My Mansfield.

The town once surrounded by villages where the men worked in the coal mines and farmers farmed the outlying areas.

A thriving market issued with a Royal Charter in 1227 at one time one of the very best markets in England. There was also a smaller market known as the Old Buttercross on the site of an old Cattle Market. I knew it as the Little Market on Westgate.

I loved the hustle and bustle of the market. Almost everything you could want was on offer. The stallholders were all familiar faces. Thankfully they usually stood in the same area week in week out, so you knew where the jumper man would be. The Veg. stalls placed around the outside edges. Now like most towns the market is almost non -existent.

At the top of Leeming St was the Carnegie Library built in 1905. Looking back I can’t recollect entering the library from Leeming St. I think it was down the walkway towards the museum and up some steps on the right side. At least I know I always came out of that entrance and straight in to the museum. When I was old enough to go to town on my own many Saturday mornings were spent in the library, followed by a visit to the museum. Leaving the library I would turn right straight into the museum. A magical world full of stuffed animals/reptiles/birds all in their glass cases. The museum, was given to the town by William Edward Baily in 1903 a wealthy collector and natural historian. Thank you Mr. Baily for transporting me into another world. Sadly the exhibits are now locked away no longer on public display and have been that way for many years.

Walking back to the town centre I passed the Palace Theatre now the Civic Theatre. The Palais de Danse opposite, in 1910 it was given a Cinematographic licence. It became the Palais in 1929. But more of that later.

Next stop The Arcade built in 1910. It replaced old buildings from the 1750’s. It has two entrances, one from Leeming St. you would walk through and came out at the top of Toothill Lane or you could enter the other way around. The arcade lined with many different shops. My favourite dress shop when I reached my late teens was Keelys to the right of the exit onto Toothill Lane.

On leaving the arcade I would head back to Leeming St. from the top of Toothill Lane. On the right corner was ladies dress shop, I think it was called Hardys and owned by a lady called Janet. The windows always dressed showing nice clothes and hats, I always thought they were for the older ladies. As I never went in the shop it is just a presumption. On the other corner Morley’s Bridal shop. Walking on down Leeming St. towards the town centre past Leckenbys, a food shop selling ham sliced off the bone and butter cut from a large block, sugar weighed into bags. The shop had its own distinct food smell. Groceries were sold there from 1906 until 1973. Landers bread shop. Kent & Coopers the Piano Shop. On, past Boots chemist a magnificent looking building on the right. Opposite Boots was a TV shop called Vallance & Davison (later just named Vallances) this is where I started work as the office junior after leaving school at 15.

The office was on the top floor of the building looking straight at Boots, so I really got to see what a beautiful building it is. Down, past the bank on the right corner, onwards past the market where I could see another three banks all architectural beautiful buildings.

On the left the entrance to the Swan Hotel car park and rear entrance into the hotel. Next, the Bentinck Café, (later it became a Chinese restaurant). Next I remember Birds butchers, where on Monday mornings you could purchase pork pies that were still warm. Onwards under the viaduct, across the top of White Hart St onto Queen St. past shops and public houses, the Portland Arms and the Black Swan on the corner of Midworth St. where I could catch the single decker bus to Jenny Becket’s Lane and home.

I had a choice of buses. I could also walk down Church St. from the market onwards to Bridge St. down past the Swan Hotel under the viaduct at the bottom of White Hart St. Past Blake and Beely’s a hardware store since 1896. The General Post Office and The Eight Bells Pub both on the right. Fox’s Bakery on the left. St Peter and St Paul’s church at the bottom of the street. If I turned to the right past the church I would have been back at the bottom of Midworth St.

Crossing over Toothill Lane onto Bridge St past Gelsthorpe’s fish and chip shop, you either liked them or you didn’t. Cooked in dripping I believe, they had a kind of smell I didn’t like. This route also took me past the entrance leading up to the Rag Yard. Used by the Rag n Bone men who went up and down streets with their horse and cart shouting “any old rags”. When they came down our drive if my dad was at home he would be out with his bucket clearing up after the horses to put on his garden.

Opposite was the Snooker/Billard Hall. Onward to the bus stops, a choice of two double-deckers, one before Bridge St. Methodists and one just after, before Stanhope St. Both going past my ‘get off stop’ near Race Course Rd. I would then cross the road and wander up Jenny Beckets Lane to Norbury Drive and home.

Many years were spent on Bridge St. apart from catching buses, good times were had at the Sunday school, Brownies and Girl guides at the Methodist Chapel. The strange building at the side of the chapel is where Sunday school/Brownies/Guides meetings were all held. On entering the building down stairs was an old kitchen area which the guides used at times. Upstairs on the right a cloakroom, opposite was the hall where Sunday school and Music Festivals were held. Coming back out of the hall turning left up some steps it led you down a passage way, we then walked through a room which housed a snooker/billiard table. As Brownies and Girl Guides we passed through this room and were always told not to touch the table. The next room was where the Brownie meetings were held, the next step took you outside to the top of Stanhope St. I always loved going from one end of the building to the other.

When I was older I would sometimes walk home (daylight hours). Past the Brown Cow on Ratcliffe Gate. Frank Inger’s motorcycles under the railway arches. Great Central Rd on the right where my sister and I would catch the train to Skegness.

Newgate Lane off to the left, King’s Arm pub on the corner. The local for my Dad’s siblings. Staying on the main rd past some steps which would take you to Arthur St. and Newgate Lane. My paternal grandparents lived on Arthur St.

On towards Redcliffe Rd where on the corner was the dreaded school dentist. Here I had a choice of walking above the Rock Houses and coming out on Carter Lane, or up Southwell Rd. There was also a well-worn path which took you past the houses so you could see inside them.

Over the junction of Carter Lane and Windsor Rd on past The Reindeer Pub. Downhill past Maltby Rd (where my maternal grandmother lived) past a road which led into the Racecourse. On visits to our Grandmother my sister and I would wait by the railway bridge when we heard a train coming so we could wave to the train drivers. Between there and Racecourse Rd we would cross Southwell Rd heading for Jenny Beckets Lane and home.

Looking back I have walked that walk many times. When I started work if I missed the bus I would run down –all downhill. What memories, I wish I could do it now.

Mansfield is a sorry sight now but it still has many beautiful buildings. Although sometimes you have to look up at the buildings as some of the fronts are modern and not in keeping with the building.

Thankfully I have my memories

I haven’t even touched on the times spent in the Palais and the Parochial Hall plus the Swan and The Horse & Jockey. My teenage years were the best.