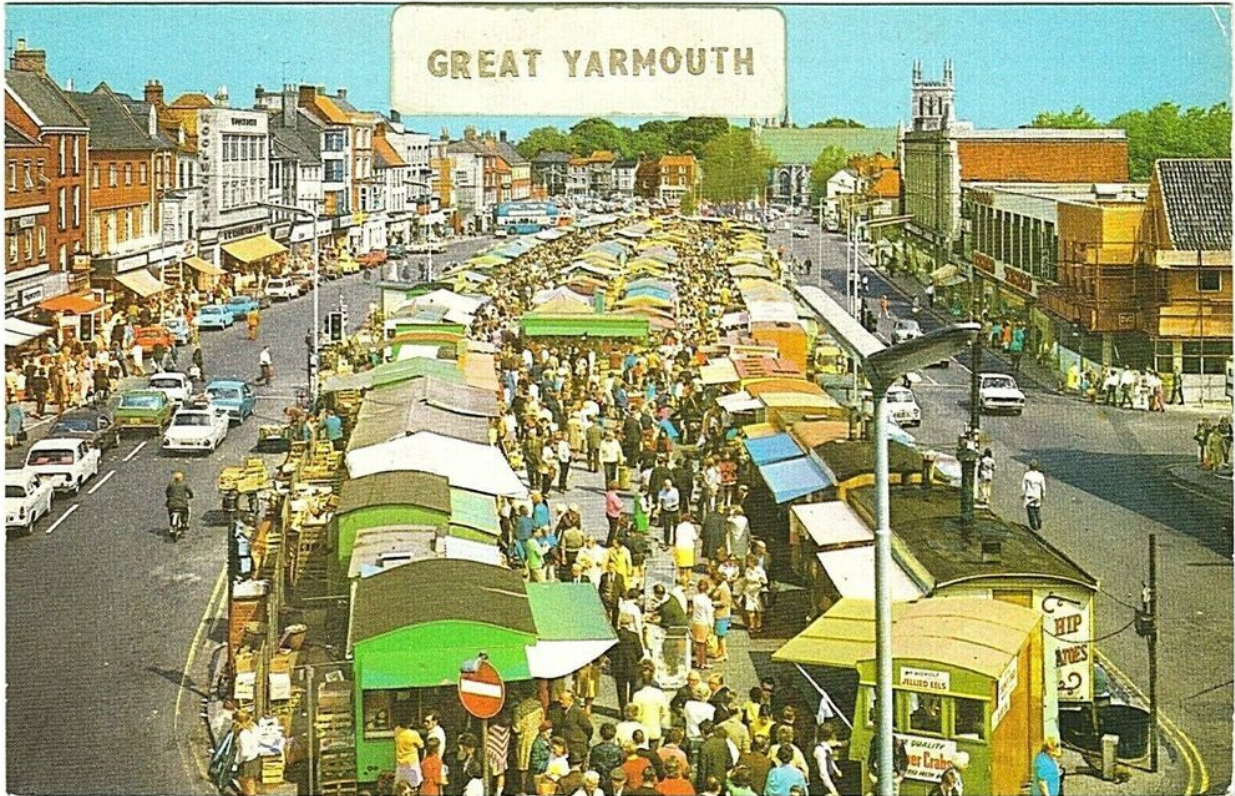


Great Yarmouth:

From Prosperity to Pandemic



Source: Great Yarmouth Postcard, 1970's

Luke Severn

2003. The scent of fish and chips fills the air throughout the centre of town. The heart of Great Yarmouth for over 100 years has always been the marketplace. People from each end of the town come to shop, gather groceries and socialise. It was almost impossible to cross the road without seeing at least three of your parents friends, old school teachers and your grandparents.

2020. The year that changed everything. High streets crowded by bold *CLOSING DOWN* signs, empty streets and haunting silence spreads across towns around the globe. 2020 has seen an astonishing amount of hardship for people from all different walks of life.

In the east of England sits a small coastal town called Great Yarmouth. Homelessness, poverty and abandonment has ravished this town in recent years but has been accelerated by the hit of the COVID-19 pandemic. The colourful, busy central hub of the town has now become a grey and bleak area.



Source: Archant, 2020

The year of 2020 has been excruciating. With the rise of COVID-19 in the Spring to the national lockdown over Summer, we have not been able to function as we regularly would have. With the second national lockdown being introduced and the cancellation of the festive season - it is beginning to prove difficult to fathom a future that will be similar to our previous lives.

Many have felt the dire affects of Coronavirus. One major blunder of the virus was how it affected businesses, locally and globally. The global economic situation is consistently reported on, we all can see that many economic hubs are suffering.

Great Yarmouth is known for the being the seaside holiday getaway of the sixties, seventies and eighties. Thousands from inland Britain would pack up and head to Great Yarmouth for days on the beach and nights in the casinos.

The new millennia saw Yarmouth begin to suffer and decline rapidly. With international package holidays becoming a lot more affordable, the luxury of summer in a British town lost its glamour. The living standard dropped and unemployment rose.

One prominent local business, Nichols Sea Food has been in the marketplace since World War Two. 21 year old Shakira Nichols has worked with her mother and family for many years now and hopes to keep their Great Grandfathers family business running for many more years to come.

Shakira recently also worked at a local primary school and as a bartender in a prominent Yarmouth pub, whilst also dedicating her time to her family's business. Along with her mother, Christine, she discussed the worries and concerns the family face against the decline of Great Yarmouth merged with the devastating effects of COVID-19.

“We are trying everything to push and advertise business”. The Nichols family have recently began to advertise using Facebook to ask family and friends to share their advertisements. “Some of our orders come from those who see our adverts on Facebook, but the main customers are still those who come to the marketplace everyday”. The sense of community is rich within Great Yarmouth marketplace and the Nichols family.



Source: Nichols Seafood

Before the strike of the global pandemic the marketplace was in development to undergo improvements meaning a major revamp for the town centre. “We’re sort of lucky in a way, this year has almost given us an opportunity to review and give our business a modern revamp”. Shakira and her mother both expressed their emotions towards the marketplace and the town. The golden age of a local market may have died but the feeling of community pride remains evermore.

In 2018 the weekly earnings of those living in Great Yarmouth was significantly lower than the rest of the East of England and Great Britain. Full time workers earned on average, £482.60 a week compared to the East earning £590.30 and the rest of the UK earning an average of £571.10. The staggering difference can be seen in the way of life in Great Yarmouth. Many people are living on the poverty line. Families are unable to support their children and work themselves into the ground to pay basic living costs such as rent, bills and food. The same sort of affects an be seen this year. The virus has caused various businesses and industries to suffer or even completely collapse. With the average earnings in Great Yarmouth being lower than the rest of the country, the town could not necessarily handle a drop in wages and salaries.

Weekly earnings (2018)¹⁶

Gross weekly pay (pounds)	Great Yarmouth	East	Great Britain
Full Time Workers	£482.60	£590.30	£571.10
Male Full Time Workers	£542.20	£639.80	£612.20
Female Full-Time workers	£396.80	£521.20	£510.00

Source: Great Yarmouth Borough Council

Brandon Lewis is the local Conservative MP for Great Yarmouth and surrounding areas. Mr Lewis claimed that “Great Yarmouth Borough, and constituency, is more than just the famous seaside town from which it takes its name.” Great Yarmouth is made up by various towns and villages such as my hometown, Gorleston. The local MP speak on projects that are taking place over the next few years, one of the promoted projects being the £120 million third river crossing being built. He ties this in with confidently saying that “the Government, councils and businesses working together the foundations for Great Yarmouth’s future prosperity are continuing to be laid.” I struggled to find the correlation with this and a new bridge. I believe that much more can be done for this dying town. Local interest is no longer at the heart of projects. Over the last 20-30 years a lot of the focus has been placed upon the off-shore energy sector. Granted this does brings

jobs to those who reside in the town, but what does this do for those who already work within the town and the community. Mr Lewis claims that the investment into the energy sector “compliment(s) our existing industries”. Bringing it slightly closer to the community of Great Yarmouth, he briefly spoke upon the work that has commenced on the town favourite leisure centre and that “£15 million has been earmarked for the town centre” - via the Future High Street Fund. I believe that the funding promised for the new river crossing could have potentially been spent on regaining local pride and recovering from the hardships many local businesses and families have faced in recent years.

Business owner Jon White has ran a t-shirt printing company for over 10 years and is primarily based online. With the increase of public closures in the UK many companies changed their businesses to work solely online. Mr White’s was already trading online meaning that this change was not the biggest of his concerns. “Business almost grinded to a halt when the lockdown hit” he explained. “I decided to go more online based because I saw a massive decline in footfall when I had a business premises on the high street. Now I’m saving on rent, business rates, utility bills, travelling to and from work. I’ve given my business a chance to continue to thrive.”

Having a physical shop such as a high street retailer compared with working from the internet can be a lot more of a struggle - especially with the new rules forcing people out of the shops and into their homes. He discussed whether he believed the company would struggle if he traded from a store. “In the long term yes, even more so! Although businesses with premises did get help with a government grant”.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council introduced a scheme that gave business owners up to £10,000 to assist with the loss of customers and profit. Alongside the grant was the nationwide encouragement for consumers to shop independently to support local businesses.

Another scheme that was introduced after the rise of the pandemic was the furlough scheme for those who could not go to work. The government offered workers 80% of their wages along with the opportunity of the specific company to top up the 80% to 100%. Many people revelled in the furlough scheme because it became a significant assistance to a troubling time. The responsibility of arranging the furlough scheme to apply to yourself or any staff falls upon the business owner. “I have one other that was furloughed alongside myself” Jon explained.

People from across the nation have been either highly supportive or deeply critical of the government. Being a business owner, especially a self employed business owner the disappointment was clear. The government took a lot longer with support for self employed workers than they did for those who work for a larger company. Connie Woolsey, self employed barber was highly critical of the way the government dealt with the situation. “They have no respect for those who work for themselves, the support is for the large corporations who they are friends with”. Opposing the attitude of Jon White who stated that he thought the government had done all they possibly could do in these circumstances.

Now, reaching towards the end of January 2021, it's becoming clear to people that our situations are not likely to change in the near future. The announcement of stricter guidelines, or Lockdown 3.0, has demoralised the country once again. Many are taking to popular social media apps such as Twitter and Tiktok to demonstrate their discontent with these new rules. One Tiktok user spoke about the differences between the summer lockdown compared with the current winter one. She speaks about how we were able to enjoy the sun in our gardens before, but now we are all stuck inside on cold and rainy days with no where to escape to. As we approach the one year mark of the pandemic altering our lives, it is important to look towards the small towns such as Great Yarmouth. It is vital to show a sense of community, support our local businesses and uplift each other throughout these unprecedented times.

Economies will crash and they will thrive. That can be said about Great Yarmouth, the town has seen greatness and the town has seen despair. Yarmouth - like many other economies, countries and towns, has an opportunity, with appropriate and quality support, to thrive once again.