

## **Barnard Castle**

Barnard Castle is a Norman borough at the site of a Roman ford over the River Tees. Its strong castle was built by the Baliol family who came from Bailleul in Picardy, France. King William II granted upper Teesdale to Guy Baliol in 1093. It was his son Bernard – hence the castle’s name – who rebuilt the castle in stone after 1150.

The Baliol family was ambitious. In 1278 John de Baliol II became a contender for the Scottish throne. But the English king Edward I opposed him and in 1296 he defeated Baliol, imprisoned him and confiscated his lands and castle. Eventually the Crown granted the castle to the Nevills. Richard Nevill, Earl of Warwick, “the Kingmaker”, died at the Battle of Barnet in 1471. The castle was then owned by Richard III who was killed at Bosworth Field in 1485. You can see Richard’s boar emblem on the wall of the parish church. The Crown took over the castle which began to decline. In 1569 it was besieged by rebels in the Rising of the North. By 1728 it was a gutted shell. In 1952 Lord Barnard of Raby handed it over to the Ministry of Works which is now called English Heritage. They manage the ruins of the castle as a heritage tourist site.

King John Baliol’s mother was Devorguilla (‘dearbh-fhorgoill’: ‘true judgment’ in Gaelic), a Scottish noblewoman. She greatly loved her husband John whom she married, age 24, in 1233. They had 4 sons and 3 daughters. When he died in 1268 –she was 57- she had his heart embalmed and encased in an ivory shrine. The heart would be placed before her at meals and its share of every meal would be given to the poor. In 1273 she founded an abbey near Dumfries called Sweetheart Abbey (‘Dulce Cor’, ‘sweet heart’) where she was buried in 1290 with Baliol’s heart. In 1263 she endowed a hostel for poor scholars at Oxford; this is now Baliol College, the oldest college of Oxford University.

Howard Hammersley writes: “Remarkably the basic layout of the town today is as described in the Borough Charter of 1155. Barnard Castle was laid out to a preconceived plan showing the streets leading from the castle to the church, cut by narrow alleyways leading to service roads at the rear of burgage plots; the town fields, pastures, moorlands and the desmesne lands, set aside as a hunting park for the Baliols, all existed by 1220.”

Today Barnard Castle is famous for the impressive Bowes Museum which opened in 1892. Its architect was Jules Pellechet who designed it like a grand French ‘hôtel de ville’. It was the first building in England to be constructed with metric measurements. It was built for John Bowes (1811-1885) and his wife Joséphine (1825-1874), the Countess of Montalbo, whom he met in France.

They were both keen art collectors. They were also very wealthy. Bowes was the illegitimate but fully acknowledged son of the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Strathmore. He inherited the English estates, which included thriving Durham coal mines, and his uncle Thomas got the earldom and the Scottish estates. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, who featured in *The King's Speech* film, was the great, great granddaughter of Thomas Bowes. John Bowes was a great racehorse owner: his Streatlam Stud bred 4 Derby winners. His main income came from John Bowes Esq & Partners, one of the greatest coal companies in Britain. Miners' sweat helped to pay for the Bowes Museum which fittingly, perhaps, is now owned by a local not-for-profit trust.

It has unique and impressive collections of paintings, ceramics, furniture, textiles and other art. A world famous painting is El Greco's *Tears of St Peter*. One of its most famous exhibits is the 1773 Silver Swan musical automaton: a life size silver swan bends and 'swallows' a fish. The clockwork swan is worked daily **at 2pm only**.

Entrance to the Bowes Museum is £10.50 adults, £9.50 concessions, free for children below 16 and carers, £6.00 for students with ID. The café and shop are free to visit so you can get an idea of the interior for free. You can also visit the grounds, laid out in French chateau style, for free. It's only a short walk down Newgate. Barnard Castle is a pleasant place to explore and to enjoy its cafes and pubs. **Prices correct at June 2015** – visit [www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk/](http://www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk/) for more details.

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