



In This Issue

- *Carlyle Meets Carlisle: 21st Century Edition*
- Calendar of Events
- Happy Hour

**CARLYLE
HOUSE**

Susan Hellman
Site Manager

Kerry Mitchell
Site Specialist

Allison Kelley
Curator of Education

Docent Dispatch

July 2017

Carlyle Meets Carlisle: 21st Century Edition

By Lee Rodrigues

After a fitful ride on the TransPennine Express through a mist-covered countryside, I arrived in Carlisle along with the sun's first break through the gloom. Stepping out of Carlisle's main rail station, a palatial neo-Tudor construction, I was immediately barraged by the bustle of Court Square. Taxis, buses, and a crush of people were all about. And yet, despite the trappings of modernity, the city John Carlyle would have known as a boy began to take shape for me.

The first things to catch my eye were the stone gates of the old town walls. Like many of the older buildings, they were made of the local sandstone. Looking at the warm hue of the stone as the sun brightened the city around me, it was easy to see why John Carlyle was insistent that his house be built of Virginia sandstone from Aquia. It would have been a touch of home and lightness in a frontier town dominated by wood and mud.

Winding my way uphill through the medieval streets, it was easy to imagine the close, cramped quarters Carlyle would have contended with as a young boy. Even with some street widening and modern touches, such as lamps and storm drains, parts of the city were gloomy and grim in the mid-afternoon. The wide, planned grid of Alexandria would have been as foreign

as the land itself, and probably a great relief.

The streets eventually opened out into Market Cross, one of the oldest town squares. Opposite me was the tourist information board, and before it a large political rally was going on. This was mere hours before the Manchester bombing, so the election cycle was in full swing. Seeking to avoid the crowds, I ducked into a side alley and came face to face with the name Carlyle. The one place in town where the name is spelled our way is Carlyle Court. Appropriately, it is a shopping center. I'd like to think that John's merchant legacy is living on that way.

Northwest of Carlyle Court is the cathedral. Despite being an imposing edifice to American eyes, it is one of the smallest cathedrals in the United Kingdom. Started by the Normans, the oldest bits of the building still feature the prominent Romanesque supports which make it feel as much as fortress as a place of worship. This portion also shows the age of the building; the support columns lean in slightly different angles, evidencing years of shifting stones and hard weather. The rest of the cathedral was added in English Gothic style. Sadly, we don't have the opportunity to see the building in its full splendor. But then again, neither did

CARLYLE HOUSE HISTORIC PARK

John Carlyle. During the English Civil War, a Scots Presbyterian regiment fighting for Parliament tore down part of the nave to reinforce the castle's defenses against approaching Royalists.

Getting to the castle is not the straightforward task it once was. I had to take an underpass below the largest road in Carlisle to get to it, which seemed like a huge disappointment. Suffice it to say that I was wrong; having to go underground made the castle spreading before me as I emerged all the more magnificent. The red sandstone walls positively glowed in the afternoon sun.

The castle would have been the source of many exploits and legends John Carlyle would have heard about as a child. The castle was built by William Rufus, heir of William the Conqueror, in 1092. Fittingly for a site that began as a Roman fort to hold off the Picts, it was one of the greatest and most important strongholds on the Scottish border for generations of English kings. It withstood dozens of sieges, the last of which occurred after John had come to Virginia. In 1745, Carlisle Castle was one of the few English places to fall to the Jacobite armies of Bonnie Prince Charlie. With the recapture of the city by English forces, hundreds of Scots were imprisoned in the dungeon, with 31 eventually being executed. Others died of thirst. Their rations were so poor that grooves in the prison wall, called "licking stones" for their ability to collect the dew from the damp walls, were highly contested by the prisoners.

Carlisle was also a center for Border Reivers, the riding (and raiding) families on both sides of the Anglo-Scottish border. Depending on who you ask, they are viewed today as anywhere between Robin Hood characters and

vicious brigands set on loot. Many famous Reivers were imprisoned in Carlisle Castle, and one, Kinmont Willie Armstrong, was broken out of the dungeon in a daring armed raid. Though most of the proper Riding parties were finished by the ascent of James VI to the throne of England (becoming James I of England and Ireland in 1603), the effects of their raids were felt for generations to come. Despite the many legends which grew up around them, the devastation they wrought to the countryside meant that the area where Carlyle grew up stayed underdeveloped, underpopulated, and unfashionable well into his time. It's no wonder the colonies were so full of lowland Scots.

While the houses along the streets may have changed, and the vehicles traversing those streets as well, I feel confident in saying that John Carlyle would still easily recognize the city he had known as a boy. Through careful preservation work, dedicated local government, and a resurgent history in English heritage, many of the sites in the Great Border City can still be seen in their former glory. I'd suggest each of you, if given the chance, should go to Carlisle and walk in John's shoes. It will give you a much better sense of what John was trying to recreate here with his grand home.

