

From 1938 to 1951 the Hughes family lived at **75 Main Street** above the double-fronted newsagent's shop they ran. Two of his short stories and several poems have direct links with the house. The uncollected short story *Miss Mambrett and the Wet Cellar* is based on a wartime incident involving a neighbouring shopkeeper, and *The Deadfall* begins with an account of his mother's vision of fiery crosses in the sky over St. George's Chapel (opposite the shop, now a bungalow) in June 1944. *Her Husband* is based on Hughes's memories of the Nicholson family, who lived next door. *View of a Pig* is probably based on memories Hughes had peering into the backyard of Glasby's butcher shop at 77 Main Street. *A Motorbike* refers to the Levis motorcycle that Hughes's brother Gerald bought before the war and left in the outhouse for the duration of the conflict, and *Edith* remembers his mother in the backyard here.

① From **Mexborough railway station**, follow the station approach over the canal to reach the A6023 by-pass around the town centre. Head straight over the crossing then up the road past Old Market Hall to reach Bank Street. Turn left, then soon bear left along Mexborough's pedestrianised **High Street**. At the far end, bear right past the Falcon Inn and go straight across the mini-roundabout. On the corner of the second road on the left (Main Street leading to South View) is **75 Main Street** – look up above the take-away signage to see the blue plaque that commemorates Hughes's former home.

In the 1940s Mexborough had four **cinemas** and some of their distinctive buildings are still evident on the High Street. Matinee screenings here of various cowboy films inspired some of Hughes's earliest published poetry.

⑤ Having crossed back over the **River Don**, bear right by the old ferry site and duck under the bridge over the canal to join the towpath. Follow the **Sheffield & South Yorkshire Navigation** past the imposing but derelict building of the former Co-op flour mill, then fork left to return through the trees to the **Mexborough railway station** car park. It is worth turning left under the railway though, following a signed public path as it provides a great view across the river to Low Meadow and Peas Hills, Hughes's childhood playground.

② Retrace your steps back along **Main Street**, then turn left at the mini-roundabout by the former working men's club, following Dolcliffe Road up the hill. The road bends round and has great views across the town to the fields around Peas Hills on the opposite side of the river. Descend steadily to pass the old **Concertina Club**, then turn left up Hampden Road, passing Mexborough Athletic's football ground. Turn first right on College Road to reach what was **Mexborough Grammar School** (now Mexborough Business Centre), where you can sign in to visit the café, exhibitions and Jane Robbins's sculpture of the young Ted Hughes on the first floor.

Hughes won a scholarship to the fee-paying **Mexborough Grammar School** in 1941 and left in 1949. At the school he received a first class education and two teachers in particular – Pauline Mayne and John Fisher – hugely influenced his poetic tastes and his writing. His first published poem *Wild West* appeared in the 1946 *Don & Dearne* school magazine. Hughes also acted in, wrote and directed plays and revues.

St John the Baptist Church is an ancient parish church that has had both a tower and a spire since the 14th century. Although its octagonal font and some stones date from this time, it has been much restored since. In 1980 Hughes read the eulogy at the funeral here of his teacher and friend John Fisher.

③ From **Mexborough Grammar School**, continue along College Road to the end and turn right. Cross Adwick Road opposite the police station, then go left at the roundabout with the A6023. Cross the main road immediately and turn right down Quarry Street, turning left at the bottom to pass **St John the Baptist Church**. Turn next right along Ferryboat Lane and bear right up onto the footbridge over the canal. At its end was the site of the **hand-operated ferry** that Hughes took across the River Don every day on his paper round – the stone marking its site and toll is still in situ.

A **hand-operated ferry** across the Don from Mexborough to Old Denaby had existed for centuries and even in the 1940s was the only convenient way locals to move between the two settlements on foot. In Hughes's day, the ferry was operated by the club-footed 'Limpy' Nuttall. It cost a penny to cross and Limpy would simply pull the ferry across the river by gripping an overhead steel cable. The ferry was fondly regarded by many local people who would still pay to cross after the footbridge was built in 1964 to allow workers to walk to the ICI explosives factory and pit at Denaby Main. The boat was simply abandoned when Limpy retired and part of the wreckage is just about visible below the landing stage.

④ While it is possible to return directly to the railway station from the **ferry site**, a short diversion leads across the river to Old Denaby, following the route of Hughes's paper round. Cross the **River Don** via the newer metal bridge, then cross the railway bridge to join the end of Old Denaby's Ferryboat Lane. An unpleasant encounter with a horse on the rough land between the river and railway inspired Hughes's short story *The Rain Horse*, and he probably fished in **Vinah's Pond** (an old ox-bow lake). At the top of the lane, turn right through **Old Denaby** village. On the bend at its end, bear right on the track to the car park of Manor Bar & Restaurant. These buildings were once **Manor Farm**, where Hughes used to roam the fields of Peas Hills, trapping and shooting wildlife. Unfortunately there is no public access to this area, so you have to retrace your steps back to the river.

Distance: 3½ miles (5.9km)

Ascent: 70m

Time: 1½-2½ hours

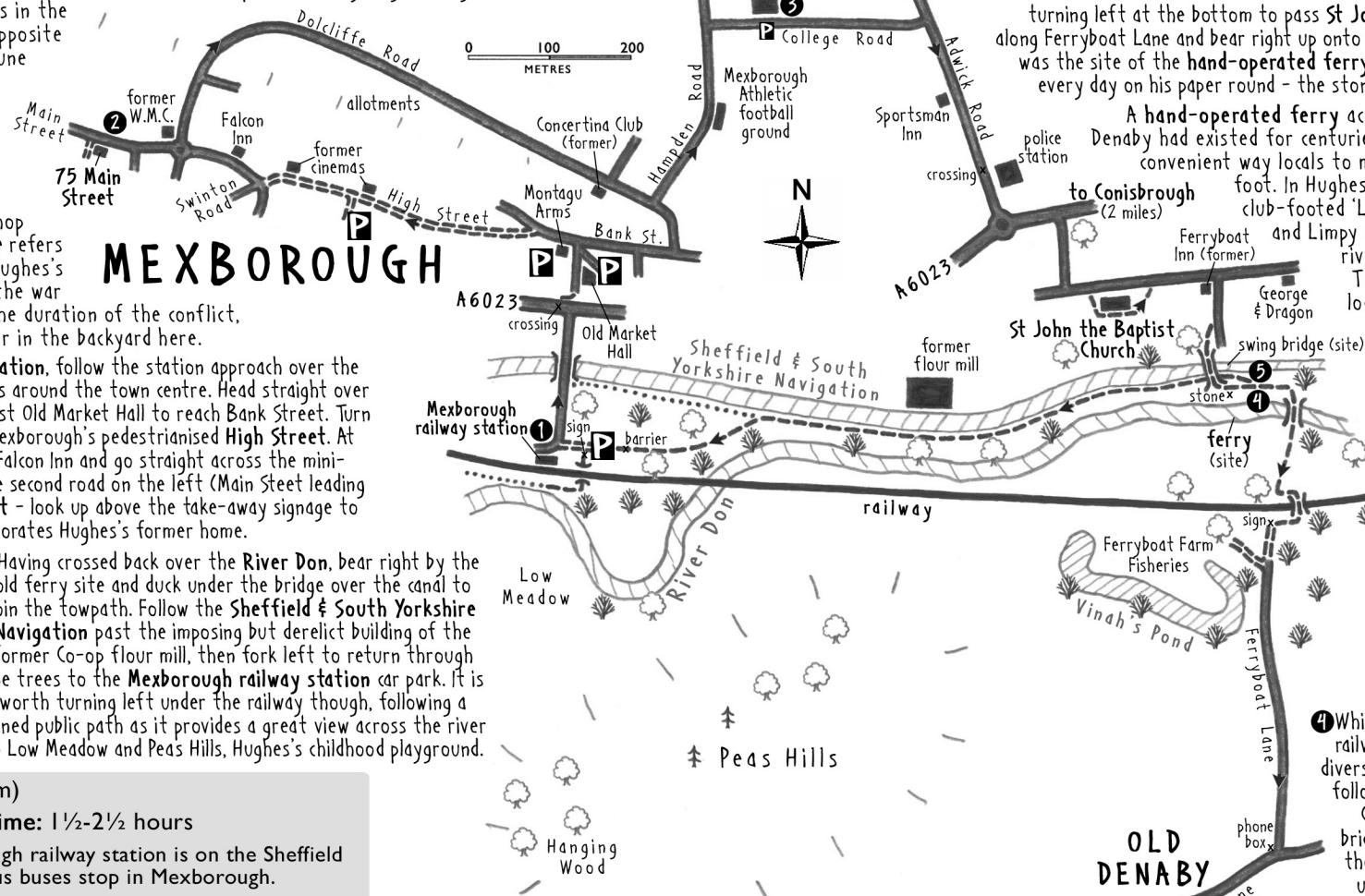
Public Transport: Mexborough railway station is on the Sheffield to Doncaster line, and various buses stop in Mexborough.

Parking: Several town centre car parks, as well as parking at railway station and free car park at Mexborough Business Centre.

Refreshments: Small café at Mexborough Business Centre and various other town centre cafés and bars. Manor Bar & Restaurant at Manor Farm in Old Denaby is also open all day.

Character: A short walk around Mexborough and Old Denaby, taking in the Hughes family house at 75 Main Street and Mexborough Grammar School, before following Hughes's paper round across the river to Manor Farm. A largely urban route, with a couple of short sections that may have some mud on them.

The South Yorkshire landscape in the 1940s was dominated by its industry – coal, iron and steel – and there were seven pits within a three-mile radius of Mexborough. It was a thriving market town though, with high employment and prosperous small businesses. Hughes's poem *On the Reservations* is about the plight of these coal-mining communities in the late 1980s and draws heavily on Hughes's experiences in Mexborough.



stone near old ferry

Manor Farm
(bar & restaurant)

'**Mexborough Railway Station** was bombed in World War Two and in *Old Oats* Hughes describes how he found shrapnel in the stubble of Manor Farm fields across the river.'