

Transcript of Podcast 039: The People's Republic Of South Yorkshire

{Intro. A crowd singing}

*You fill up my senses,
Like a gallon of Magnet,
Like a packet of Woodbines,
Like a good pinch of snuff,
Like a night out in Sheffield,
Like a greasy chip butty,
Like Sheffield United,
Come thrill me again*

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Carrying on from last episode's New Year greetings, if you celebrate or otherwise mark it, I hope you had a happy Easter, a kosher and joyous Passover, and/or a Blessed Ostara. It's that time of year when there are many and varied religious and cultural celebrations one after another. It was Holi recently too, an ancient and popular Hindu festival that celebrates both the arrival of spring, and the defeat of evil (Hiranyakashipu) by good (Vishnu). Most outsiders, especially in the West, only know it as 'that festival where everybody throws coloured powder around'. Still, at least they've heard of it, which is a step up I guess.

Related, I'm writing this on International Asexuality Day, which ... seems to be trending regionally on Twitter, which either shows there's a lot of us, or it doesn't take a lot to trend on Twitter. I've spoken and blogged at length about Asexuality before – indeed I have almost two entire pods on it (episodes 7 and 32) – so I'll briefly pass over it this time by reminding people, of whatever orientation and/or gender identity, but even also whatever hobby and interest you have, place that fascinates you, or specific cause you believe passionately in, the important thing is getting people to hear about it, getting it known; until then people won't listen, won't care, and, importantly, have no way of relating. You may feel sometimes you're shouting into the void, but if only one person listens, understands, and goes, 'yes, that's me', or 'yes, that makes sense, I believe in that', then you have achieved something, and made that one small step towards a wider acceptance.

I don't think I have any personal updates to give you really, it's been an otherwise fairly indistinct two weeks. I'm doing more running again now the weather's ... I'd say improved but as I look out the window I see it's currently trying, albeit failing, to snow, but it was about 20°C on Sunday; we're very definitely in that weird bit of the year where the weather doesn't really know what to do. I've probably said it before, but the best thing about running is not the running itself, it's the having run, that feeling that you've achieved something and your body is going 'wowzers, I needed that, but now let's rest'.

At the end of this current week (so possibly around the time you're listening to this episode), I'll be having my voice recorded professionally, so hopefully nothing horrific will happen between now and then to prevent it. I'm hoping they give me guidance on what to do next, actually, on how to market it. The friend I was going to meet while I'm there can no longer meet me, because she's realised she's busy until just after lunch – we could still have met up but we'd've only had just over an hour and it didn't feel worth it. Guess it gives me an excuse to go back down to London later in the year. I have however booked to go see another friend in mid-May, once the pubs have been open long enough for people to have got over the initial thrill. She lives

up Durham-way so we're meeting in York as it's halfway. It shows what sort of year this is that I've booked a day off work simply to go drinking with a friend in a city I've been to many times before. I'm normally all about the new, the exciting, the different. Meh.

I'm also pondering my summer trips. I had thought about hiking a footpath in Scotland, or visiting Orkney, but I'm just a bit fearful that everybody else will be doing it, as they can't go abroad. I've no real desire to be on a remote footpath or small island and be surrounded by everyone else looking for their own piece of solitude. But I'll have to see how that pans out.

Anyway. My second ever podcast episode was on Hometown Travel, and I talked a bit about my local area. Since then I've kind of moved house so I have a new hometown. While I'm not recreating an episode on the concept of hometown travel itself, I did think it would be a great idea to do one specifically on the area I live, because unlike Kirkby-in-Ashfield and surrounds, people have actually heard of Sheffield, and it's a pretty notable city. Or at least I thought it was notable. When I was chatting with my American friend Laura, who you'll've heard on previous episodes of this pod, she admitted to have not realising just how big Sheffield was, or even really where it was.

While I'm going to try to encompass the whole of South Yorkshire in this pod, obviously Sheffield itself will take centre stage, being the largest settlement and the one that acts as the 'gravitational centre' of the region. It wasn't always thus, though, as I'll come onto in a minute.

First though, some general information about the region. South Yorkshire itself doesn't really exist, not any more; rather it's a region of what used to be the West Riding of Yorkshire that was split off in 1974 and itself, to all intents and purposes, abolished in 1986 to be replaced by the four authorities of Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster, and Barnsley. Now, I know many people listening to this are travel bloggers more used to reading and hearing about distant, beautiful, cultural, or famous places like Bali, Paris, and New Orleans, so it's probably unlikely you'll have come across Rotherham in any of your brand collaborations or blog-surfing. But that's what I do here; talk travel tales from, literally, beyond the brochure.

The area covered by the old South Yorkshire region, by the way, was about 1,552 km², or nearly 600 square miles. This makes it marginally larger than the Maasai Mara game reserve in Kenya, which given how much I heard about it growing up on programmes like 'Survival', surprised me in how small it is.

The population of the region is about 1.4 million, of which 584,000 live in Sheffield. This makes Sheffield the third largest borough and city in England, after Birmingham and Leeds, and the fourth largest in the UK (Glasgow appears to have a marginally bigger population). This is, of course, a bit fake given the way some borders of boroughs are defined (the edge of Manchester for instance literally runs along the edge of the city centre), but regardless, we're dealing with a sizeable place here; and as a result South Yorkshire is only the 10th most populous in England, behind not only the likes of Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, but also those exciting must-see counties of Essex and Hampshire.

Apart from the main towns of the four boroughs, the region is largely made up of a series of villages and small towns, many following the contours of the land and built to take advantage of the natural resources – mainly coal. In between are hills, lots of hills, as the higher land of the Peak District to the west drops slowly to the flat plains of Lincolnshire and the Humber estuary to the east. This effectively means it looks from above like a lot of densely populated spots surrounded by open areas of green, as if someone's thrown a load of houses like dice and they've landed on the ground and scattered randomly. Indeed two of the boroughs, Sheffield and Barnsley, themselves cover parts of the Peak District itself; it's a very weird feeling to stand in the middle of a country lane without any mobile signal and realise you're technically in the UK's fourth largest city. In addition, the suburbs of Dore & Totley, in the SW of Sheffield, are the location of one of the most affluent local government wards outside of London. It's a very varied place.

Later I'll talk about how it feels to live here, especially as someone who moved in to the area rather than being brought up here, and I'll also include a few contributions from friends who have a connection with the area. But first, let's look at the history of the region. This bit is longer than I anticipated.

People have been living in the vague area since the end of the last ice-age. I mentioned in my Hometown

Travel podcast about Creswell Crags, a series of caves in the rock on the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border, where the most northerly prehistoric cave paintings have been found. While not in South Yorkshire, it only lies just over 10km from the Sheffield border so it's reasonable to assume the people who lived there did hunt and wander through the area.

The first true reference I can find to people living specifically in what is now South Yorkshire though is a couple of iron age forts – one of which is very close to where I live, at a place called Wincobank, in the north of Sheffield. Obviously there's not a lot there now – it's a green and muddy hill – but it commands a reasonable view out over the middle Don Valley area and would have been a good spot to base yourself. Items from a similar time have also been found in the centre of Sheffield, at what later became Sheffield Castle. There seems to be a theory that a small circle of foundation-type stones found at Deepcar, between Sheffield and Barnsley, may be the remains of a Mesolithic-era house, but there's very little evidence to corroborate this.

It was really the Romans who first made a solid mark on the area, and they started early. Within a few years of their initial invasion in 43AD, they'd built a fort (initially believed by later archaeologists to have been a temple, hence the suburb name of Templeborough) just to the south of what is now Rotherham; the site of this fort has been covered by later industry (which we'll come back to later), but part of the granary of the fort was moved nearer the centre of town, into Clifton Park, which means you get to see genuine Roman ruins in a completely non-genuine setting, which is always pretty odd.

The Romans concentrated mostly though on a fort and settlement at Danum, just a bit further East and at an easy crossing point on the River Don (a Celtic name relating to the goddess Danu). This was built as an important staging post for the route between the major Roman cities of Lincoln and York – the main track of which crossed the Humber by means of a ferry, which was not always possible in bad weather, so an alternative inland by-pass was constructed. The settlement at Danum grew and ended up surviving beyond the Roman era, eventually being renamed Doncaster.

As an aside, not much seems to remain of this era of Doncaster's history, aside from a 'timeline' in the pavements along its streets that document all the things that have happened in the area that have been long forgotten and no longer visible. These days it's more famous for its racecourse, its football club (on whom I once won £100 in one of my very rare visits to a bookmaker), and for being the home of the first person I ever had a small crush on (a penpal called Rachel, who I haven't spoken to since 1994). It is home to the region's airport though - Doncaster-Sheffield Robin Hood Airport (its name probably more interesting than its location), whose dual-language signage suggesting it looks more towards Warsaw than London or Rome for business.

After the Romans left, the South Yorkshire area became somewhat frontier country, It was on the southern edge of a Brittonic Kingdom called Elmet (shades of the name still exist further North, in places like Sherburn-in-Elmet), but when the Saxons moved in and created their kingdoms in the original Game Of Thrones setting, the border between the kingdoms of Mercia to the south and Northumbria to the North was generally the Rivers Don and Sheaf – indeed the very name 'Sheaf' may mean 'to divide', in the sense that the river 'divided' the two kingdoms, in roughly the same way the River Mersey, a name that means 'boundary', marked the western extremity of the same border. Most of South Yorkshire thus was part of Northumbria, although that Sheffield Railway Station, from which you can get trains to both York and Tamworth, two of the main settlements of the requisite kingdoms, stands directly over the River Sheaf and therefore the border between the two, feels quite apt.

Its location on the edge meant it never seems to have developed much beyond a few homesteads, but conversely it does mean it escaped the wrath of the incoming Normans and the 'Harrying of the North' at the end of the 11th century where much of what was Northumbria was laid waste.

One place that was occupied was Conisbrough, between Rotherham and Sheffield. I talk about this more in my earlier podcast episode 30, which was on The Wars Of The Roses. The church here dates from the 700s and may well be one of the oldest buildings extant in the county, while its castle has been often owned by no less than royalty since as far back as King 'I seem to have something in my eye' Harold. Although quite small now compared to places around, Conisbrough castle does stand atop a large hill next to the River Don, so it

would have been quite a strategic vantage point.

There was a castle in Sheffield, built not long after the Norman Conquest, but it was never really notable, as compared with other castles nearby like Conisbrough and Sandal. In fact the castle grounds were far larger than the castle itself, stretching out so far southeast that a Manor House was later built in the park. This, by the way, is why my local parkrun is called Sheffield Castle Parkrun, despite being some distance from where Sheffield Castle stood – it's held at Manor Fields Park which was once part of the Castle grounds near where the Manor stood. There's only a few stones there now, which admittedly is more than Sheffield Castle. Its main claim to fame was being where Mary Queen Of Scots was held for a period of time in the late 1500s while Queen Elizabeth I pondered what to do with her. The castle was completely destroyed during the English Civil War and eventually replaced by a market hall. Which has also since been demolished – to be fair it was fairly dated and ugly – and it has been replaced with, well, at the time of recording, nothing, it's a building site hidden behind temporary fencing covered with street art.

Another oddity of this early mediaeval period was suggested at the time of the Scottish independence referendum that Doncaster was part of Scotland. This was due to the Treaty of Durham in 1136 between King David I of Scotland and King Stephen of England, where the latter ceded the town to Scotland; King Stephen having problems of his own and didn't want to engage further in a costly war with the Scots. The belief is the town was never formally re-taken, but to be honest this was a period of pretty constant warfare and vague alliances, and borders changed regularly; King Malcolm of Scotland swore allegiance to King Henry II of England in the late 1150s and the English King assumed de facto control of the city and everyone accepted this. Who needs a legal framework? Unless you're listening in 2027 and you're desperate for a Scottish passport, I guess.

Anyway. What we now know as the main towns were given market charters in the late 1200s, but it wasn't really until the rise of industry in the later middle ages that the region really took off, and population estimates suggest that it's not until the mid 1700s that any settlement in the area hits any significant national size (even in the 1600s the likes of Bury St Edmunds and Great Yarmouth were larger than anything in Yorkshire outside York itself and possibly Hull). Rather, the area was, similar to in Roman times, a place you passed through rather than stayed any time in. This is of course where the tales of banditry, outlaws, and people like Robin Hood come in.

Robin Hood? But isn't he associated with Sherwood Forest? And the Sheriff of Nottingham?

Well, yes. But of course he's a mythical figure that's a combination of a number of different tales, some of which may be based on multiple real people, and exaggerated. There's a couple of competing theories over this, but it must be remembered Sherwood Forest itself isn't terribly far from Sheffield and Rotherham – Worksop, at the northern edge, is less than 10km from the county boundary – plus Robin Hood himself is often referred to as Robin of Loxley. Loxley is a real place; it's a northwestern suburb of Sheffield, heading out towards the peaks (and on the 'wrong side' of the River Sheaf, it must be said). In addition, it's believed the area he normally patrolled was Barnsdale Forest, which lay just north of Doncaster, and directly on the road between there and York, so would have been prime territory for banditry (rather than the more famous places in Sherwood Forest which are ... kind of nowhere, really. The Great North Road never went through Edwinstowe or Mansfield). Note too that Little John, one of his associates, is reputedly buried in Hathersage, in the Hope Valley just to the west of Sheffield.

Loxley is also the name of one of the rivers on which the city of Sheffield stands. In fact the city is noted for standing on five rivers (the Don, The Sheaf, the Loxley, the Rivelin, and, despite its unassuming name, the Porter Brook, which is much larger than it sounds), and, like many of the world's major cities, seven hills. As an aside, the third steepest residential street in England is in Sheffield - Blake Street, in the west of the city between Uppertorpe and Walkley, with an incline of about 30%. This combination became important in the Middle Ages and directly led to the rise of the region as a centre for industry – the hills were rich in metals like iron ore, and the rivers flowing through them provided an easy and cheap source of hydro energy to power things like mills and industrial grinding machines. This pre-dates the so-called Industrial Revolution – the notable Shepherd's Wheel (named after a much later owner) that stood on the Porter Brook was known to exist in the mid-to-late 1500s. It's now a working museum and scheduled ancient monument.

The main industry at first was metalwork; Sheffield became noted for its steel (and indeed is still known as Steel City to this day; it's Ice Hockey Team are the Sheffield Steelers) – a fact mentioned as early as Geoffrey Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales, in the late 1300s, and by the 1600s it was one of the leading sites in England for, amongst other things, cutlery (and even in my lifetime I can still recall tableware embossed with 'Sheffield Steel' on it). Sheffield was also the site of the first successful European attempt at recreating 'crucible steel', a form of ironworking that made a purer and stronger form of steel, that was common in India and Central Asia. Within 100 years of Benjamin Huntsman's first attempts, Sheffield was believed to be the origin of up to half of the entire steel output of Europe – providing the backbone to the expanding British Empire and causing the region, and Sheffield in particular, to grow exponentially. Coming from nowhere, Sheffield was the 11th biggest town in England in the 1801 census, becoming the 6th by 1861. This of course is commemorated in the fact the central theatre in Sheffield is called 'The Crucible'; it does not look like one, after all.

There was one issue related to this sudden increase in Sheffield's industry and population, involving water. Remember I said this was an area of seven hills and five rivers? The growing populations needed fresh water supplies, and this was achieved by building several reservoirs in the nearby Peak District, just to the west of the Sheffield urban sprawl. One such is the Dale Dyke Reservoir, near Bradfield. It's 23 hectares in area (about 18 Olympic Swimming Pools), holding 2 thousand million litres of water. At least, it does now. When originally built in 1864, it held half as much again. That's quite a lot of water, and indeed, it was too much water for the dam that held the reservoir in place. A day after being filled, the dam broke (it hadn't been constructed to exacting standards) and 3 thousand million litres of water rushed out, down the River Loxley and into the River Don. The resulting flood surge reached upwards of 12 feet, killing over 240 people, and destroying over 5,000 buildings. It's one of the most devastating floods in British history, and may even be the largest non-weather-related flood disaster experienced in the UK.

Weather related flooding has affected the region since, in 1991, 2009, and 2019, but notably of course in 2007 when parts of Sheffield were inundated with just under 2 metres of water, especially the Hillsborough area, which was also the area most hit by the 1864 flood. One of my internet friends at the time was flooded out of her house and, as far as I know, never went back. She ended up moving to Leeds, via Australia.

Anyway. The other towns in the South Yorkshire region also expanded because of developing industry – Barnsley became a major centre for glass and linen, for instance, and Rotherham developed an iron industry (remember that Roman temple? It was moved because of a huge ironworks built on the site just after World War One), but it was coal that was the king for most of the region, especially around the Dearne Valley between Barnsley and Rotherham. At nationalisation of British Coal just after World War 2, the total number of extant collieries in South Yorkshire stood at around 70; it's likely the total number of mines dug (including ones closed early due to unprofitability) ran into the hundreds. It's no coincidence that in more recent times, when the National Union of Mineworkers moved their headquarters out of London, they went first first to Sheffield, and then to Barnsley.

Unions in general became an important factor in specifically Sheffield's growth. Working conditions in the steel industry were notoriously grim, and employers tended to cut as many corners as they could – ahh it was ever thus. In response, militant agitation amongst employers grew over the mid-1800s. Sheffield saw the organisation of some of the first recorded Trade Unions, and certainly the first known attempts at cross-industry Trades Union Congress type bodies – the Sheffield Mechanical Trades Association in the early 1820s.

A pay dispute and subsequent failed strike action in the 1860s led to the Sheffield Trades Union movement reaching out to the rest of Britain and in 1866, in Sheffield, the country's first national Trades Union was founded, the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades. Although it didn't last very long (due mostly to its leadership being implicated in a series of violent actions and murders known as the Sheffield Outrages), that it existed at all paved the way for the Trades Union Congress (the TUC) as we know it today.

Note, by the way, that Trades Union activity wasn't fully legalised until 1872.

Trades Union activity in the region was also pivotal a hundred years later, during the Miners' Strike, a year-long strike across the UK that pitted miners against politicians, Yorkshire against Nottinghamshire (football

matches between Mansfield and Doncaster had to be heavily policed for years afterwards), and may be symbolic as to why many perceive a 'North South Divide' in the country. The strike itself is beyond the scope of this podcast, but it's worth noting it began in South Yorkshire, when the colliery at Cortonwood, at the Barnsley end of the Dearne Valley, was earmarked for closure for being uneconomic. It's now a retail park. In addition, the most famous 'battle' of the strike took place at Orgreave, in the east of Sheffield. If you ever see footage of police and miners/picketers fighting on TV or in a film, it's likely the footage came from here. It's now a business park with plans to develop into a country park.

This history of a unionised and active workforce is partly the background as to why the moniker "The People's Republic Of South Yorkshire" has been given to the region. It's always been an area of very socialist, left-wing, thought, and it was in the 1980s when these views came strongly to the fore. Some were practical – heavily subsidised local transport for instance, which partly caused ructions with central government (Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher) who wanted to restrict local council spending. Also, Sheffield in particular was fond of communist-style housing in tower blocks, one of which, Park Hill, just up the hill from the railway station, became notorious for its construction and reputation. It was later designated a Listed Building as a prime example of Brutalist architecture, and is now seen as quite bijoux. It looks like something directly imported from Belgrade or Novosibirsk, only with more day-glo patches. The nickname was also given for symbolic reasons – Sheffield council had a tendency to fly the Red Flag outside the town hall, and signed a twinning agreement with the Soviet city of Donetsk – one of the roads in the southeast of the city, now served by a tram line, is called Donetsk Way.

It also famously declared itself a nuclear-free zone. This led directly to the thought-provoking and incredibly bleak film 'Threads', concerning the realities of the aftermath of a nuclear war, being set in Sheffield. This theme of the end of the world as we know it came up several years later, when the equally apocalyptic TV drama 'The last Train' was initially set here. Evidently Sheffield's the place to be if you want to experience Armageddon.

On a lighter note, kind of, arguably the most famous film to be set here was The Full Monty, although even that was set with the backdrop of post-industrial dereliction.

So that's a brief (ha!) history, but what is it like to live here? Local author Judith Watkins, who was born and brought up in Sheffield, gives us a brief overview.

[JUDITH WATKINS]

I was born and bred in Sheffield, and even though I worked abroad and travelled the world, I still ended up back here. I think that's because I'm from the Steel City, and its magnetism is a force to be reckoned with. Once the place has touched you, it's hard to pull away. Just ask the multitudes of ex-students who came here to university and never left.

Could it be its architecture that draws the crowds. I mean the 'ole in t'road', town-hall eggbox, and Tinsley Towers were all icons of their time, but they've long since been replaced by other marmite structures like the cheese grater car park or the steel drums of the Hubs building.

Or might it be because of its reputation as the greenest city in Europe, with its much-loved trees which modern day Sheffielders have even risked prison to protect. You see, with the Peak District National Park right on the doorstep, it's never far to travel to find the peace and quiet of nature.

In my outdoor city, you can not only walk, but run, cycle, and climb. Maybe you'll soon even be able to ski again, if they ever rebuilt the slopes that burned down. But if that's too energetic, then just sit back and watch the footy. A choice of two teams, just be careful which you pick. And remember you're in the birthplace of the world's most popular sport, with Sheffield FC being the oldest football club in the world and Sandygate its oldest football ground.

But a more likely explanation for Sheffield's appeal is its reputation for being a safe place to live, and its nickname as 'the largest village in England'. For, despite its population of over half a million, you'll always bump into someone you know in the city centre. And take care, because that stranger you meet in the pub

will be the second cousin of your best friend's sister's hairdresser, so watch what you say.

But whatever you do say, you'll be sure to get an answer, because Sheffield folk will always engage you in a conversation. In fact it wasn't until I left my home town that I realised saying 'hello' as you walk down the street, or commenting on the weather in the bus queue, wasn't the norm for all cities. It's the friendliness of the place that's so infectious, and once it's got under your skin then Sheffield will be carved in your heart forever.

The trees ... ah yes. It's another example of that radicalist bent the people of the city seem to have in spades. As part of a street regeneration campaign, the local council wanted to remove several thousand trees from the streets of Sheffield that were blocking the way or damaging the pavements, and replace them with saplings. The locals, especially in the west of the city, Nether Edge and Sharrow, areas with a vibrant and quite studenty population, objected to this and tried to prevent the culling of healthy trees. Often by handcuffing themselves to it. One of my friends, in fact an ex, but obviously we still talk to each other, was one of the leading campaigners who got arrested.

As for football, not only does Sheffield have the world's two oldest extant football clubs (Sheffield FC and Hallam FC, who play each other in the Sheffield Derby – the **other** clubs play the Steel City Derby), but the Bramhall Lane football ground hosted the first ever floodlit football match, and it's also one of the few sporting grounds to have hosted both international football and cricket. Albeit only one international cricket match. In 1902. When play was affected by industrial haze.

Someone else who was brought up here and came back later in life is Annie Matthews, who goes by "No Hurry Be Happy" on Instagram. She also talks about the trees, but also what she finds pleasurable about the city in general.

[ANNIE – NO HURRY BE HAPPY]

Sheffield's my home town. I was born and brought up here. As a working adult, I moved away and I lived in London for a number of years, and Cheshire, but in my 50s I've returned to Sheffield. The thing I love about it most is you kind of have the best of both worlds. You've got the city and urban lifestyle, there's theatres and art galleries and events happening, and at the same time you're surrounded by beautiful countryside.

I read quite often that Sheffield has the highest ratio of trees to people across Europe. It's also got around 250 parks or green areas. This year it's honestly been an absolute blessing to have loads of places to go walking. There are events happening outside, gosh, all year round really especially music in the park in the summer; that's a great fun thing to do. Probably the best example, or the most well known example, is the Tramlines Festival.

The world snooker championship has been held in Sheffield for years, I've lost count really of how many years. But when that happens the city centre is just full of atmosphere and there's fans from all around the world who turn up to watch it. It really is a fun thing to do to head into the city centre when that's happening.

The biggest downside of Sheffield? Well for me I would say it's not being near the coast. But it is only an hour to two hours' journey really, so I guess I can't complain too much.

Culture, ah I've not really spoken about culture. From my demographic's point of view, Rotherham's most famous children are the Chuckle Brothers (To Me To You), while ex-Top Gear Presenter James May went to high school here. Weirdly, his co-presenter, the divisive Jeremy 'Take That' Clarkson was born in Doncaster.

Barnsley council converted part of its town hall into a hyper-local museum called 'Experience Barnsley'. This gives an introduction to the region, and has a considerable number of interactive exhibits and information specifically local to the Barnsley area, including short films depicting stereotypical Barnsley residents across the centuries. At the time of my visit there was even a temporary exhibit on one of the town's most famous sons, the cricket umpire Dickie Bird. It's also telling that on my visit, the vast majority of other visitors there, if not Barnsley resident, at least had a very strong connection to the area; essentially the museum was telling

people about their own history – an important and often overlooked aspect of community.

Barnsley Town Hall itself is a 'Classical Style' building, listed, built in the early 1930s. It could so easily have been Art Deco. There's a war memorial outside it, and there was a weird ... sculpture thing which the council occasionally issues warnings to people not to climb. It was on loan from the Yorkshire Sculpture Park just across the old West Yorkshire border in Wakefield, and I don't know if it's gone back yet. It's called Crossing (vertical), by the sculptor from Bristol Nigel Hall, it's made of steel (but presumably not Sheffield Steel, alas), weighs just under 6 tonnes, is 10 meters tall, and its design of a central backbone lined with slats has given it the nickname of the 'nit comb'.

Sheffield, apart from its movie heritage mentioned earlier, has also been a hotbed for music. In my youth it produced bands like Human League and ABC, also Heaven 17, one of whose songs was, in keeping with the city's vibe, banned from airplay by the BBC for being too politically radical. It's also home to the two Cockers (Joe and Jarvis, unrelated tho it seems Joe babysat Jarvis when the latter was a wee kid) – when I was a student, my housemate at the time claimed I looked like Jarvis Cocker; very similar height, same kind of head shape, similar glasses. I've never seen it myself. My mother thinks I look more like a younger Louis Theroux. I suspect that's just wishful thinking on her part. These days, the biggest musicians from Sheffield are probably the Arctic Monkeys. Oh well.

The city is full of small bits of history too, if you know where to look. For example, in the suburb of Hillsborough, to the northwest, the main shopping centre is built into, and named after, Hillsborough Barracks. They were built in the mid 1850s, and housed a number of regiments including one battalion of the Dragoon Guards and another of the Royal Artillery. At its height, just under 1,000 soldiers were stationed here. While it's hard to believe they were in situ in preparation for a revolt of Yorkshiremen, it must have been quite a nice posting ... despite the plethora of industrial towns around (eg Deepcar, Stocksbridge, Elsecar), the location on the edge of the Peak District and next to the River Loxley must have been more appealing than other garrison towns in the South.

The site was quite expansive, incorporating (amongst other things) a stable block, married quarters, a school catering for 80 children, a granary, hospital provision (including both dental and veterinary practices - tho not in the same building!), and the facility to store field guns. By all accounts it was quite an imposing site.

The Army pulled out in the 1930s, and the site was turned into commercial premises - apparently at first a chemists took over before Morrisons supermarket took over the bulk of it in the early 1990s; other parts have become a car park, other shops, and a pub, whilst the married quarters and garrison commander's house have been demolished and built upon.

Then there's the quirky-named suburb of Halfway. This lies on the very southern edge of Sheffield, again heading towards Creswell Crags. It's the terminus of one of the tram lines, which means I never fail to be amused by the sight and sound of trams going 'halfway'. The name derives from an old coaching inn on a main road, but there's been some debate as to which one. The most likely appears to have been one between the older and, at the time, more significant towns of Chesterfield (in Derbyshire) and Rotherham (Templeborough); indeed in a straight line it's almost exactly 12km from both.

Just to the west of the city centre is Eccleshall Road, heading towards Nether Edge.

[BEA AND GREEN]

GREEN: We have hidden treasures, like the synagogue, which is just tucked away off Eccleshall Road, and that's a very grand building. You don't know that's there but when you do know that's there it's like, well I'll have a look at that.

Also just off Eccleshall Road, in Sharrow, is Sheffield General Cemetery. You wouldn't know it was there unless you peeked down one of the side roads to explore. Opened in 1836, it saw nearly 90,000 burials until it's closure in 1978. This isn't just an ordinary graveyard with uniformly-lined stones though; this is a landscaped parkland and woodland, in almost the very centre of the city, that just happens to have graves and mausoleums in it, as well as a handful of old chapels that are now listed buildings. Amongst the people

buried here are William Dronfield, founder of that first Trades Union Congress, the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades, many of the victims of the Dale Dyke Flood, and a chap called George Bassett, who you may not have heard of but you almost will have heard of the company he founded that was named after him, which later invented Liquorice Allsorts. One of the most disgusting sweets in the world. Don't @ me.

The voice you heard in the previous paragraph was one half of a couple who are friends of mine from Sheffield. Bea you'll have heard before – she contributed to Episode 34 on British Seaside resorts – but for this pod she was joined by her husband, Green, and they had a great chat with each other about their experiences. The full version (all 24 minutes of it) will be available for my Discord followers, but I've taken a few extracts to use in this pod. Unlike Annie and Judith earlier, both of them grew up elsewhere and came to Sheffield as young adults.

[BEA AND GREEN]

BEA: Well, I came to Sheffield when I was 22. I was at college/university back in my home town of Cheltenham, and I was just slowly kind of dropping out of that, and then I decided I would defer for a year to do a year-long course that happened to run in Sheffield as well as in Cheltenham, and I decided I would come up to Sheffield for a year. But then I got here and it just felt like home very very quickly, and I met my first husband, and it just felt right to stay here, and I just ... stayed.

GREEN: So what's your earliest memory of Sheffield?

BEA: Well, I remember when I shared with my grandparents that I was going to move to Sheffield, and Poppy said 'why do you want to do that, it'll be all black and industrial'. So I remember coming to Sheffield and thinking 'it's not black and industrial; it's lovely'. The industrial aspect of Sheffield didn't really come into my awareness I think for quite a while. I moved into Crookes to begin with, and have stayed on this side of the city. I think if anything, my most industrial knowledge of Sheffield for quite a long time was still back in 'The Full Monty'. That was really my first introduction to Sheffield, though I didn't, I only really kind of made that connection when I moved to Sheffield and I was like 'oh gosh, The Full Monty', and I've really loved, as I've lived here, realising, 'oh that's whey filmed that bit', 'that's where they filmed that bit', cos Ruskin Park, just down the road in Blake Street, that's in The Full Monty, so ...

Yeh, so I think, community has felt like a really huge part of my experience of Sheffield from when I got here. And although the community I feel like I'm part of now is very different to the one I was part of when I came, Sheffield to me as a city feels like a city made up of communities, it doesn't feel like a huge city at all, and I love that about it. Cos the fact that it's a huge city means you're not constantly bumping into people, yet at the same time I feel like I belong.

Bea there talks about community and togetherness, and though she came as an adult, she has the same sense that Judith earlier had – the feeling that Sheffield could be described as 'England's largest village'.

I, too, am an interloper, an outsider. I was brought up the other side of the country, in Liverpool, and I don't even think I set foot in Sheffield until I'd just turned 30. It was ... I'd never had a need to go there, plus it was kind of in the wrong part of the country to even pass through. It also wasn't a place I knew a great deal about. There's a few places like that in the UK, towns and cities that didn't impress themselves on me at a young age so I never really associated anything with them. I put Leicester, Bristol, and Southampton in the same category – big places that existed, but with nothing to focus on, no real reputation to consider. That's not to say I'd have considered them boring, more ... I've nothing to say about them. So much so, indeed, that when I was choosing Universities to apply to, it never even crossed my mind to look into it.

It kind of changed for me when I moved to Nottinghamshire. Not only was Sheffield now only 25 miles away (its railway station being an hour from my house, including waiting time for the train at Alfreton station), but the job I had involved servicing several telesales call centres across the country, one of which was in the Dearne Valley. When the mining and heavy industry closed, there was a huge amount of derelict land and nothing to replace it. Indeed one part, near Manvers, was regarded for a time as the largest derelict site in western Europe. Some of these sites have been replaced with country parks and areas of beauty, such as the Rother Valley at the extreme southern edge of South Yorkshire (near Creswell and Sherwood), and the Old Moor RSPB wetland site at Manvers, which covers 89 hectares, which is 89 international rugby pitches,

or an area about the size enclosed by the mediaeval walls of the city of Delft, in Netherlands. Or twice the size of the Vatican City.

Much of it though became home to identikit and soulless call centres (arguably the new Working Classes) where people spend 8 hours a day either trying to sell mundane services or handling calls from dissatisfied customers who are unhappy with the mundane services that they've previously been sold. They're staffed with advisors who will happily switch allegiance to any of the other nearby companies based purely on salary & bonuses; the job's pretty much the same, only the greeting differs.

Anyway, I went to the Dearne Valley quite a bit. The railway from Rotherham to Swinton, passing through the old industrial sites, some still in use, some in ruins, the embankments and hillsides covered with young silver birch trees, always felt to me like it told the story of the region in a handful of minutes.

However, it's not all grim. Remember I mentioned the ironworks in Rotherham built on the site of a Roman fort? It's now home to the Magna Science Adventure Centre; a large interactive/educational museum that aims to display and educate about not only the industrial heritage of the region but also the science behind that industry. It's a fully interactive and child-friendly site divided into four segments, relating to the four traditional elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Each segment has different exhibits relating to science, showing for example how forges work, how tornadoes form, and the applications of the power of water. It's a great site for budding engineers and scientists. Its centrepiece is 'The Big Melt' – a live demonstration of an authentic huge electric arc furnace that had been previously used for real in one of the steel-making factories that Sheffield was world-renowned for.

At the other end of the Dearne Valley, there's another industrial museum, the Elsecar Heritage Centre, wherein one can find a heritage railway, craft shops, and a working original Newcomen Beam Engine, the sort of thing your history teachers at school would rave about for ages. Indeed this was the very engine that pumped water out of the nearby colliery for the whole of the 19th Century.

These both show the region is both accepting and proud of its industrial past, and wants to keep the history alive even if the industries themselves have long since gone.

As for Sheffield itself ... I think the first time I set foot in the city was when I went to Darnall and won a bottle of wine for making the most amusing noises when being tickled. But that's a tale for another podcast. Probably. I do recall having a period where every time I went to the city, I encountered something different. One time I was walking down one of the main shopping streets and randomly encountered a group of Bollywood dancers. In the rain. They seemed to be enjoying themselves though. Another time I was standing in the square outside the Crucible Theatre, and random people ran past and tried to hide behind me – some kind of interactive D&D / hide-and-seek game it turned out. Then there were the random table-tennis tables both in the square in front of the Station, and outside the Crucible. It always seemed that something quirky was happening every time I came.

But being so relatively close meant I was able to explore it more often. You'd have thought I'd have explored Nottingham more, but while I could get back from there later in the evening (and it was cheaper to get to), in terms of door-to-door it was more-or-less the same time, and, I don't know, I guess Sheffield just 'pulled' me more. I've always been a northerner, despite my 12 years in the West Midlands. Liverpool is a city which I must say has a similar feel – it's equally as radical and cultural, and I can certainly see parallels – so maybe I just felt this was more 'like home' to me?

I of course was attracted by the beer – several good breweries in the region and lots of very good pubs, including one at the railway station itself that's been converted from the Edwardian waiting room that serves as a huge brewpub. But being near the countryside also helps. Nottinghamshire is quite green, but it's the green of farmland, of muddy trails through overgrown grasslands, of never being that far from a country lane. Sheffield reaches as far as Stanage Edge, a cliff edge walk on the moorlands some 450m up that's very popular with rock climbers and people doing bouldering; it's much more wild and remote country, and close to the even more open countryside of Kinder Scout and the Peaks. Which I talked about more on my recent podcast episode 33. On the very edge of the city is the Strines Inn, a centuries-old public house and B&B which is reputed to be haunted. It stands on a long country lane close to the Dale Dyke and Strines

reservoirs, and is pretty much the only building for maybe two kilometres around.

Both Sheffield and Barnsley stand on the Trans-Pennine Trail, mostly a series of dead railway lines that stretch from Liverpool to Hull that have been converted into footpaths and cycle trails, so the whole region is great for hiking.

It's also a good place for running. Especially barefoot running; I've mentioned before both how the pavements are smooth and comfortable to step on, and that there's actually several of us barefoot runners in and around the city, one of whom does often head west through the Rivelin Valley and up into Stanage Edge. And of course there's the Sheffield Castle Parkrun that's entirely run on smooth tarmacked paths. The only downside is all the hills. All. The Hills. Still, good for my leg muscles I guess.

Bea (one of those barefoot runners) and Green (who also runs, but in proper running shoes) talk about Green's first memories of arriving in the city, but also a bit about that countryside off towards Stanage Edge, and the views they offer.

[BEA AND GREEN]

GREEN: *When I first come to Sheffield, I were about 18, a young whipper-snapper. I used to live in Handsworth, and we used to go out on Friday nights, and we used to get bus into town. First time I got bus into town, it were a 52, and I got on bus, and it were 2 pence, and I said 2 pence to town?*

BEA: *2 pence? When you were 18?*

GREEN: *Ar, happen. 2 pence to town it were. Bus driver said to me 'where you going luv?'. And I'd never heard anyone say 'luv' before in my life. A man saying 'luv' to me. I didn't know where to look. I were 18 then, I were young, I didn't know anything else. And we got on bus, and we went to the Mucky Duck, and they wouldn't me in, and I had to go back again on the bus to go home to get my passport.*

BEA: *What did you think of Sheffield when you arrived as a student?*

GREEN: *It was quite grimy and industrial still. I remember being on Fargate and the Treeton miners were always there, and I remember the Battle for Orgreave.*

BEA: *So you were 18 in ... '84?*

GREEN: *Yeh, and it was quite a grim time for Sheffield then, but Sheffield was quite industrial then, still.*

BEA: *When you came to Sheffield, did you intend to say here longterm?*

GREEN: *No, no, no I did not.*

BEA: *Why did you end up staying longterm?*

GREEN: *Because ... moving around a lot as a child, and my family did not have a home in the UK, they were all still living abroad, and I came to do my course in Sheffield, and after my dad left the military, the whole family came to live in Sheffield. So we all live here now. So I think I was the gravitational pull for the whole family coming to live in Sheffield.*

BEA: *So your family came here because you were here?*

GREEN: *Yeh.*

BEA: *And so therefore you stuck around.*

GREEN: *I stuck around, yeh.*

BEA: *And would you say you fell in love with Sheffield quickly?*

GREEN: *Yeh, yeh I did, because, I remember having this wonderful countryside on our doorstep. I remember we had a day, me, Glen Blackman, and Steve Flatman. We had a day trip, we got the bus to Castleton, the 272 bus to Castleton. We got absolutely hammered. And that bus journey on the way back, when you're absolutely hammered, and you didn't go for a wee before you got on the bus, is the longest bus journey in the world, but it's one of my earliest memories of being out, cos I think we went to Mam Tor as well. One of my earliest memories of having such wonderful, blessed countryside on our doorstep, that is so accessible to us.*

BEA: *And we call it our back garden.*

GREEN: *We call it our back garden.*

BEA: *And we got married in it.*

GREEN: *And we got married in it.*

BEA: *On Higger Tor.*

GREEN: *Yeh. And the way that everything just gravitates to the centre of the city, I actually love that. Cos you know, you can see the city. If you stand on a hill you can see the city., If you stand on another hill you see the city from another aspect. If you go to a very flat city you don't get that sense of proportion and*

gravitation. When you take somebody, and you drive out to Redmires, and you park up at Redmires, and you've got a mile walk, just over a mile, up to Stanage Pole, and that you walk that little bit further, and you just get to that edge, and that is one of the most spectacular things in the world, because you've been in the city centre and then you just get there, and that whole vista just opens up.

BEA: {indignant} It was far more spectacular before they cut down all those trees.

Someone whose views and vibe for Sheffield have changed over time is writer, editor & creative coach (and advert star) Letty Butler, who was very glad to have a second chance to experience the city.

[LETTY BUTLER]

So, the first time I moved to Sheffield, I was 7, and it was because my parents were getting divorced, so me my mum and my brother moved from London, and I remember spending probably every night for two months after I was told I was told this was going to happen praying that there were no houses for sale in Sheffield, because I did not want to move here. Needless to say, that didn't quite work.

The reason we decided, well mum, decided to move to Sheffield as she was actually doing a show at the Crucible at the time, I think was called 'born yesterday', and she had a day off, a Sunday off, and she went out into the Peak District, and obviously things weren't going well in the marriage, and she had taken herself off on a walk to Beeley, and she came across Chatsworth House, and she sat down and she sketched the house and and made the decision that this is where she wanted to bring us up, and she has that sketch framed in the cottage where she moved us into and where she still lives now, so I guess it was Chatsworth that sealed our fate.

And then I left, I left Sheffield to go back to London to train at drama school, and then be a jobbing, working actress, and I stayed down there for another 11 years. And then I got lured back to do an MA at Hallam, and I was adamant that it was, I just just going to be here for the 8 months contact time, and then go straight back to London, Sheffield had nothing to offer me.

And I got here, and I was amazed at how much the city had changed, like how exciting and creative and vibrant it was, and I'd forgotten what it's like to have nice people everywhere, and the beauty of the landscape and being so close to the Peak District, and slowly but surely I remembered why this is home and why home is nowhere else. I'd spent most of my life as a bit of a half-breed, I didn't know if I was north or south, or London or Sheffield or what, but having flitted between the two I'm very happy to confirm I'm Sheffield through and through so I now live in the city centre and I'm not going anywhere.

Yeh I love Sheffield, it's just a great place. I'm sort of annoyed people don't know about it but I'm also secretly pleased. Which it a bit selfish. But, you know, there we are.

To end with, I'd like to offer a very personal recollection of Sheffield, from local writer Stephen Mellor.

[STEPHEN MELLOR]

I was going to talk about Sheffield as a place for invention, innovation, and radical thinking, but they announced last night they were eclosing John Lewis in the city. Now we don't know it as John Lewis, we never have, they rebranded it JL a few years back and everyone stood outside and said 'nah'. We know it as Coles. John Coles opened up a department store in the city, god knows when, and for generations, Coles Corner was where you met your girlfriend, the lady you were trying to court. Back then I suppose it was far more innocent than it is these days, but that was where you met, you held your flowers, you gave them, and you went off walking to the pictures. That's where so many of our families started.

When I was at that age, when I was, you know, a younger man, about to start out in this big world. I had my first real kiss at Coles. By then it had moved to Barker's Pool. It wasn't one of those mad passionate French-style kisses and all over each other in the rug department, none of that. I really liked this girl and she really liked me, she must have done, we were together for a while. And she always liked to go into Coles when we went into town, and one afternoon we bunked off school and went into town, we had a wander around, me trying to pluck up the courage, we went into Coles, we went all around Coles, up and down, all different

departments, even departments I had no idea what they bloody well were, and then finally we were on the escalator, and she turned to me, and said "have you got something to ask me then?", and I thought 'well it's now or never', so I asked her, and just as we were nearing the top of the escalator, I think to go onto the second floor down from the top where the cafe was, she said yes, she would go out with me. And we had our first kiss.

I'll always remember that, and I'll always remember that escalator. And I'm sure I'm not alone.

So whatever happens to John Lewis, I don't really care, but I do care what happens to Coles.

So what have we learned in this episode? South Yorkshire's been inhabited since the Iron Age, but historically tended to be on the periphery of things, until industrialisation brought people here. This industrialisation led to radical viewpoints and an overarching sense of community spirit. It's a region full of villages, both small and large, surrounded by beautiful scenery, some of which has replaced the heavy industry the area was noted for. It's a place that draws people, and once you're here, it's surprisingly hard to leave.

And I guess where better to celebrate the end of the world, than with a pint of Abbeydale beer and a pie covered in Henderson's Relish, sitting on Stanage Edge or Parkwood Springs overlooking the city, watching civilisation collapse from a nuclear or asteroid strike.

Shame I really hate liquorice.

{standard section separation jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me in another two weeks for another venture beyond the brochure. I'm aiming to have another topic-based pod, though as normal, I haven't decided yet. Before you go though, there's one final contribution. Poet Christina Hogg, a long time resident of the city, has written a few times about Sheffield, and her feelings for the place. She's allowed me to use an extract of one of her poems, "I'm mapping Sheffield", on this pod. The full written version, along with another poem she read aloud, will also be available to my Discord followers. Until then, have a reet good time, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}

The Mapping Of Sheffield (extract) - Christina Hogg

*I'm mapping Sheffield
and what Sheffield means to me
How can you map the smells?
The scents, the memories?
How can you map how it all comes back to me?
City Hall seats smells same like
A twenties elegant cruise ship
and who has sailed
In the 40+ years since
I went in. Philharmonic
Crucible feels same warm
Cocoon of room of soft voices in anticipation
and you looking over from seat's edge
going and fetching another pint
Sound of skies
How can I map Sheffield?
How can anybody?
(Hawley has a good ol' go, a crack at the emotional shape)
You can't draw lines /get out rulers/define
like I did pastel only punctuated
by telegraph wires in front of
moors
I map, freedom from sash window
I'm mapping Sheffield
in my mind in my heart
an idea of it
I take priororial ownership
We all have ghosts
I wonder what they did
with the polar bear
that'd be something to dispose of
at the dump
(I subsequently find out after time of writing that Snowy is still there, phew, keep meaning to
stop in and see him but it's been too sunny)
I guess the bees have flown
from the window
Western models (older and Pete the artist is deceased)
I see then
Made these memories
We all go on this boating lake
on 5th form trip is on a Monday when all the museums are closed in Leeds
and Sheffield
everywhere
Epitome of organisation
Biology department and electron microscope
A virtual tour of what you do if your dead clever
Octagon 5th form Christmas disco 1984
The last time I went there
Socialist Worker! Socialist Workers
I think there was a gig going on next door
Dolebusters? I fear
I walked the streets for ages
God knows where endlessly
Trawling sales for four whole days
Rubbing shoulders with Sheffield smackheads scene*

These days (30 years later)
I go down canal
They say you're new
She has lines on her pretty round face
I know I've had hard life, already Manor, she's early '20's
Almost still teenage
It were dead end secretary going nowhere
Y'know when you're going nowhere like same two blokes in office
At least you can sign on same time durrant start til 3
You're so lucky
you're getting out, qualifications 9 and 3
London-ish art college October '90 looming
We play pool opposite ABC, or were it Gaumont?
Across from
Hole in the road
Map these
I'm mapping Sheffield
of distinct
childhood
and
teen
70's
and
'80's
Memories in specific locations
Mapping how some of it's gone
Gaps
Where egg box were round, cooling towers
Hyde Park shambles You can go in Lynne's Pantry and see
set of screen prints
Lost But Not Forgotten
and have fishfinger sandwich (expensive)
Old school on Surrey Street
and remember them gone
Ah go on have a Lemon meringue
Visuals, tastes, commonplace conversation
Oo they found a pirana down Donni canal
Never!
I'm mapping
The smells the same the feeling the entrance to
Graves
Library
Gold lettering
,but upstairs
Where's the jade?
I wish I ant gone down Chapel Walk
It's like an old boyfriend
as lost his hair and got a beer belly
Remember him at the height of his powers
Messing around in English hair slick like
Rare booktokens choosing carefully
What was it? Aesops fables
Glossy pavements
And if you're lucky milkshake (pink) before fast
food was invented, you'll have to wait
(My daughter is incredulous when you try explain this)
Always on a budget

*It goes without saying
Map this
Tuppence
Map this
Time that's lost
and gone
and place that's still there somewhere
underneath you get to my skin and sensibility
Born in Jessops 3 weeks late
Yes, in heatwave and
Yes its been complex
Once or twice
Mapping a Sheffield that is myself
and all I have left is
JARVIS
in big letters
one voice
30 years
I mean, it's not much to go on
Is this too much emphasis on one man?*