

Carlisle and its nationalised pubs walk



Carlisle was the centre of a great experiment in the management and architecture of public houses. It was the nearest city to the colossal munitions works – they were nine miles long – at Gretna and Eastriggs, built hurriedly in the First World War. Thousands of workers moved to the area to construct and work in the plants. Many were well paid and they had few opportunities for leisure other than pubs. Lloyd George, the newly-appointed Minister for Munitions, was concerned about reports of faulty ammunition. German U-boats attacked imports and the pre-war gravity of beer was reduced to conserve grain stocks. In 1916 the Central Control Board, under the Defence of the Realm Act and the Liquor (Temporary Restrictions) Act, took public houses and other outlets into State ownership in the Carlisle and Gretna areas. Four breweries and 227 licensed premises were 'nationalised' and the Scheme was later extended to Maryport and district, including another brewery and 136 licensed premises.

Pubs at Enfield Lock, in London, and near the naval bases at Invergordon and Cromarty were also taken over by the Central Control Board.

The CCB closed 53 licensed premises and two breweries in Carlisle. Pubs were closed on Sundays and 'spirit-less Saturdays' were introduced. Before the controls, Carlisle was notorious for heavy whisky drinking and treating: one evening was called 'The Night of a Thousand Whiskies'.

The CCB was wound up in 1919 and the pubs in Enfield Lock returned to private ownership. In Carlisle (and in Invergordon and Cromarty) the State continued to manage pubs after 1921. The Carlisle & District State Management Scheme was set up, following the model of municipally-controlled bars in Gothenburg, Sweden. The Scheme, managed by Home Office civil servants, began to improve public houses to encourage moderate drinking. Managers were paid a 75% commission on sales of food and 25% on non-alcoholic drinks rather than profiting from the sales of alcoholic drink. All advertising and window displays of bottles were removed. Drink prices were fixed and 'treating' - buying rounds of drinks - was banned.

The Scheme appointed its architect, Harry Redfern (1861-1950) and he, with his colleagues, began to design and build improved public houses in the Carlisle area. Their designs became influential within the licensed trade, especially in the inter-war road houses of the Midlands and Home Counties.

Redfern's brief was to create light and airy pubs, easy to supervise, with comfortable surroundings and designed for food service and recreation. Many had gardens and bowling greens. The managers were to have spacious accommodation for their families; they were civil servants, after all. Redfern's designs were elegant and innovative. He introduced smoke extraction systems as early as 1927. His designs have a coherence because he was responsible for all the design work, down to fixtures and fittings such as door handles and light fittings. He even laid out the planting of trees, shrubs and flowers.

We start outside the **Cumberland Inn**, Botchergate, a fine example of Redfern's work. It was designed in 1928 and built in 1929-30 in a Tudor Gothic style. It has buff coursed ashlar sandstone walling and dressings with coped gables, tall ashlar gable chimneys and a slate roof. The interior is fine, especially on the first floor where the panelled walls have gilded quotations from Omar Khayyam, Robert Burns and G. K. Chesterton. This is the least altered of the Scheme pubs and it demonstrates the civilised approach to drinking by the Scheme. It has been recently well refurbished. It is listed Grade II.

Further along Botchergate is the closed former **The Earl Grey** (later The Jester) of 1935. This was Redfern's only design in 'streamlined' *moderne* style. It replaced a shabby Victorian pub named after the Prime Minister Earl Grey who introduced the Reform Bill in 1832. It had a gleaming stainless steel front door and modern-looking Gills Sans lettering. The manager's family lived in the charming flat above the front door. The pub isn't listed so its survival is problematic.



Next door to the **Post Office** at 20-34, Warwick Road is Redfern's 1932 The White House, formerly called **The Crescent Inn** in Scheme days. It is a nice example of his work. The interior has been altered but the Hispano-Moresque exterior survives. It is listed Grade II. It recently closed which is worrying.

The former **Gretna Tavern**, Lowther Street, was Redfern's first job in Carlisle. He converted the old Post Office into a State Tavern, opening on July 12, 1916. The old selling counter became a long bar. 'Perpendicular' drinking was discouraged. There were plenty of seats, waiter service, large airy rooms and no 'snugs' (which were impossible to supervise). Meals were served. The interior was originally painted in battleship grey but this was uninviting. Redfern's assistant, George Walton, repainted the interior in rosy pink, with floral decorations, and fitted red leather seats. It became popular with women munitions workers. The tavern was inspected and approved by King George V and Queen Mary on May 22, 1917. After the Scheme was shut down, the Gretna suffered many name changes and refittings, including time as an Irish theme pub 'Finnegan's Wake' in the early 2000s.

15-17 Lowther Street, the entrance to the Lowther Arcade, is by Henry Higginson (1904). It was built for the Carlisle Old Brewery Company. Through the Arcade, which replaced Three Crowns Lane, in English Street, we face Woolworths Buildings (1932), built on the site of the '**Gaol Tap**' (**City Arms**) a notoriously busy boozier which had six doors and a bouncer. The Scheme took it

over but closed it on October 28, 1930, when English Street was widened by the Corporation.

Opposite the Gaol Tap we can see the **Citadel Restaurant** café, now called the Old Arcadian. The Scheme successfully ran cafés as well as pubs and off-licences. Yates's was the **Citadel Tavern**, converted by the State in 1916 from the Wellington and Three Crowns pubs. The Wellington was fitted in 1906 with 'Ye Old Baronial Hall', a Gothic themed interior with panelling and suits of armour. This was stripped out in 1916.

In Lowther Street, Pippins, originally **The Apple Tree** pub by Harry Redfern (1925), is red brick with sandstone and terracotta dressings and a Lake District slate roof. The ground floor was altered and remodelled when the Scheme pubs were sold off but the first floor retains its original plan with a central bar serving different social classes and sexes. There were mixed and women's bars. Originally it had a large, hanging inn sign.



On the west side of English Street, facing the Market Place, is the **Crown & Mitre Hotel** (George Dale Oliver, 1903-5) in red sandstone ashlar. It has art nouveau figures and scrolled vine leaves. Listed Grade II. Private hotel bars were exempt from the Scheme's monopoly, presumably because they weren't used by the working classes.

The **State Management Scheme's offices** were in 17-19, Castle Street, which is now occupied by Bookcase. It still has a fine Georgian interior with decorated

ceilings. Opposite is the **Boardroom** (originally the Board), the closest pub to the Board's headquarters.

Near the West Walls, by the River Caldew, is the former **Carlisle State Brewery**. It opened in 1756 but most of the present buildings are late Victorian. When the Scheme began there were four breweries in Carlisle but some were closed. The Scheme was wound up in 1971 and all the properties were sold off by the end of 1973. Theakstons took over the Carlisle State Brewery and used it to brew their Best Bitter until they too were taken over by Scottish & Newcastle who closed down the brewery. It is now apartments and student accommodation.

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