

Rowntree Stores – by Mr S of Staxton

The first time I visited the beach at Scarborough as a young boy I thought that everyone on the beach were residents of the town rather than visitors and thought how lucky they were to live here.

I also remembered the news sellers outside the post office selling the Evening News and shouting to get people's attention to what was the big story in the news that day.

I recall visiting Rowntree's department store which was on the site of the current Brunswick centre. I thought it was a palatial store, the first ever experienced, which had fitted carpets throughout. There was also a system of managing customer's payments which was fascinating but quite common in major city department stores. Those serving would accept the customer's money and place it in a capsule together with the invoice. The capsule would shoot off along a framework powered by a blast of pneumatic air, initially travelling upwards and then along beneath the store ceiling and disappear heading for the cash office. It would then return along the same system back to the server with a receipt and the customer's change. I was never clear as to why this system was adopted. Someone suggested in those early days it was considered vulgar for women to handle cash and it was mainly women who made up the serving staff. It also may have prevented the temptation by a light fingered member of staff to steal from the till.

I also remember if there was a blue light emergency in Scarborough a blue light would turn on in the telephone exchange whereupon all switchboard operators were required to ignore all normal calls and prioritise only the calls that were connected to the emergency.