewer and Transcriber: Huw Roberts

Today I'm talking to Frazer Armitage. Frazer's grandparents moved from Leeds to Scarborough and bought a house overlooking Peasholm Park. Later, they converted that house into a family guesthouse. It would have been typical of several hundreds of such guesthouses operating in the town. Frazer grew up in that house, which continued as a guesthouse throughout his childhood, and I'm interested in talking to Frazer about the experience of the family having to deal with a fairly long season of operating as a guesthouse.

*Frazer, tell me just what it was like to be a boy growing up from his early days in a small family guesthouse.*

Thank you Huw. Really preparation started for the season probably after Christmas on New Year's Day, I always remember Dad getting very excited around that time sitting at the kitchen table preparing a manual spreadsheet for each of the seven bedrooms in each week of the coming season so he could fill them in when people started to ring the guest house number. The phone would actually start ringing in early January and you could pretty much already write down which week and which bedroom each visitor would stay in because we had a whole number of recurring visitors for many, many years.

It was always interesting to me though, that certain guests did get preferential treatment. A couple of stories I always remember old Les from Nottinghamshire, he used to come to all the cricket matches. He was a farmer in Nottinghamshire and one of his fields was next to a golf course. My dad at the time was a very keen golfer and Les soon realised if he brought a big bag of golf balls found in his field he would get a double room at the back of the house all to himself and maybe an extra sausage in the morning. But I also remember a potato farmer from South Cave in East Yorkshire now. They would come up in August every year with a great big sack of potatoes for all the guests to have throughout that week they were staying. They also got a nice room looking over Peasholm Park.

The season started at Easter and the week before Easter, my brother, my sister and I, we used to hate that time of year. It was the time when the three of us and my mum and dad had to vacate our bedrooms that we'd occupied through the colder winter months. My brother and my dad, they slept in a small corner of the loft in a very dark room, my brother being on a camp bed. My mum slept on a camp bed in the small family living room downstairs and my sister was on a board that covered up the family bath in the bathroom. Myself, as a small child, I slept on a board as well, at the bottom of the stairs leading to the top floor, a curtain was pulled across and I was told to keep quiet so visitors wouldn't be poking their nose through and staring at me. Many did and I was often called a 'poor little bugger' for what I had to go through.

It was when I was 12 years old that I actually started working in the family guest house and it was great to be honest. My dad paid me a decent wage and I earned lots of tips by being a cheeky 12 year old to all the guests. My job really was to wait on in the morning. Well, first of all I was up early preparing all the tables in the downstairs dining room, filling up the sauce bottles with tomato sauce, HP sauce, and filling up the cornflake box cornflakes. Setting the tables ready for the day. The bell would ring at 8:45 and all visitors would come down. They had the choice of just cereal and toast. No one ever took that. They had one cereal and then a very hearty breakfast, which was the same each day, fried egg, a sausage, a couple of rashers of bacon, grilled tomato and some beans. They also only had tea. My father was really put out when anyone asked for coffee. Evening meals were 5:00 pm. The bell would ring at 5:00 pm and if you weren't then sadly your meal would go cold. So we were quite strict in the regime. Saturdays were changeover day and my Auntie Betty would come down to help out my mum. She would come with a carload of fresh laundry, sheets, bedding, pillow covers etc. and my mum and Betty would spend all Saturday morning changing beds, hoovering the rooms and giving the whole house of real dust over. I was given a lovely job, washing the basins and the toilets.

My dad was quite ruthless as a businessman and he really really wanted people to pay as they arrived, obviously nervous about non-payers. We never, ever had any occasions of that. Many of the people who visited from those areas of South Yorkshire and the Northeast tended to rock up on the Saturday and pay cash for the week, so they never ran out of money or they could budget their daily spending in Scarborough. Some others would actually pay by cheque on the Friday and, again, it was made my job to subtly place their bill in

front of them between their pudding and their cup of tea in their evening meal on the Friday.

Other perks, other than the tips, it was great. We used to put up a big board in the dining room, showing everybody what shows were on for the season in Scarborough. Some great acts like Les Dawson, Ken Dodd, the Grumbleweeds, and The Krankies. They would be on at the Futurist, the Opera House and the Floral Hall. In return for that, Scarborough Council would also give us two free tickets to all these shows. My dad was never interested, but I used to enjoy going to these shows with my mother.

*Thank you for that colourful description of running a guesthouse as a family. What would you say was the most dramatic incident that happened during all those years that you were working in the house?*

There were many incidents there but funnily enough, I think that the one that always sticks in all of our minds was the sad passing of an elderly guest in room No 8. I remember the bell ringing at 8:45 for everyone to come for their breakfasts, myself serving them on, and the being a blank seat at one of the tables in the dining room. We continued to ring the bell thinking he may have had a couple too many beers the night before and slept in. But by 9:00 am it was decided another guest would go up and knock on the door and sadly the elderly guest had passed away in room 8. Of course that meant there was a breakfast going spare and instead of offering it to any of the other guests, my father and I decided to share it before it went cold. So that was one of many, many memories of that time in the guest house.

*I'm sure and perhaps at some other time we can cover some more of those stories but in the meantime thank you very much Frazer for a lovely and colourful contribution.*