



Nigel's Webspace – English Football Cards

Working for A&BC Chewing Gum – Margaret's story

Founded in 1949, the A&BC Chewing Gum company in 1959 moved to a factory in Spilsby Road in the Harold Hill industrial estate near Romford Essex. They stayed there for the remainder of their corporate life, until 1974. While there, they increased the factory footage many times and also bought the next door factory as the company expanded.

In 1962/63 Douglas Coakley approached Brian Epstein (manager of the Beatles) and his lawyer David Jacobs and obtained the rights and licence to produce cards with the Beatles images and signatures. A set of 60 cards were first produced and issued, with immediate success.

Around this time the Coakley Brothers, Douglas and Tony, as Directors, decided to buy-out fellow founding director Rudy Braun.

Getting your first job

Margaret, pictured on the right in the photo below, joined A&BC Chewing Gum in 1963 at the age of 15 and worked for the company for 10 years. Her parents lived a five minute walk from the factory, so her Mum took her across the road to get the job. Previous employees have related that at the time it was easy to get work at the Harold Hill estate, with more jobs than workers in some factories. Margaret tells that 'at one time or another half the youth of the estate worked there'.

The photo depicts her with fellow workers in their white factory outfits, pictured on the steps of the factory. She left in 1973, just before they folded, to go on maternity leave, but she remembers being very sad when told that they had closed. She describes her time there as being so much fun, full of fond memories and pirate radio blaring out loudly all day.

Margaret remembers loving every minute of her time there. She recalls that the Coakley brothers were 'very handsome and good employers'. She clearly remembers the Beatles cards, in fact they had a raffle which she won to see a Beatles film and she was very excited.

She worked on the card machine and remembers eight card-wrapping machines and two Bazooka machines, and in smaller room a 'bag of gold' machine which was for tiny yellow/gold pieces of chewing gum. She recalls that her machine 'worked by putting the gum in one channel and the cards in another and they all moved along to be wrapped and then I would walk to the other end of the machine to pack them in a small box'.

Margaret remembers that she got told off one day because she put Scottish football cards in English wrapping, and not being a football fan didn't realise the importance of it all. From a football card historian's perspective this is both an interesting and concerning memory, as we are not aware that there were differences between Scottish and English wrappers!

Margaret still lives locally, and although it is now more than 40 years since she left and the factory closed down, she still sees faces that she recognises in the local area. I'm very grateful that she has provided this story and the accompanying photo, all of which help to tell and retain the story of A&BC. Many thanks Margaret!

If you have any memories of working for A&BC Chewing Gum, or of selling or distributing A&BC Chewing Gum cards or items, please be in touch via email: cards@littleoak.com.au

