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Yesterday's Town: A multimedia investigation into the tourism decline gripping Britain's East Coast

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Yesterday's Town

**A multimedia investigation into the tourism decline gripping
Britain's East Coast**

**A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University**

**Candidate for Bachelor of Arts in Broadcast Journalism and International
Relations**

Renée Crown University Honors

December 3

Honors Capstone Project in Broadcast Journalism

Capstone Project Advisor: _____

Capstone Project Reader: _____

Honors Director: _____

Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date:



Marine Parade; Great Yarmouth, United Kingdom

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Abstract:

One of the hardest things for some people to accept is change, especially when it involves part of their national identity. For years, people in Great Britain have thrived off of tourism in seaside towns and have considered it a source of pride. But the high-end Bed and Breakfasts' and lively boardwalks that once attracted vacation-goers are not so common nowadays as the world becomes more globalized and more Britons can afford to vacation overseas. This has resulted in a drastic loss of revenue for many of these seaside businesses. The number of visitors who stayed overnight in Yarmouth peaked in the 1970s at over 9 million. But by the start of the 1990s this had fallen to just under 7 million and by 2003, just over 5 million, according to a report that outlines a 2013-2018 tourism strategy sponsored by the Great Yarmouth Borough Council and Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority. Coastal towns are economically and socially struggling in what some Britons view as an irreversible trend. My project illustrates this trend by focusing on the significant decline occurring in Great Yarmouth, one of Britain's hardest-hit seaside towns. [According to a report from a London-based think tank](#), the Center for Social Justice, Great Yarmouth is suffering from high unemployment, poor health, and poor education – more so than other coastal towns and all due to a slow decline in tourism revenue, limited alternate tourist attractions (other than the sea and gambling) and its relatively isolated location on the east coast away from any major industrial centers. Great Yarmouth (also known as Yarmouth) is part of a national pattern in which many seaside towns must receive millions of dollars in aid from the government just to stay financially afloat. A vicious cycle is formed as declining tourism creates poverty and poverty further deepens the decline in tourism- making it hard for small business owners to make a living. My goal was to document this struggle in a personal and compelling way.

Throughout my reporting, I found that despite economic setbacks, locals are making a strong effort to revive British coastal tourism. This is mostly through community-organized initiatives such as creative advertising campaigns and development projects. They are fighting to hold on to an industry that has defined their community for more than 60 years. Although my coverage pertains specifically to the people of Great Yarmouth, I expect the themes of adversity, adaptation, and recuperation to resonate with any audience, no matter where they are from.

This portfolio contains only some of the components of this project. To see the final product in full, you can download the iPad App by going to iTunes and searching for “Yesterday’s Town”:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/yesterdays-town/id951737375?mt=8>



Britannia Pier – Marine Parade, Great Yarmouth

Executive Summary:

Yesterday's Town is a multi-media video journalism project that investigates the changes gripping the British coastal tourism industry. The project idea incorporates the opinions of local tourism experts as well as economic and social science reports published by British research institutions. But more importantly, it tells the stories of the people and businesses this economic change affects most.

Although the project contains themes that are common among most British seaside resorts, it focuses on one town in particular – Great Yarmouth, known as “Yarmouth.” Yarmouth has seen a huge decline in foot traffic – or the number of people traveling to the area for a vacation. My goal was to document what this means for the people of Yarmouth who have invested their livelihoods in the tourism industry. I have used video, maps, written articles, photographs and graphics to tell their stories in ways that appeal to a broad audience. All content was placed on a final App – easily downloadable on an iPad and created to allow

a user to pick and choose the exact parts of the project he or she would like to explore.

This portfolio contains only some of the components of this project. To see the final product in full, you can download the iPad App by going to iTunes and searching for “Yesterday’s Town”:

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Preface:

This multi-media video journalism project is the product of roughly four years of learning about effective ways to tell stories visually and an acute interest in my family history. The deep passion I have for telling this story and telling it well comes from my family background. From 1973 to 1981, my father lived in Great Yarmouth. His parents bought an old house near the town's main boardwalk with every last penny they had. They converted into a bed and breakfast that was successful during the peak years of tourism. However, four years ago my father returned to Great Yarmouth after living in the U.S. for over 30 years only to see what was once a tourism hotspot struggling to stay afloat. My father spent eight years living in Great Yarmouth during the 1970s, when tourism was a booming industry. His somber reflection on how much the British coastal tourism industry has declined since then and how that has affected the small town he used to call home led me to investigate its root causes. My aim is to tell the stories of the people living through this significant decline in tourism and the resulting affects it has had on the local standard of living. This phenomena can be proved through academic reports, unemployment charts and statistics – but I felt what I could bring uniquely to the table was a visual presentation of this

information told through the people of Yarmouth themselves. As a broadcast journalism major in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, I have spent the last four years studying how lighting, camera angles and compelling video can influence how people feel and respond to your work. Used properly, these techniques can make people pay attention to issues and events happening all over the world. This story was one best told through people and places – to humanize an industry decline that is causing some in Yarmouth to rethink the way they make their living and live their lives. This project presented the perfect avenue for me to combine the creative concepts I have learned as a journalism major with some of the international economic lessons I learned during my studies in international relations. This project is designed to present the viewer with the facts about the tourism decline in a way that is visually interesting. This project does not take a side or a stance. It simply presents the opinions of those living and breathing this issue and what they ultimately think will become of this small seaside resort and all of British coastal tourism in general.

Acknowledgments:

Kind, intelligent and generous people made this project possible. I would like to thank the many S.I. Newhouse School journalism professors who taught me how to shoot compelling video, write clearly and concisely, extract the best and most thoughtful answers out of people during interviews and tell stories using multiple communication techniques –including photo, video, graphics and written articles. These professors include: Chris Tuohey, Charlotte Grimes, Susanne Lysak, Randy Wenner and Michael Cremedas.

Special thanks to Randy Wenner, who served as my capstone reader. I appreciate his guidance not only on this project but throughout the various journalism classes I have had the honor of taking with him. Professor Wenner helped with initial logistics before my travel to Great Yarmouth and reviewed all of my video scripts.

I am also grateful for the advice and critique of professor Charlotte Grimes, who carefully read through each of my written articles and made them monumentally better by catching the small errors and helping shape the overall theme of each piece.

Professor Seth Gitner, my project advisor, played an influential role in shaping the structure of this project and brainstorming what the final product would look like. A talented visual storyteller, Gitner has an amazing knack for compiling multimedia projects that are visually pleasing and interactive for viewers.

The kindness and graciousness of people in Great Yarmouth had a huge affect on the success of this project. Special thanks to Darren and Ian of the Marina Guesthouse who provided phenomenal housing and comfort for me during my fieldwork. They helped me navigate the streets of Yarmouth as I conducted each of my video shoots.

I am eternally grateful to each and every one of my interviewees who all opened their homes, their stores, their tearooms and gave me their time so that I could tell their stories. Ernie and Karen Childs of the Great Yarmouth potteries, Sam Russell of the Eastern Daily Press, Peter Jay of the Hippodrome, Albert Jones of Pleasure Beach, Tony Smith of Sara's tearoom, Michael Boon, Michael Castle of the Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Nick Mobbs of the Imperial Hotel, Kirsty Burn of the Great Yarmouth Tourist Authority, Glenn Tubby of the Great Yarmouth Racecourse and many more.

A very special thanks to Eric Holzwarth and the entire Renee Crown Honors program for believing in this project enough to fund it and make it possible. I couldn't be more grateful.

Project Methodology:

During the fieldwork (interviews) I conducted between May 12, 2014 and May 23, 2014, the main questions I sought to answer were:

- 1.) Does a decline in tourism mean the decline of Great Yarmouth as a prominent coastal town?
- 2.) How are local participants in the tourism industry coping with the crisis personally? In what ways has this affected their lifestyle – socially and economically?
- 3.) How are local business owners changing their business model to appeal to guests who increasingly expect higher quality and better service?

I came away with stories of individuals and families who are struggling to stay financially afloat – especially during the winter months when there are fewer tourists, but say they still have faith in the tourism industry.

In addition to interviewing these individuals, I creatively captured them going about their diverse daily routines. This will help the viewer understand and

relate to the struggles and triumphs of each interviewee. In addition to the video and photo portion of this project, I conducted interviews with local officials at the forefront of the recovery attempt, such as those from the Great Yarmouth Tourist Authority and the Great Yarmouth Heritage Partnership, in order to substantiate the personal experiences of local business owners. These expert interviews were used to provide context for the claims of my six core interviewees. After I gathered all of my media material, a total of 6 feature videos were produced (one about each interviewee), 6 in depth articles were written about each interviewee that included input from local authorities, wrote roughly 5 blog posts about my day to day experiences and process of information gathering (to increase transparency), and took hundreds of photos during my time in Great Yarmouth (only some of which were used in the final app). This project is partially data driven, meaning statistics that demonstrate the economic decline of Yarmouth, such as the increasing unemployment rate in Yarmouth over a span of 10 years, were a significant component of the final iPad App and were incorporated into my articles.



Rooftop on Trafalgar Street; Great Yarmouth, U.K.

Digital Age Storytelling: An inside look at the decisions that shaped this project

Field work pre-planning:

The idea for this project originated in a conversation I had with my father in fall 2013. He told me about how his family had a run a bed and breakfast in Great Yarmouth from 1972-1978. The tourism industry was at its peak back then and his family's guesthouse was booked solid during the tourism season. His

family could make enough during the summer months to last them an entire year. Although the tourism industry still carries on in Yarmouth today – it is nothing like it used to be. After understanding this, I realized this story meant a change in the livelihood and even identity for thousands of people who depend on this industry for their income.

As I started to learn about the types of tourism jobs that exist in Yarmouth, such as operating a circus show, owning a pub, or running a fish and chips stand, I realized how much this story would be about people. Incorporating the studies and statistics that prove a decline is a vital part of this project but I knew that to bring it to life I had to talk to people and learn about businesses.

One of the first and most important decisions I made was what forms of media I was going to use. In today's digital age, people use a variety of different devices and media to get access to information. In the journalism world, it is no longer enough to have just an article or just a video story – there must be additional components such as maps and charts that are interactive and provide the viewer/reader with a way to visualize the data presented. My advisor Seth Gitner and I decided to illustrate the tourism decline through video and written stories about people involved in the industry, photos of Yarmouth, audio recordings of interviews and natural sound, graphs and charts of economic data and maps – all of which are compiled on an App that people can download onto their iPad. Could this project have been done well with just video – yes. However, to make it an excellent project that kept up with the standards and quality expected by today's media consumers, we decided to incorporate a way for

viewers to choose how they wanted to experience this story – whether it be watching video, reading articles, or looking data charts. Our primary goal was to make this app interactive, easy to use, and easy to understand. Media consumers are generally doing other things when they read articles or watch video – meaning the best way to make my content appealing was to create a way for the viewer to choose their experience. After understanding the basics of what the end product was going to look like, I was able to easily select the equipment needed to carry out the fieldwork for this project – a Sony NX5U HD video camera, a canon still photo camera, an audio recorder, wireless mics, lavalier mics and a tripod.

I spent roughly 5 months preparing for the fieldwork portion of this project (two weeks in may during which I would travel to Yarmouth to gather all of my material). These 5 months were vital to helping me understand the economic make-up of Great Yarmouth and establishing a contact base of people I might interview. Although the themes and ideas in my project do characterize most of the British Coastal tourism industry (as many coastal towns are facing the same problem), I focused on a case study of one town. This was done strategically to simplify my fieldwork but also to give the audience a tailored experience in the final product. People tend to respond more when themes are explained on a smaller scale. They want to learn about specific people and places.

Being able to focus on one specific town allowed me to forge strong relationships with a lot of its people. I spent 5 months working with my main source, a local reporter in Yarmouth at the Eastern Daily Press, who was able to provide me with great local interviews and really help me discover the true nature

of Yarmouth and report on this town in the most balanced and accurate way possible.

I decided to make most of my interviews with local business owners who were a living and breathing part of the local tourism industry. I wanted to find people who depended on tourism foot traffic to keep their business running – knowing it would be they who had the best insight into the changes affecting the industry. Not only was I looking for business owners, but I was looking for those that had been in the area for a couple decades at least – surprisingly this was not hard to find in Yarmouth. The town is a very traditional place. People who grow up there tend to stay there, I have been told. I also wanted to make sure I interviewed people from a variety of businesses – not just the ice cream stand owners by the beach. I made it a point to seek out the local owner of the roller coaster park, a tearoom, a bed and breakfast owner and a heritage museum curator. A huge component of the tourism industry in Great Yarmouth is heritage– I had to make sure to include these types of tourism venues in order to paint an accurate picture of what the industry consisted of.

I strategically choose to travel to Yarmouth in early May– just before the tourism season really got underway. Arriving in Yarmouth before the tourism season started to heat up allowed me to obtain more interviews than I would have if I had come at the height of the season when local business owners had no time to speak with me.

Gathering media material

In order to ensure I obtained informative and meaningful interviews, I wanted the people of Yarmouth to really get to know me and understand what my project was all about. Developing that level of trust was crucial to getting the type of interview I wanted – one where my subject was comfortable enough to share their deepest struggles. Many of the interviews I conducted in Yarmouth were pre-arranged, I did this mostly to ensure that they would be a good fit for this project and had lived in Yarmouth long enough to know the area well and understand the changes the tourism industry had undergone. I made sure to choose interviewees from a variety of different sectors within the local tourism industry to ensure that I was representing as many voices as possible and that I was obtaining diverse opinions.

I filmed almost all of my interviews using a wireless microphone – which allowed the interviewee to move around while also talking to me. For example, when I interviewed Ernie and Karen Childs, who own the Great Yarmouth Potteries, I hooked Ernie up to a wireless microphone while he was molding clay - eventually to be painted into a pot. While he was modeling the clay, Ernie was able to describe his perspective on the tourism industry. The wireless microphone also picked up a lot of natural sound – a technique designed to engage the audience and make them as if they are there next to the subject. The point of arranging the interview this way is to further engage the viewer by having the interviewee perform an action while talking (which is more visually interesting).

To keep my interviews focused, I mostly asked my interviewees questions about how they run their tourism and business and how that affects their lifestyle. One of my goals was to find out how businesses are staying profitable in a tough economic climate. I had them introduce themselves and explain how they got to where they are today. I then had them run through their business model – how they manage tourism during peak season (which can sometimes be thousands of people), and how they stay afloat during the off-season when there are very few customers. Focusing on this angle helped create continuity among my interviewees. Although each of their stories is unique, they must all be tied together by a common theme otherwise the project wouldn't make sense as a whole. Maintaining a common theme throughout all of my interviews allowed me to compare and contrast how different businesses within Yarmouth were successful – or example how heritage-based businesses differ from theme parks.

Many of my interviews were pre-arranged so that I could ensure I would have plenty of content once I arrived. But I also made sure to obtain some enterprised, or on the spot, interviews while I was in Yarmouth. These spontaneous interviews are extremely important to producing a quality multimedia journalism project because they helped make my project diverse. You can only know so much about a place before you actually get there. Once I arrived in Yarmouth I was able to make more informed choices about the people I wanted to interview and places I wanted to go.

While I was in Yarmouth, I really wanted to make the effort to get to know people and develop sources. I opted to walk to all of my interviews instead

of taking a cab. Walking meant I had to be up a little earlier or didn't get a full lunch break but it also meant that I got in see the town of Yarmouth through more than just a car window. People change when you put them in front of a camera lens, so to be able to interact with them without a camera really helped when it came to conducting my formal interviews and getting a sense of what people cared about.

Although the main theme of this project is the overall decline in tourism – when I conducted my interviews I had each interviewee specifically talk about their life and personal business. Of course they had their opinions on the overall decline in tourism but I really wanted them to feel comfortable. People feel most comfortable when they talk about things they know and love. In my videos, I want the audience to really get to know each of the 20 people I talked to. They provide a face to an economic decline that has affected the lives of so many. It's important that they are relatable on camera and don't freeze up. Talking in front of a camera can be very nerve wracking and the best way to calm those nerves is to have people talk about what they know. On my end, that meant asking them questions about their business – everything as basic as what hours they worked and what ingredients they use in their scones to more complicated topics like their policies on hiring seasonal workers and how they attract customers.

Compiling the project: the final iPad app

Designing and organizing all of my material for final iPad App compilation was one of the most important decision-making times for the project.

The information, photos and video I collected in Yarmouth needed to be presented in a way that was interesting not just to the people of Yarmouth who are directly affected by the tourism but to the average viewer that didn't necessarily know much about British coastal tourism.

Because of my expedited graduation date, December 2014, my advisor and I, with the support of the Renee Crown Honors Program, decided to enlist the help of a Newhouse School design student who was familiar with Adobe InDesign- the software used to compile the final app. This student played an extremely important role in the completion of the project. My advisor and I worked closely with her to develop a design that would convey the meaning/ tone of the entire project. The student, Beth Fritzinger, developed the app's visual theme and helped organize my journalistic material in a way that was visually appealing and user friendly.

The first step in the final compilation process was coming up with a name for the project, which ended up being "Yesterday's Town." I came up with this title a couple months after I returned from Yarmouth and felt it gave my audience a sense of what Yarmouth was like when I visited. Yarmouth is a seaside resort that is struggling to adapt to changing tourist tastes and where many people tend to hold on to the past. After all, Yarmouth was one of the most popular resorts in England in the 1960s and 1970s – attracting an average of about 40 million guests per year.

Many local business owners there inherited their businesses from family members and didn't make any changes for want of keeping the seafront a heritage

preservation site. Walk along the Yarmouth seafront today and it's extremely apparent that many buildings are more than 50 years old and have kept the same exterior from the 1960s/70s.

Our main goal was to make the App interactive and picture orientated. As the audience pages through the App, we wanted them to feel like they were getting a new piece to the story with each page swipe. For this reason, we organized the videos so that the interviewees with the best video and most unique stories appeared first. Accompanying each video was also a written article that included a bit more detail and cited some government reports that were used to make conclusions in the video.

We choose to create an intro page for the App on which my best photos were displayed and that also included a brief intro video and written excerpt. This was done to ease our audience in to the story and give them the relevant context before they started to jump into the specific cases I profiled. From a design stand point, this also opened up an opportunity for Beth, our design student, to be creative and showcase my best pictures and really set the mood for the entire project.

As one of the last pages of the App, we choose to create a "seaside tourism by the numbers page" out of strong belief that there are stories in data. Once people had become acquainted with the issue through personal narratives from Great Yarmouth business owners, we wanted to supply the viewer with the evidence to back up the claims featured in my stories. The data I included illustrates exactly who was coming to Yarmouth and how that changed over the

years. Incorporating a timeline was a strategic choice in the sense that the tourism industry in Yarmouth was developed by outside factors. My advisor and I thought it was important for the audience to get the entire context – how tourism took off in Yarmouth. The timeline allows the viewer to experience Yarmouth tourism from the beginning and see how it came to be. Using census data and graphs allowed me to expand my research beyond the personal experience of local business owners. It helped me report how a decline in tourism has affected the entire town - from a high unemployment rate to the types of jobs people have been getting in Yarmouth.

Conclusion:

The opportunity to talk to real people and real business owners about the changes facing the seaside tourism industry in Britain gave me the opportunity to see beyond the numbers. Although the British seaside tourism industry is facing some tough economic times, especially towns on the East Coast, many people I met in Yarmouth have hope that the tourism industry can adapt with the time and stay relevant. While some people are more pessimistic than others about where the industry is headed, some truly believe that Yarmouth can become a hub for entertainment again. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to share their stories with the world.

This project was meant to explore a big issue at the micro level. While the basis of this project comes largely from academic reports and scientific data, the idea blossomed after I heard an anecdote from my father. The numbers in this story are extremely important as they back up the claims of my interviewees, however it's the people with which I hope my readers and viewers will connect most with in this issue.

In conducting this project, I grew so much as a person and a reporter. The true role of a journalist is to provide a way for people to make educated decisions in their daily lives. Having the opportunity to travel to England and simulate the work routine of a foreign correspondent changed and monumentally improved my journalism education. It is my ultimate goal to become a foreign correspondent and this project served as a great opportunity to practice the skills I would need to master in order to earn such a position.