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ROBIN HOOD'S BAY

Robin Hood's Bay is a very picturesque fishing village in North Yorkshire. The origins of the name are unknown but there are many speculations. Unfortunately there is no connection to the legendary outlaw and this small fishing village. The name does not appear in any records until Tudor times, although it is sometimes called 'Baytown'. A mile to the south of the village are bronze age burial mounds called 'Robin Hood's Butts'. There are also signs that some Romans spent some time in the Bay, the Whitby Pannet Park Museum indicates that Ravenscar was once a Roman Signal Station.

Although fishing is no longer the main industry in Robin Hood's Bay, in the 18th and 19th centuries the village thrived on it. In 1538 'Baytown' grew in size when many people from the inland village of 'Raw' moved down to the coast as a Danish invasion was no longer imminent. In fact Robin Hood's Bay was a more prosperous and important fishing centre than Whitby. In the 1820s there were 130 fishermen sailing 35 cobs and 5 large herring boats, the community was continuously expanding. The women and boys were also kept busy, women baited lines and barrelled fish for market, while the boys mended nets and made the lobster pots. Unfortunately in 1920 there were only two fishing families left in 'Baytown', lack of harbour facilities prevented the Bay from becoming a viable port and the industry declined. Today the interest in fishing is reviving with Robin Hood's Bay being one of the best crab grounds on the north coast.

Prosperity in the 18th and 19th century in merchant shipping grew and the village was renowned for the quality of its young seamen. The Royal Navy however had to send 'press gangs' to recruit seamen. The women of the village drove them out with pans and rolling pins while their men hid.

Smuggling in the 18th and 19th century was rife and nowhere more so than Robin Hood's Bay. It was an ideal location because of the natural isolation of the bay. A lot of the smuggling was financed by local squires and although the risk was hanging, it was thought the perks were worth it. In 1856 the coastguards were given the responsibility of catching the smugglers. Robin Hood's Bay was a tough assignment for the Whitby based excisemen and dragoons were brought in to assist. Houses and inns in the bay are said to have connecting cellars and cupboards, it was said that 'a bale of silk could pass from the bottom of the village to the top without seeing daylight'. The illicit trade of smuggling died out as a result of the reduction of trade duties rather than the determination of the excisemen.

In 1780 disaster struck in the Bay, fierce gales and the strong sea caused many of the cottages along King Street to fall into the tide. Again in 1791, part of Park Road disappeared into the sea, over a century later a strong sea wall was built. In 1975, at the cost of £578,000, the highest sea wall in Britain, measuring 500 feet long and 40 feet high, was constructed ensuring no more of the old Robin Hood's Bay was taken to its grave by the ever faithful sea. Wrecks were very common in the early days. One memorable night in 1881, a large brig 'Visitor' was run aground. The sea was so rough the lifeboat had to be dragged eight miles in the snow to Robin Hood's Bay to be launched. The whole crew of the 'Visitor' were saved thanks to the people of the village.

In 1885 there was a great change in the community with the coming of the railway. It not only connected Robin Hood's Bay with surrounding villages, it gave the people new markets in which to sell their local produce and introduced the village to the tourist. A century's gap separates the old town from the Victoria 'Mount Pleasant' development, obviously brought about by the coming of the railway. The Whitby to Scarborough railway line was closed in 1965 which was a great pity because it was one of the most scenic railways in Britain.

Leo Walmsley, the Yorkshire novelist spent much of his childhood in the village from 1894 to 1913. He wrote two books about his childhood, 'Foreigner' and 'Three Fevers', the latter being made into a film 'The Turn of the Tide'. The books describe the village and surrounding area very vividly. Other famous people have made their homes in Robin Hood's Bay. One of the houses was for 25 years the studio of artist Dame Ethel Walker.

To sum up, although fishing is no longer important to Robin Hood's Bay, the community is still thriving with thousands of visitors every year discovering its ancient charm and beautiful surroundings.

General Information

Amenities: Tennis, putting and bowls, pony trekking, golf course and swimming pool (Raven Hall Hotel).

Information from: Scarborough and Whitby Tourist Information Offices.