

Carlisle City Centre walk - 3

Start at the Market Cross in the town centre. It is dated 1682 and replaced a medieval one. Distances to and from Carlisle are measured from the Cross. The lion represents the authority vested in the city by Royal charters to hold markets on 2 days per week, Wednesday and Saturday. A general open market was held around the Cross until 1927 when all stalls were forced to move to the covered market. The four sundials on the Cross served as a time piece before there was a public clock on the Town Hall.

The contract for a new Town Hall was made in 1668. The original 1668/1669 building with 6 windows forms the central portion of what you see today. The Market Bell cupola is still there. This was rung at 8am to signify the opening of market trading. Anyone who opened earlier was accused of “forestalling”. The date 1717 relates to the right-hand extension which included the clock tower.

Many of the buildings around the Market Cross were town houses later converted into inns. Above the Co-operative Travel Shop we see the sign for the Angel Inn. Clarks shoe shop next door was once the Liverpool Arms.

Much of the English Street/Scotch Street area was demolished in the 1980s and replaced with the Lanes Shopping Centre. Some of the old names of the lanes and courts that ran between English Street and Lowther Street have been retained.

La Senza on English Street was Ridleys the Chemist and before that Martindales. Martindale was the author of a drugs handbook, still in use today and universally known as Martindale’s Pharmacopoeia. The Thomas Cook building is a typical example of an 18th century town house. An archway leads into Kings Arms Lane. Next is Pack Horse Lane, which still has its street sign, and takes its name from a pub. Walk into the lane. On each side of the entrance and against the left wall is a cast iron bollard, a piece of street furniture designed to protect buildings and pipes from passing carts. Further down this lane was the old cockpit. Walk back into English Street and turn left, then left again into Lowthians Lane. White glazed bricks were chosen to bring some light into the dark close. On the right is the Carlisle World Shop and One World Centre, once the Rose and Crown Inn, which closed in 1907 and is a rare survival of a pre-State Management pub.

Go back onto English Street. We are now in the Corn Market, an area where farmers bought and sold their grain. To our left is the HSBC, originally the Carlisle and District Bank, built in 1851 when Bank Street was laid out. The building was extended in 1899 and again in 1923. Expensive White Portland Stone was used for the façade and Shap granite for the pilasters.

Across the street stand the two buildings making up Marks and Spencer. The right half was built on the site of Highmoor House. Look up to find two plaques noting that Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Duke of Cumberland both stayed here in 1745/1746. The central archway into Highmoor House straddled what is now Barwise Court. Walk up Barwise Court and into Blackfriars Street, an area named after the Blackfriars who had their convent here. The M&S Food Hall was built over the site of the Blackfriars graveyard. When excavating for the foundations of the new building, archaeologists found over 300 burials here, all pre 1540. Because the city, as well as the Blackfriars, had used this graveyard, it gave an insight into the health of Carlisle’s citizens, as ordinary men, women and children were found here.

On the back of the House of Fraser, a plaque notes this as the site of McReadys theatre of 1813. The lane, now an entrance into House of Fraser, was originally named Theatre Lane. This was changed to New Bank Lane, and then closed in 1935 when Binns took over from Robinsons and extended their premises, but the street sign was never taken down. The quoin stones and pediment of the theatre are still in place.

Across from the House of Fraser is the Sportsman Inn standing on the corner of Heads Lane. This lane is named after Bella Head, once landlady of the inn, formerly called the Earl of Warwick. The Sportsman is the oldest pub in the city, there being a reference to it in 1747. It was the birthplace of Guy Head, the famous portrait painter. His portrait of Nelson is in the National Portrait Gallery; he also painted Lady Hamilton.

Walk down Heads Lane. On the left you can make out the chalky, faded lettering 'City Mews, Livery and Bait Stables' where farmers coming to market would leave their carts and horses. The city was once full of such facilities.

As we come out onto the medieval West Walls, cross [Beware of traffic] over to the Sally Port Steps and look back. The attractive building opposite the Twisted Wheel was a former blacksmiths.

As you came down Heads Lane, you walked along the side of the Tithe Barn [can you spot the medieval masons' marks on this side?] which has its gable end onto West Walls. The Tithe Barn belonged to the Priory of Saint Mary and dates from the later part of the 15th century. The west end of the Barn collapsed in the 19th century and the whole barn was restored in 1970. Today it is used as the parish rooms of Saint Cuthbert's church. If the gates are open you can see the open (windowed) north side. Look through the windows to see the original timbering. Just past the Tithe Barn on West Walls is St Cuthbert's Vicarage. This 1832 block, extensively remodelled, originally housed the vicarages of three Carlisle churches, St Mary's, Holy Trinity & Christ Church. Past these, turn right into Eaglesfield Abbey. The entrance to Church House is on your right, the original entrance into St Mary's Vicarage. One of the responsibilities of the Priory of Saint Mary's was to provide education. This is why the Grammar School was built here (on left) in 1832 and extended in 1851; see the date over the extension. Walking ahead and through the gateway, you enter Saint Cuthbert's Churchyard. The gateway was built in 1784. The gravestones were cleared to the walls in 1887, some stones being laid down as flags. The Church dates to 1778 [dated weather vane] replacing an earlier building. The graveyard was enclosed by railings erected to prevent bodysnatching.

Walk through the churchyard and into St Cuthbert's Lane, watching for the large yellow letters on the right of the Lane. These indicate 'Emergency Water Supply 65 yards' and point back to Saint Cuthberts where a water-tank to fight fires was built in World War II.

Prepared by Carlisle Library with the help of Denis Perriam

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