

Living Memories Interview of Margaret Brown
by Jackie Thorns – 30th March, 2009

So you came into Tickhill when you were quite young?

Yes, I was about four and a half, we lived at Letwell previously.

And whereabouts did you live?

On Rotherham Road, opposite the Friary, they had a new house built there.

And your neighbour, I believe, was?

Oh, Mr Ben Shaw, who was Headmaster at Tickhill school and then Edlington.

And did you get on with your neighbour alright?

He was lovely but unfortunately, before we moved, his wife died and he went for a year to Africa, he sort of got leave I think, and when he came back he borrowed me to have afternoon tea with him because he hated eating by himself and he also brought me a little black doll back.

That would be quite unusual then, in those days, nobody else would have one?

Probably, I don't know.

Have you still got the doll?

Yes, Bambula – her name is.

And what were your first thoughts about Tickhill, can you remember, what were your earliest memories apart from the neighbour?

Well, I can remember coming to the house before it was floored properly and seeing all the rafters so that was quite early and, of course, shopping with mother. There were a lot more shops than now, and we had a woman who came and helped mother for a little while just on odd days. I can remember seeing an odd aeroplane and looking at it in wonder because they were just beginning.

So, when did you start school then?

When I was 5, I went to Tickhill Infants School for a couple of terms, I don't know why I left really, but while I was there the Coronation, I think it was, was celebrated with the school processions etc., there were some clowns and carts that went without engines or engines that went without horses that

frightened me to death and I was a sunflower in a white dress and daisy crepe paper head-dress and it poured with rain, I think that would be June. So after my time there I went to Miss Goodwins, which I think was a very good private school really, they introduced us to French and Poetry.

Did she actually do all the teaching?

Miss Grace and Miss Nelly taught, and there was another sister lived in the house, Miss Lottie, who did all the housework, she stayed in the house – someone had to keep order, and it was in a little hut, where Gleaddall's live now, opposite the Methodist.

So you weren't taught in the actual house?

No, it was in a separate building with a little playground at the back and one at the front. Just a few of us there, about 15: Tom Beastall, Mary Hulley, the Ashmore twins, they were all there.

Did you enjoy it?

Yes, I think so, yes. At the last hour of the afternoon, each afternoon, we seemed to have a story like 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' or 'The Odyssey' or poems or something, while we sewed even the boys sewed on these cards, for sort of, I suppose, a relaxing hour.

That would be quite nice for the teacher as well I suppose.

And I can remember Miss Grace always opening up a cupboard door and doing her hair if anyone was coming.

And what sort of, well you wouldn't know what sort of age they were?

No, they seemed very old. But they did try and teach us a bit of French as well, and I had a good grounding, I felt I had a good grounding, with the three R's.

So how long did you stay there then, what happened?

Until I was 8 I suppose and then I went, my father had ambitions for us to go, to Beechfield School, Chequer Road, Doncaster.

Was that instead of going to one of the one's in Tickhill?

Yes, but war broke out that September and he took me in and we met in the Old Infirmary in Wood Street, we just stayed there for about two hours or something and got homework, it was pandemonium and this, apparently, was while the air-raid shelters were being built in the school grounds as there

was nothing in the school. So my father took me away again, he took me back to Miss Goodwin's for a while and then I went back again, when things had settled down.

Did you enjoy it at Beechfield as well?

Not a lot!

(There was quite a lot of laughter at this point!)

Why was that, was there a lot more children?

Yes.

Oh well, that must have come as quite a shock, I suppose?

Yes and I was very timid.

So did they get the air-raid shelter built then?

Oh yes, loads of them, at the back of what was the museum, what is now the Waterdale Carpark.

Do you remember going into the air-raid shelters?

Not for an air-raid warning, no.

Did you have an air-raid shelter in your house, in your garden?

Yes we had one built in the garden and my mother put us to bed there sometimes, when Sheffield was being bombed. So that was quite frightening, as my father was in the ARP or Home Guard or something and I didn't like my mother being left with just us.

I don't suppose the shelters were very pleasant inside?

Well, ours wasn't bad, because my mother made it comfortable except for the odd little mouse running along.

You said you enjoyed your lunch-times when you were at Beechfield?

Well, we had two hours lunch time because everyone went home for lunch, of course we couldn't, living at Tickhill, so we used to go in about 8 o'clock, on the 8 o'clock bus or my father took us in, and come back on the 10 to 5 bus, it was a long day, but we had the two hour lunch hour so we spent that by wandering down to the sweetie shop spending our coupons or going down to Beechfield Park, we spent a lot of time there, there were swings and

roundabouts and a paddling pool and we used to help the donkey man in the summer, they had holidays at home, donkeys in the park, and the man used to let us lead the donkeys, and if it was raining or not very nice we'd play hide and seek round the air-raid shelters, which I'm not sure we should have done, and we went up to the museum and we looked round the museum – the old museum this is, and there was a mummy there and a bee in a case, bees in a glass case and you could watch them being all busy as well, it was very interesting. We didn't do any damage or anything like that, but we did enjoy browsing round it looking at things.

Talking about the war then you've got some memories from when you were actually down Rotherham Road, there?

Yes, in the summer holidays when war broke I'd had scarlet fever, I'd spent most of the holidays in bed and my mother wouldn't let me go to hospital because I tended to have bronchitis, she thought I wouldn't be looked after properly, so I had a disinfected curtain over the door and all my toys had to be burnt or destroyed.

I bet you were sad about that?

I think mummy cheated and disinfected them very well. Some of them were destroyed because they reckoned the infection could spread, but it didn't, my brother didn't get it at all. So that wasn't very nice and then the first air-raid warning we had was in September and we went with the rest of Rotherham Road, there weren't so many houses back then, into the cellar at the Friary, which was at that time empty. I can only remember going there once, but it was quite creepy.

And who was living in the Friary at that time?

Nobody, it was empty at the time.

Somebody must have had a key to get in?

Somebody had a key, yes.

And then later on the Friary was occupied?

With the army, I think it was an Officer Mess some of the time, and so they were in and out all of the time, different regiments, when they weren't there we'd roam round the garden and collect walnuts and swing on a rope that they had from a tree and all sorts of things like that. But when they were there, of course, it was very busy. I can remember the Bren guns coming out of the drive of the Friary, they sort of lurched because they were on caterpillar wheels to turn round to go down into the village.

So how were they, were they pushed or had they a motor of some sort?

Oh yes they were like small tanks, they'd got engines and things.

So they kept those in the grounds of the Friary?

They went in and out, I remember all the convoys going by, I mean that was ... we used to count them sometimes, there were so many armoured trucks and tanks and all sorts going from Sheffield to the East Coast, so it was quite awesome I suppose, really.

But I suppose, as a child it wasn't particularly frightening, just interesting?

Interesting, yes, oh and I haven't mentioned about Hexthorpe Flats, have I?

So you remember seeing one of these 'mock battle' type things that they did?

Yes, we were supposed to all keep indoors, out of the way, because they were going to have mock battles, I think ... a bit like Dad's Army, with the ARP and things as well, but I remember seeing soldiers running through the garden from the front to the back and that sort of thing and they set the quarry on fire which is near us along Stoney Lane.

Was it supposed to be a kind of a bomb that had detonated?

I suppose, yes. Another time we were told to stay indoors because we were having a gas practise but I didn't have any after effects of that or anything, but it's all very exciting when you're young. The sirens – when we had air-raids and things, the sirens going, we learnt to tell the different ones, they'd all got different notes, Harworth, Edlington, Rossington, Langold, you could hear all of them going on a clear night, it was quite awesome, and the squadrons, the hundreds flying over east, it was a continual drone, it was quite scary because we seemed to get a lot over here. Then, of course at the latter end, I remember laying in bed with mummy, well she came into my bed, when doodlebugs were around, near the end of the war and we could see these little lights going along with the drone and you hoped the light kept going.

Nobody was in any danger at Tickhill, though, were they?

Not really, except that we did have two land mines land the other side of the railway line and they told my mum to keep all of her windows open in case they went off before they detonated them, you know. So we went to bed, we had a shelter built in the garden, and we went to bed in it very often when Sheffield was bombed, I mean it vibrated under the ground.

Could you sort of hear any of the bombs being dropped over Sheffield?

Oh yes, like thunder. I remember motoring to Sheffield after Sheffield had been heavily bombed and seeing the damage to some places which had been flattened, and the barrage balloons as we approached all the rest of it.

So was that all while the war was actually on?

Yes.

So was it safe to actually go into Sheffield?

Probably not, I mean my husband had a terrifying journey through Sheffield, he was evacuated and then they came up to Doncaster, to his father at Doncaster, so they could all be together and they got to Sheffield, my Mother-in-Law with the two children and the taxi driver came from Doncaster with his father and when he found out, it was in the height of the bombing in Sheffield, and he found out the sirens had gone, he couldn't get out quick enough, my husband still has the memories I think ... he said it was the most terrifying ride he had ever had! In particularly getting your wheels stuck in the tram lines, you know? But he couldn't get out of Sheffield quick enough.

So it was a bit ironical being evacuated to this area when they were bombing Sheffield?

He wasn't evacuated here, he was evacuated to Kent and then Devon, but his Mum wanted to get them all together, their house was bombed in London anyway, so they came to rent a house up here.

And how did you go on with ration books and that, do you remember any of that?

Yes, particularly sweets, of course.

So did the shops operate quite normally during all this time?

Well, we didn't have to queue for stuff much, but we did pick a lot of fruit and that sort of thing, we used to go to Sandbeck and the gardener there would let us buy tomatoes and things so that helped, but mummy grew quite a bit.

Because people were encouraged to grow things in their own back garden weren't they? So the shops had plenty of supplies then?

Well, they seemed to have, and we still went cycle rides and had dens up the lane, but some nights if we heard a funny plane, the German planes stuttered, we'd wonder if it was and we'd dive off the bikes. My uncle came,

one Christmas day, from Letwell and he was peppered by a stray aeroplane along the Worksop Road, he was really scared, he'd had to jump off his bike.

You can't imagine them bothering with one person?

No, but he was quite scared.

So during the war, people weren't particularly downcast all the time, were they?

Well as a child, you don't realise, do you? I mean, there was a factory at Maltby and buses went to the factory, a munitions factory.

But in the village were people ... I think you mentioned some concerts and things took place?

Oh yes, we had a lot of war efforts, it was very much a village community and we raised a lot of money I gather, by concerts during the war and received various shields to that effect. One was HMS Lightning, I think ... there should be some shields in the library, there used to be – in the library when it wasn't a library. We used to have concerts there and we used to have dances there in the library, it was a nice big room with little orchestras, proper dances and when I was about 14, Mrs Rice who was the Headmaster's wife, she ran an old-time dancing class so we knew how to 'old-time dance' a lot of us, and that was good fun too. But the concerts, they were a local talent, I thought they were marvellous – when I was little anyway. A couple of brothers, I'd better not tell you the names, they were conjurers and magicians and of course, we'd no television so you thought it was wonderful. My mother and father both performed at these concerts, my father wore a kilt and sang Scottish songs, Harry Lauder's mainly, and my mum was a very good singer and she sang more classical music but then some encore songs like 'Two frogs came in our parlour door', that sort of thing. Some of the others did sing-songs, I remember one young man sang 'The Siegfried Line', that sort of thing, and 'Run Rabbit'.

So this was all to raise money to send to the soldiers?

Yes, yes.

All in the library?

And in the Parish Rooms, yes.

You were telling me about food during the war, that it was quite readily available, what do you remember about the shops in Tickhill then?

Well, I think, because there were no freezers and fridges and things like that, WI started a 'canning and bottling' group which mother took part in, as well as making jam. Canning was a bit elaborate so they had to do it at someone's house for sealing the lids, I suppose. Our milk, we used to get from the farm, Friary Farm, in the can – sometimes it was quite warm, it was lovely and we used to help pick fruit at an orchard off Worksop Road and we cycled to Sandbeck for tomatoes and vegetables occasionally, and shopping, well I used to be sent down for a bread loaf at Herrings shop which was down Westgate, eventually there was a little shop opened on Rawson Road, Pinfold Lane junction called Jakes, that had provisions, and we used to go to Whinfreys on the corner of St Mary's Gate and across the road from there, there was Whinfreys and Wombwells and Greenhoughs, all sold bits of groceries and things and then Fanthorpe's was the fruit and veg, that's where the veg shop is now, and it sold fish – fish mainly. Then of course there was Hunters grocery store which we didn't go in and we didn't go in the Co-op which had three separate departments, then there was Jenkinsons that sold ribbons and garden things. Taylors weren't in existence then, it was a beer-off, I can't think what was next door to it, there were another two shops there and where Eatons butchers is it seemed to have a variety of occupations including being a wool shop at one time during the war.

So you could get absolutely everything you wanted really?

You could really, because there was Jarvis' down Sunderland Street that sold clothing and all sorts of things, they were full of everything I think and Jarvis grocers shop that people have talked about, we used to go there for quite a lot of things. Your sugar was weighed out into blue bags and biscuits were in paper bags, loose – you could choose which ones you wanted, butter was off a slab, cut off a slab and your bacon was done while you waited, the service was so good. And of course, behind, was a little bakers that sold to the shops really.

Oh very good, so you got fresh bread as well?

Yes, and there were two more shops up Northgate and another one at the bottom of Sunderland Street, Mr Lanes, where the Bed and Breakfast/Café is now. So we had quite a lot of shops that sold a real assortment of things, Herrings shop also had a little library, they seemed to get books from somewhere and you could hire them, before there was a proper library. So yes, we were kept quite busy, there was a lot going on, and of course the church still had Harvest Suppers and things like that, we were quite involved with the church.

And I suppose it kept up people's moral having the different events?

It did, and it used to be full with the armies there, because usually if there was a regiment here they were marched to church, but Canon Cook was very

good because he started these special services like 'Candlemass' and 'Rogation Day' and that sort of thing and made more of a feature of them and they were filmed, you know? They've been on television, at first they were broadcast and they were on television after that. I've been to a service when it was televised because they kept featuring Jilly, who was opening her mouth at the right time but not singing, and then when we were in Llandudno on holiday we saw it on the television, the girls would have been in the choir but we saw the service on television.

I never realised Tickhill was so famous?

Well. I think it was Canon Cook who did it, he was quite enterprising and forward looking, he was a lovely man. We used to have a fair, fairs came round about twice a year, with roundabouts and ..., it varied what they brought, I remember a cake-walk and these swings. Only small affairs they were but we all loved them.

So have you any other memories of old Tickhill?

I remember we had no traffic down Pinfold Lane at all except horses and carts when I was little and I remember coming home from school one day and a man was beating his horse and I bravely said "Don't do that!", I was ever so cross with him, I said "You're cruel" and he didn't look at me, I've no idea who it was or anything but I mean, he could have got off and thumped me, I can't bear cruelty to animals. I think I probably got some rude words said to me but he didn't beat the horse again, probably it had been naughty anyway. I remember Scarlet Fever or Pneumonia being awfully serious and someone in Rawson Road had it and they put straw down on the road outside so it wouldn't disturb them or something, and we had to be quiet going by the end of the road – I think it was over the top.

And do you remember Saxton's?

Yes, I remember Saxton's, in fact my father had quite a few deliveries by ... he used to run a daily horse and cart up to the station or Doncaster for parcels and bring them back and deliver them, he was a carrier but he also had the funeral horses and carriage which was so dignified they were lovely black horses, you know and the black carriage, I remember seeing that as a child. And a fox hunt down at Tickhill Spital, Miss Goodwins took us down to Tickhill Spital to see this fox hunt setting off.

Who would that be then would that be linked to Sandbeck?

I would think so, but I don't really know.

And you used to have some sort of fete or something down at Sandrock as well?

Yes, we did, yes. The church fete that one, that was a superb venue for it really because of the lots of woods and caves and things to wander in round the back. They used to crown the May Queen in the vicarage garden and have an afternoon tea party with an odd stall and the kids could dance round the maypole and then it was repeated at Westgarth Garden Fete or Sandrock Garden Fete, so they could wear their dresses more than once, I think.

How long did the maypole dancing go on for, do you think?

It went on until quite recently.

In Westgarth, or ...?

In Westgarth, at the garden fete, the vicarage garden bit with the change of vicars didn't materialise and of course the Sunday School's gone down now, there used to be a big Sunday School, it used to be three or four classes when my children were little and now there's nothing really, different times.