



John Morton Carr (1857-1928)

The following account owes much to fate and chance. The Chair of Shincliffe Local History Society, Garry Stout, attended a conference at the University of Newcastle via Zoom on 22nd

March 2021. Berwick Archives gave a presentation on the resources that had been uncovered as the result of links with Berwick Police including "Wanted" posters and the remarkable diaries of PC John Carr written in the 1860s. By sheer coincidence, SLHS were preparing information about a Shincliffe John Carr who was born in Tweedmouth and whose father was a policeman. Surely, they could not be linked? Following checking and verification by both parties, it was indeed the case. Local history studies always throw up the most unlikely connections and serendipitous discoveries. We are indebted to Berwick Archives who have been willing to share their research on PC Carr with us. Some of it is included in the text below.

John Carr was the village schoolmaster and was living in School House, on what was then known as Stockton Road, in 1891 and 1901. He had been born in Tweedmouth where his father had been a police officer. His father's police diaries provide a fascinating insight into the world of a "bobby" in the mid-Victorian period. It was not unusual for PC Carr to begin his working day at 10:00 a.m. and finish at 1:30 a.m. the following day. There would be some days when his shifts were even longer. PC Carr died as a result of an eleven-day "typhus fever", as recorded on his death certificate for the 4th June 1867, when John Junior was only about ten years old. This infection is the result of transmission from lice or fleas and is prevalent in overcrowded properties, a common occurrence in Victorian tenement properties. Andrew Carr, John's older brother, was present at their father's death. Andrew would later be buried with his parents. The respect shown by his fellow officers is evident in Carr's headstone which marks that he was "a straightforward and conscientious public officer", qualities that his son would inherit and demonstrate in his life in education.

John Carr's first recorded appearance in the village is in the 1881 Census as a teacher. He began his career in January 1877 in the Monkwearmouth Colliery School in Sunderland. The building is still there, just yards from the Stadium of Light. He was appointed the Headmaster of Houghall Colliery Board School in 1879. He was living in Prospect Terrace in 1882 when his wife gave birth to twins (John Morton and Mary Wilson). Both were baptised on the day of their birth, suggesting that one or both of them may have been ill. Then, on November 1st, 1886, he took up his position as Headmaster of Shincliffe School and spent thirty-five years in the role. The old school and School House now exist as private houses. He died in 1928. His funeral was attended by several present and former occupants of Wood View terrace where he had lived since at least 1911 when he is recorded in the Census of that year in Number 4. They included Joseph Landt Mawson, living at Number 7, James Fenny, (Number 5), James Menzies, then living in Avenue House, Thomas Foster (Number 3) and finally, Charlton Robson, who had journeyed from Monkseaton to attend. Robson had built both Wood View and Robson Terrace. It should be borne in mind that Robson was in his late eighties by this time. Carr would have provided some comfort to Robson and his second wife when his daughter, Edith Maria, died at the age of fourteen in 1891. He would, no doubt, have taught Edith at the school and would have recognised the

grief shown by the Robsons. Carr and his wife lost two infant sons, Alfred, and John Morton Carr Jnr., in the 1880s.



Fig. 1 John Carr with staff (Lottie Dazley, Gertrude Barrass, and Eliza Gallifant) and pupils in 1918-19.

Carr was clearly seen as a responsible and vital member of the community. He was appointed the foreman of the jury in an inquiry into the unfortunate death of Mrs Mary Ann Willan, the wife of farmer and JP, John Willan, who lived in Shincliffe. The Durham County Advertiser (14/8/1903) reported that the couple were making their way home (with a Miss Vanderpump, possibly Muriel, sister of the Willans' son-in-law, Paul George Vanderpump, a solicitor) past Mountjoy Crescent in Durham on 7th August 1903 at 7:50 p.m. when the pony bolted after Mr Willan stopped to speak to a friend, Thomas Coates, a master builder and a fellow JP in the city, who lived in Numbers 16 and 15. Mrs Willan was thrown from the trap on to the road. Her skull was fractured, and she died at home the following morning just after eight o'clock after being transported there by Samuel Fenny, son of Carr's neighbour, also Samuel Fenny, who lived at 5 Wood View. She was aged 50. The inquiry into her death was held at The Railway Tavern in Shincliffe.

John Carr retired from his post as Headmaster of Shincliffe School on 31st October 1921. This meant that Carr would have been the Head during the Great War of 1914-18, a period that saw some of his former pupils lose their lives in the fighting. One can only imagine the grief he must have shared with the bereaved families. The news of his retirement led to a fulsome article in the Berwickshire News and General Advertiser on 17th January 1922. It reported that:

"Throughout those 50 years (in the field of education) all who have come in contact with Mr Carr readily agree that they gained much from that privilege. Duty has always been his motto, duty primarily not to himself but the children given into his charge – a charge nobly fulfilled to over three thousand children. The many boys and girls who have had the benefit and pleasure of Mr Carr's influence are unanimous in their love and gratification for all that he meant and still means to them."

One of Carr's staff, a Miss Gertrude Barrass, clearly enjoyed her time at the school. She was appointed in 1891 and retired in 1934, serving under Carr until 1921 and then

Mr Harry Appleton, a former pupil of hers. Miss Barrass lived for many years in 5 Flass Street in Durham and died in 1956. Mr Carr's influence over his staff and pupils must have been considerable. Lottie Dazley won a scholarship in 1905, along with Harry Appleton, thanks to the tutoring of John Carr. Like Harry Appleton, she returned to teach at Shincliffe and became Miss Barrass' colleague. Miss Dazley was still teaching at the school in 1939 and living in Number 4 Roseacre. Mr Appleton, meanwhile, lived in School House with his wife, daughter, and father-in-law.



Fig. 2 Three of the teachers in this photograph are former pupils of John Carr: Harry Appleton, Lottie Dazley, and Eliza Gallifant. (The date of the photograph is believed to be between 1926 and 1930.)

Both Mr Carr and Miss Barrass would have seen many changes in the running of the school over that time. From 1880, School Boards, set up as a result of the 1870 Education Act, were required to enforce attendance for children aged 5-10. They could also set a minimum standard that children had to reach before they were employed. It should be noted that such schools were only exempt from fees from 1891. They would also have witnessed the raising of the school-leaving age (sometimes referred to by the acronym ROSLA) over the years; by 1914 it had risen to 14.

One of Carr's friends at his own school in Berwick was Peter Anderson Graham who later edited *Country Life* magazine. Anderson's son, Stephen, was a successful author in his own right who wrote about pre-revolutionary Russia.

Carr was a regular attendee at St. Mary's Church and served as both a sidesman and Churchwarden. In addition, he was honorary treasurer of the of the Shincliffe Reading Room which opened in 1895 as well as secretary to the Shincliffe coronation committee.

Carr's wife was Jane (or Janie as she was often known). Her father, Kerr Middlemiss, had been a joiner and innkeeper of the White Lion in Berwick. Her death was announced in The Berwick Advertiser on 26/5/1922. She had died at home on 16/5/22 and was buried on 19/5/22 in St. Mary's Churchyard. As well as losing their two boys

in infancy, the couple also had four daughters, three of whom followed their father into the teaching profession.

Margaret Carr was the oldest of the daughters and the only one not to turn to teaching as a career. In the 1939 Register, taken In September of that year at the outbreak of WW2, she could be found looking after her two sisters, Mildred, and Ethel, in the village of Nornay in Worksop, Nottinghamshire. They named their property Shincliffe House. Margaret was the sole recipient of her father's will.

Another sister, Mary Wilson Carr, was also an elementary school teacher. She retired to Grange-over-Sands in Cumbria and died in 1960. Mary, along with Margaret and Milly, were members of the Dickie Bird Society, one set up in Newcastle by "Uncle Toby" who wrote under a pseudonym for a local newspaper. Carr's daughters were clearly imbued with a sense of duty from an early age and continued to be members into adulthood. You can read about the organisation [here](#).

John Carr was not the first Headmaster of Shincliffe School. However, one could make a powerful argument for claiming that his industriousness and high expectations of both pupils and staff are still in the DNA of the "new" building (built in the 1960s) nearly one hundred years after his retirement.