

# **“Harburn Halt” – a busy stop on the tram line**

**Harburn Hobbies owners on Leith Walk say they are busier than they have been for decades – in spite of admitting that the tramworks were a “pain”.**

The shop has given a new name to the McDonald Road tram stop which lies just opposite Harburn Hobbies, the model railway shop which has been in business in the capital since before the Second World War. The stop is now unofficially called “Harburn Halt”.

Despite the disruption caused by the tram works – with contractors digging up Leith Walk not just once but twice, current owner Bob Baird says business has never been better – and he says the improvement in sales is partly down to the tram stop outside the front door.

Bob began working at the family firm in 1966 as a Saturday boy and the business has been owned by his family since just before then. He did admit that the period of construction was both “very difficult and very long”. He said: “We have one of the original posters here in the shop which was on the wire fence outside. It says “Taking you to the shops in 2011” and it was 2023 when it actually arrived here. Originally the construction was to begin at the foot of Leith Walk and they were going to lay the slabs all the way up there.” He said that during the works deliveries were a bit of a problem, although they are “not so bad now”.

During the last year the roadworks became quite “intense” and Bob said that period was pretty hard but he explained some of the tram workers were kind enough to help with deliveries to the shop.

While the period of disruption led to a loss of some customers, Bob said he saw it as an opportunity and the business rose to the challenge. He said: “We had to work to refocus, not do the usual. We had to go out and get business, so we used the internet and media such as the model railway magazines which brought in business from all over the world. Even during Covid we ran the mail order side from the shop which was otherwise closed to the public. We worked quite hard sending all the orders – including jigsaw puzzles which were very popular.” Bob said they have always been inventive with stock – and now they have “First class” LNER cushions for the real enthusiast.

Now that the tram line to Newhaven is open Bob said that they have more regular customers visiting the shop again including an American airline pilot who jumps off a plane and onto the tram to come and pick up the latest piece of kit. And people visiting on cruise ships are also becoming more regular customers to the shop. Bob said he has almost forgotten what it was like to have a building site outside the front door.

The company has more than 8,000 products for sale in the shop and online, and won Bachmann’s Retailer of the Year Award 2023. Bachmann is one of the main model train manufacturers making kits for all enthusiasts with buildings and scene craft to make the model railway come to life. Bachmann visited Harburn Halt to hand over the shield which is part of the recognition.

Bob said they are very proud of winning. He said: “We’ve got a good team here with around ten people employed by us. It’s not just me.”

Bachmann's head of sales, Pauline Hinkley, said: "I was pleased to have the opportunity to visit the store and present this award to Harburn Hobbies who have been supporters of all things Bachmann for many years. Its professionalism, vast product knowledge and dedication to the hobby are all so evident from every member of their team, and I'm sure this is the key to its longevity and success. I wish them many more years of providing excellent service to the people of Britain and beyond."

Not everyone is a fan of the tram and other businesses did not survive the period of building works, but Harburn Hobbies is one which has kept going in spite of it all. It has always been in Leith although the business had its roots further down Leith Walk at Stead's Place where it first began.

<https://www.harburnhobbies.co.uk>



Bob Baird of Harburn Hobbies in Leith.  
Picture Alan Simpson





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