

Scarborough Sea Wall Heritage Trail Project.

Scarborough born Roberts Armitage Talks About Memories of Summer Vacation Jobs in Scarborough.

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Today I'm talking to Mr Robert Armitage who was born and bred in Scarborough and was a teenager living in the town during the 1960s and early 1970s. I'm interested in the opportunities that the town's young people were able to take advantage of as they looked for holiday jobs during their school and college vacations. Robert, would you please tell us of your experiences in getting work in those busy tourist times for Scarborough.

1970's Scarborough was rich pickings for vacation jobs for teenagers and students. This was an era before cheap package holidays to exotic sounding European destinations made the traditional week or fortnight holiday at the Yorkshire coast less appealing. From the age of fourteen there were always summer jobs that I could do. Starting with stacking shelves at the local convenience store and delivering supplies to anxious seaside landladies in time to meet the dinner deadlines. The rickety "Hovis" bike of the day was a far cry and much more dangerous than today's Deliveroo riders' electric version.

One season I decided that wearing a Donald Duck outfit to be a photographers model was a good idea. It wasn't. I endured a days of constant fun making and abuse by over familiar lassies on tour or unwilling toddlers being coerced into posing with an artificial and not very convincing Disney character. A better option seemed to be working in the local laundry. This was true until the effects of standing eight hours a day by a steam roller guiding the towns hotel and guesthouse linen sheets through the machine were felt by aching feet and starched finger tips. It was a great awakening to what some people did every day and not just for the summer. An eight hour day punctuated with a morning and afternoon tea break of fifteen minutes and half an hour for lunch didn't seem like much respite from the daily toil. It seemed incredible that there could be so many sheets in the town, but back then there were an awful lot of visitors.

Another season and another job. This time it was in the bakery loading the bread vans with shop, cafe and hotel orders before riding with the driver delivering those supplies. This was a shock to the student lifestyle of term time. You had to be up and with the delivery van at 4am and work through until the last delivery had been dropped. You went to places you knew of but didn't know what to expect below stairs. Public and private images can be quite different! From hotels that eventually fell into the sea to small cafes serving up a greasy spoon. Wherever we went we were always welcomed. I was always grateful for that fry up at about 9am. My driver had done the same route for years and was obviously loved by his regular customers. Stock was needed to feed the visitors or keep customers happy.

Working in the bakery was less fun if better hours, typically I worked an afternoon and evening shift. It was a hot and stuffy environment where you could stand for hours stuffing bread buns into plastic bags. So a trip to the gâteau fridge was welcome relief. The nightly dinner break was usually a trip for fish and chips.

My favourite job was the last one before graduating and leaving Scarborough in search of streets paved in gold. I worked in the newsagents kiosk opposite the Station. This was a prime position as many visitors would arrive by train in the 1970's. Scarborough then had a thriving conference trade and I would have former Prime Ministers, Leaders of Trade Unions, delegates of all kinds calling at the kiosk for their daily newspapers and cigarettes. This was a revelation to me. We sold numerous exotic sounding foreign newspaper titles which were snapped up by the language students in town. The broadsheets were preferred by the senior delegates at the conferences and the tabloids were for all customers. I never knew there were so many brands of cigarettes available. I used to play mental games guessing what brand the next customer would buy, the French ones for the actors at the Theatre in the Round, the unfiltered for the older male conference delegates, and No.6 for the everyday smoker. The real challenge of the job was the mental arithmetic. There were no fancy tills or card systems in those days. What customers bought had to be

calculated in your head and transacted in cash. Thankfully the UK had introduced decimal coinage, at least there were only two columns to add. Complex calculations of five or more items required pencil and paper. This was all done in the glare of a queue of impatient customers anxiously looking to see if you made a mistake. It was such a reward to hear “well done lad” when you gave the correct change to a customer. I have now no idea how much these jobs paid. I did it to save enough money for an end of season short holiday and to subsidise the entertainment while away at university.

The funds generally stretched out until mid-second term so a top up at Christmas was usually achieved by delivering the Christmas post. This was typically a one or two week job. I loved it. You walked the streets delivering much anticipated greetings from friends and family often in faraway lands. The joy of receiving the card was evidenced with gushing thanks and the occasional mug of hot tea. Easter break was always reserved for study, knowing you would be back for a summer job in only a few weeks’ time. These jobs taught me so many lessons, that there is great dignity in work and this really matters to people’s sense of self-worth as well as putting food on the table. Summer in Scarborough was when many folk made their annual living. It was hard work with long hours but a relatively short season. At the end of it a short break then back to planning the next year. For me it deepened a strong sense of identity with the town and its people.

Robert Armitage, many thanks for providing us with your early work experiences in Scarborough as a teenager and young man taking advantage of the job opportunities in Scarborough’s tourism business in the 1960s and early 1970s.