

Scarborough Sea Wall Heritage Trail Project.

David Normandale - A Scarborough Mariner and Trawlerman.

Interviewer and transcriber: Huw Roberts

Today I'm talking to David Normandale. Born in Scarborough in 1941, David has been a mariner all his life and yet he has moved around, both in the way that he has earned his living from the sea and in choosing where around the world to base himself. His various roles read a little like the chapters of a book, and I'm asking him to take us through these chapters in his life.

David, was it inevitable that your working life would always be at sea? Was that part of the DNA of your family?

It was. My father was a trawler skipper. My Grandad and My Great Grandad were both trawler skippers out of Scarborough. It was just the line of growing up with the trawlers.

Take us to your first maritime experience. How did you become a merchant seaman and what was your role in that job?

I left school in 1956 and I went fishing for three months prior to joining a tramp steamer in Germany in November 1956 and subsequently did 4 1/2 years tramp steaming around the world with G.N.C. Harrisons of London.

And then you left the Merchant Navy and you became a fisherman out of Scarborough. How did this opportunity come up?

After the Merchant Navy, I decided to go into the fishing where some of my friends were and my career took off from there.

And so how many years were you fishing off Scarborough before your next chapter in your life?

I started fishing out of Scarborough 1961 and ran with different boats and then met up with Jim Sheader who was having a boat built in Scarborough, joined him as the crew and was with him for quite a number of years until Jim retired and I took skipper of the boat, the Mary Alison. I then went into partnership and bought a boat from Holland before going back to the Merchant Navy for two years.

So tell us why you went back to the Merchant Navy having spent so many years fishing off Scarborough.

The fishing wasn't very good in the mid-1970s and the price of oil just went through the roof, and vessels were having to stop going out because they couldn't afford the oil. So I decided to go back to the Merchant Navy for a couple of years while things improved. I went with the Manchester liners from Manchester and served as third mate on their ships before coming back to the fishing.

So you already had your fishing skipper's ticket. What did you need to do in order to be able to, I think you served as Mate in the Merchant Navy at that time?

The Merchant Navy were anxious for anybody for crews. They were short of crews and everything and I presented what I had, my skippers ticket from the fishing and so that would have to do so they took me on at that until I went back to the fishing.

That was until 1979.

When I came back to fishing I bought a boat, the *Craigivar* and fished with that vessel for a few years eventually decommissioning the vessel before emigrating to New Zealand in 1983.

And what did you do in New Zealand?

It was time for a change. I was married to a New Zealander then, and the opportunities for fishing out there were good, better weather and everything, so went out to New Zealand, bought a 40 foot boat and scallop fished out of a port in New Zealand, that port was Whangarei up in the North Island towards the Bay of Islands.

And I think you were out there for about 10 years. Is that right?

Yes, I had really enjoyed it before I came back and bought a hotel. That was in Scarborough in 1993. In 1996 I bought a vessel, called the *Fern* which was a Fraserburgh trawler of 75 feet and brought it to Scarborough, put extra tank fuel tanks on it and sailed out to New Zealand. We arrived there in 1997, the first week in February.

So you had sold the hotel by that time. That journey must have been a very interesting one. Tell us a little bit about it.

I would say it was very good. We had some bad weather down in Torquay, but apart from that as you got further south down to the Canary Islands the weather was lovely. We re-bunkered in the Canary Islands, crossed to Panama, did a night passage through the Panama in six hours, which was expected to do in 12 hours but we did it in six. And then we sailed from there on Christmas Eve out to the Marcasia islands. We re-bunkered there, had a few days to show there, on to Raratonga, one of the Cook Islands, a few days there re bunkered and then into New Zealand into Whangarei.

A trawler probably isn't the kind of vessel you normally choose for a long haul voyage. Tell us a little bit about the cost of that trip to get that boat out to New Zealand?

Trawlers are fitted with the big engines for towing heavy gear and everything. So before we set off we had to try and find the most economical speed and fuel consumption. The vessel at full speed would burn 20 gallons an hour, but by easing down on the throttle and down to 8 knots, we were able to get it down to 8 gallon an hour, which was the most economical speed. So that's the way we went.

So having got to New Zealand what happened next?

Well, the idea was to go trawling and fishing off to New Zealand but like in England, they brought in the quota system and it was too difficult to try to acquire enough quota to fish the boat. I sold the boat to another fisherman who wanted to take it up to the islands. Then I lost contact with it.

And what did you do after that?

Came back to England.

Which year was that?

1998.

Having got back to Scarborough, what did you do then?

More or less retirement then, semi-retired. I used to go down and help down to the hotel actually. I knew the new people who were in there and I used to go down and just give them a hand.

You've kept your links with New Zealand and you spent part of the most years in New Zealand.

I did for a few years until the COVID, I used to spend three to four months in New Zealand.

And presumably had a very good social circle arising from that.

Yes, I have a lot of friends out there.

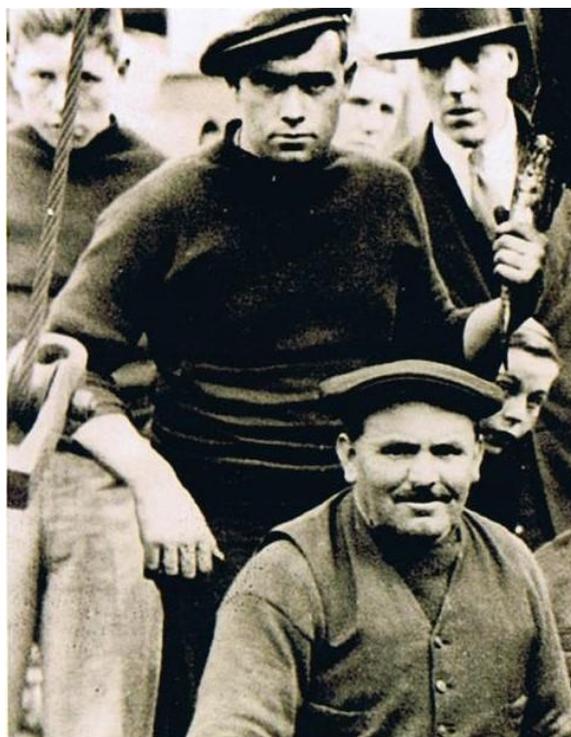
You've had such a varied career including owning and running a hotel, although I'm guessing your wife did most of the work in dealing with that. In which of those mariner's roles were the happiest?

I think fishing out of Scarborough was the best. It was enjoyable. Every day was different. The camaraderie with all the people down there. It was one big happy family.

David Normandale, seaman, trawlerman, perhaps even marine adventurer. One time hotel owner, many thanks for sharing your experiences with me today.

David Normandale.

Interviewed by Huw Roberts in October 2023.



The Nordale, one of David's Grandfather's Trawlers. Right, David's grandfather with his father standing behind him.