

The Story of Castle Carr



I remember hearing about Castle Carr from my parents, how they would go and picnic outside this abandoned castle way up in the back of beyond, high above Wainstalls village. Anyone going to Wainstalls could be forgiven for believing that this was the world's terminus. Once there the only thing to do was turn around to go back to the real world. That wasn't true though for although now on private property, even in 1997 when I was fortunate enough to visit the site, there was something magical, even mythical about this place. It was once written about as such,

“It could be truly said of Castle Carr, “Once seen, never forgotten”, especially when the approach is made along the top drive through Heights Lodge from Wainstalls village near Halifax, when the great house would suddenly come within view in the secluded valley amid the lonely moors.”

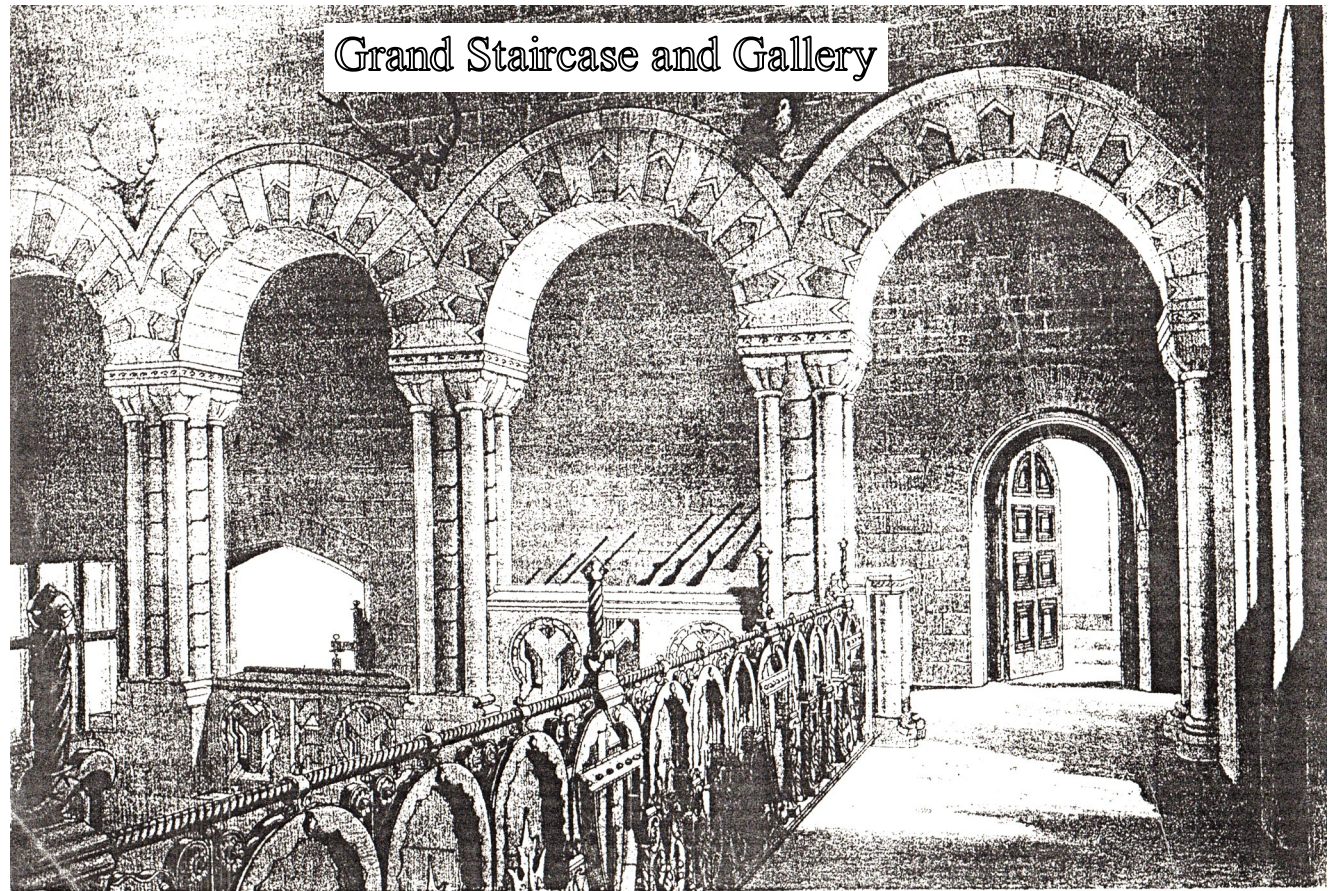
So it was that year, when two of us met Bo Scholefield, son of the legendary farmer Frank Scholefield, famous for wearing an eye patch and brandishing a shotgun which he would happily aim with his good eye at anyone trespassing. Having been granted safe passage to see Castle Carr's remains we went through an open gate and then down the road as described above and even though the castle was long gone, its ghost was standing proudly between some of the most beautiful surroundings you could ever imagine. What was no longer there, your mind filled in. So, we were met by Bo who was very friendly and told us about the land.

Looking at illustrations and photographs this had been a mansion of rare design in this part of the West Riding of Yorkshire; being constructed as a country house and shooting lodge.

Both visually and in its history Castle Carr could have been the setting for a Victorian ghost story and indeed echoed the tale of Hill House as written by Shirley Jackson in "The Haunting".

You see, tragedy was to strike the house, endowed upon the castle's creator, Captain Joseph Priestley Edwards, who would never live to see its completion and who, therefore, would never walk its hollow corridors; or would he?

Joseph Priestley Edwards was born on December 29th, 1818, the fourth and youngest son of Henry Lees Edwards of Pye Nest, Halifax, a wealthy manufacturer. His elder brother was probably better known, Sir Henry Edward, a staunch Conservative and Freemason who became MP for Halifax from 1847 to 1854. On the 16th of January, 1844 Joseph Priestley Edwards married Margaret Jane Norris, daughter

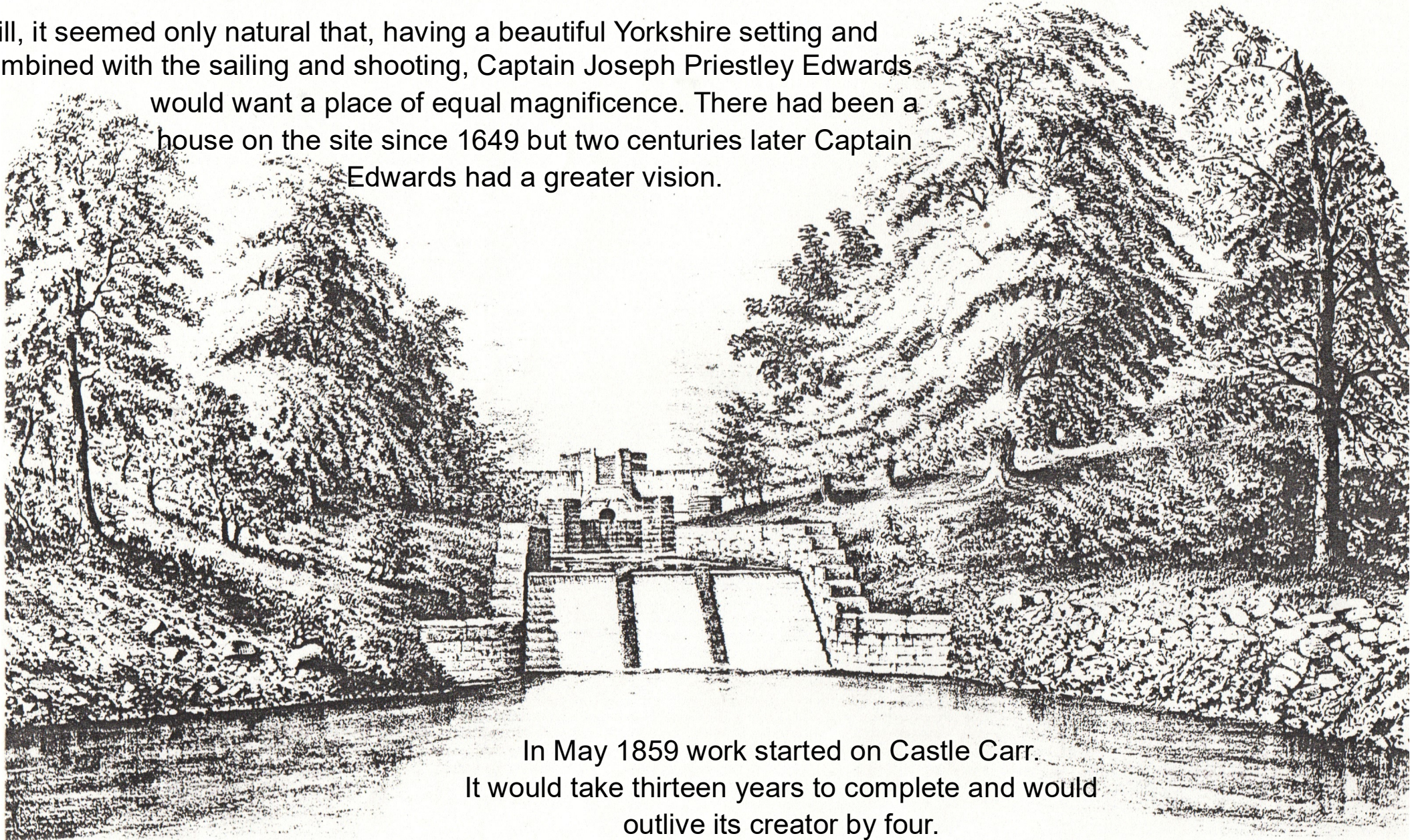


Grand Staircase and Gallery

of James Edwards Norris, attorney of Savile Hall, Halifax. Built in 1726 and facing onto what is now Savile Park Road, nuzzled between Holy Trinity Primary School and the Boulevard Surgery, Savile Hall still stands. They had four sons, Adolphus Henry Lees Edwards who died in infancy, Priestley Augustus Edwards who was born in 1844, Lea Priestley Edwards, born a year later in 1845 and Alfred Delafont Edwards, born in 1848. Priestley Augustus was to suffer the same fate as his father in a horrific accident some years later. Captain Joseph Priestley Edwards, as he became, served in the West Yorkshire Yeomanry Cavalry and resided at Fixby Park, Huddersfield.

Having gained his own wealth Captain Edwards made his first purchase of the land above Wainstalls in 1852, followed in '53 by further acquisitions that would give him control over shooting rights and also the use of reservoirs on which he could keep boats. These reservoirs held a secret of their own for on the 21st of August 1842 a local archaeologist, sketched what appeared to be a number of Bronze Age barrows, or graves, spread over the valley bottom. When the Upper and Lower Dean Head reservoirs were constructed, they were lost.

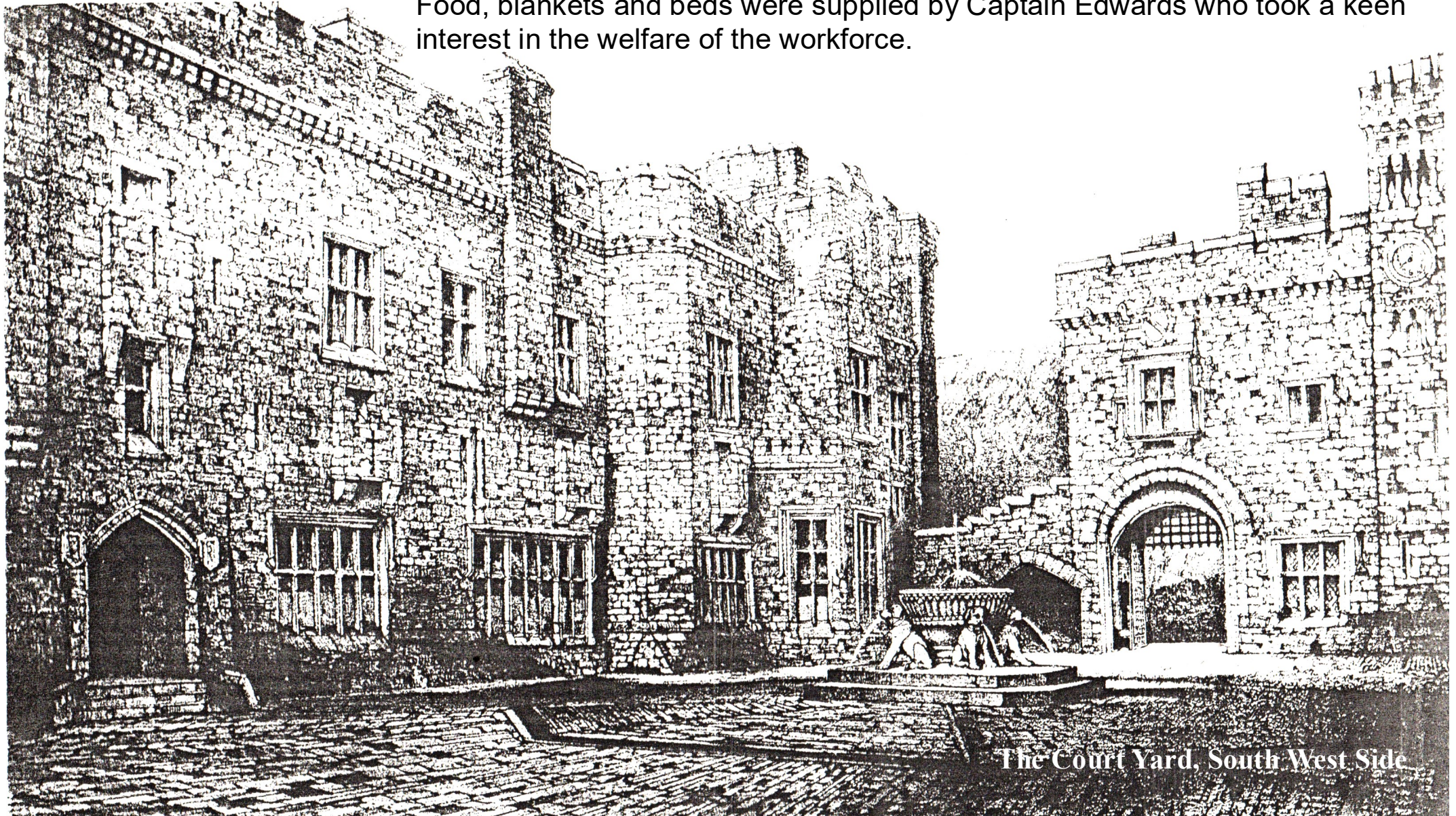
Still, it seemed only natural that, having a beautiful Yorkshire setting and combined with the sailing and shooting, Captain Joseph Priestley Edwards would want a place of equal magnificence. There had been a house on the site since 1649 but two centuries later Captain Edwards had a greater vision.



In May 1859 work started on Castle Carr.
It would take thirteen years to complete and would
outlive its creator by four.

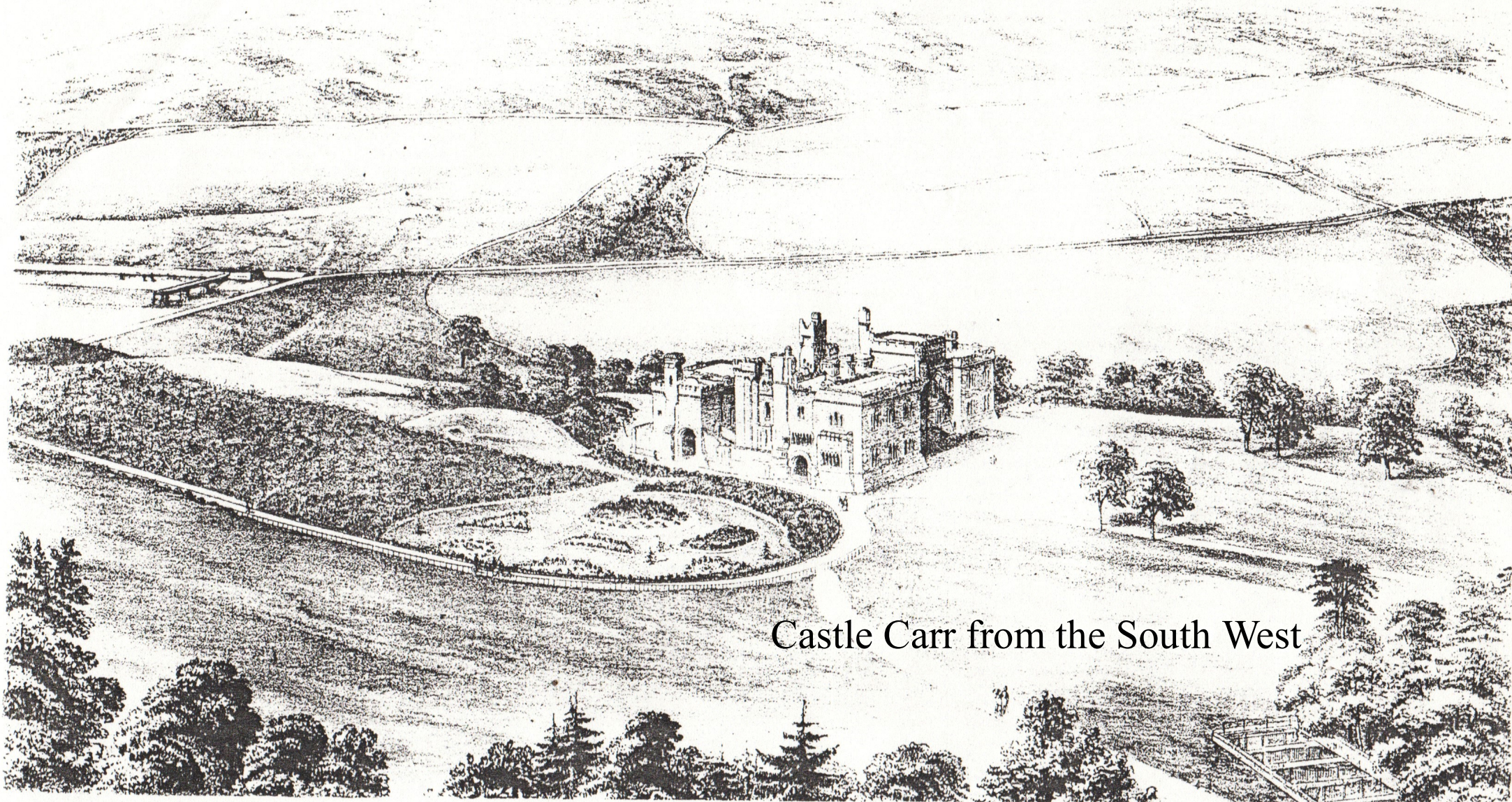
The architect of Castle Carr was Thomas Risling who utilised stones from quarries on the estate as well as those from Northowram and Holmfirth where a lighter coloured stone was used in the construction of the Grand staircase. At the peak of the building over one hundred men were employed, including many skilled masons from the Midgley area as well as Scottish, Irish, French and Italian workers, who resided in a purpose-built camp on the site until the mansion was completed enough to allow the men to sleep inside.

Food, blankets and beds were supplied by Captain Edwards who took a keen interest in the welfare of the workforce.



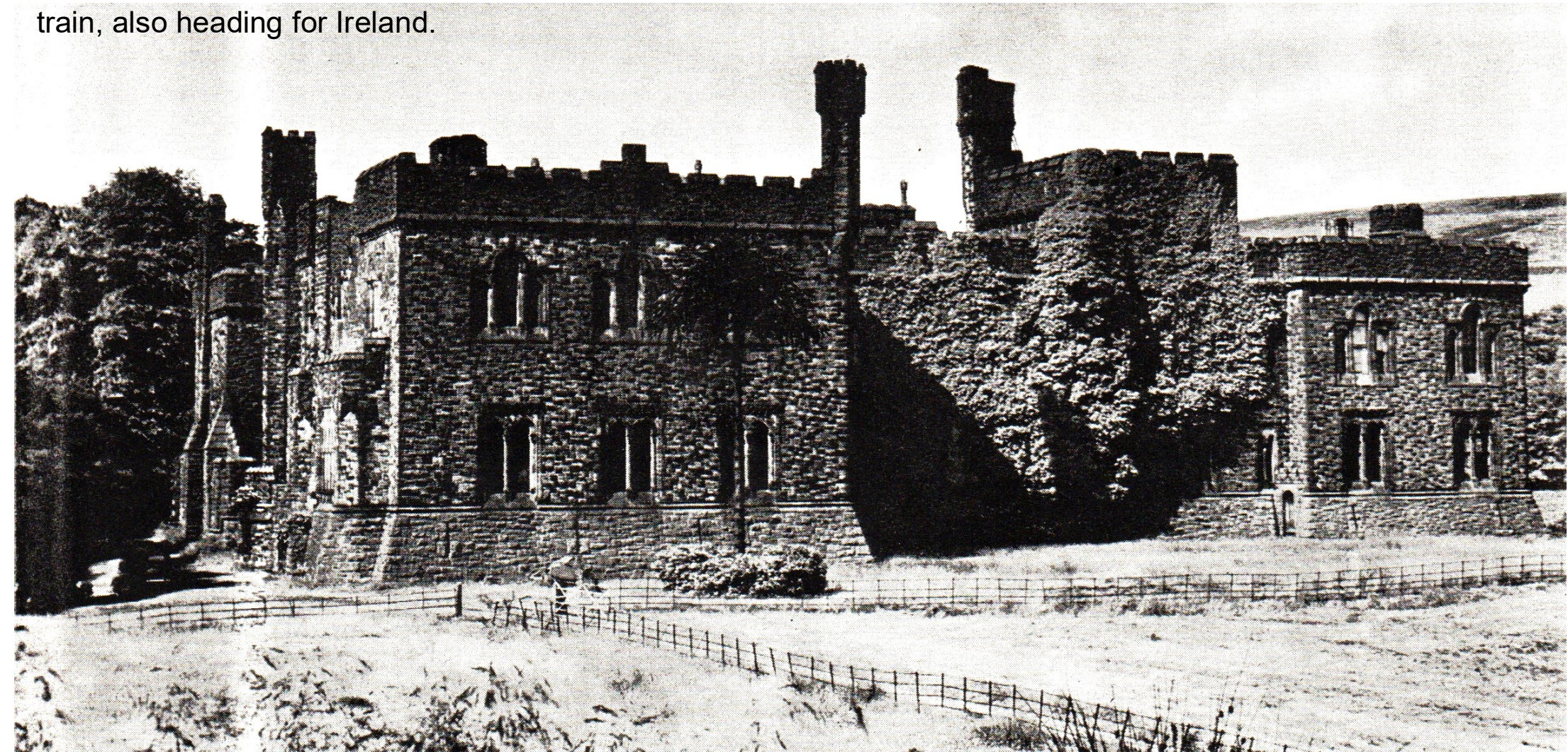
The Court Yard, South West Side

The gardens and parkland were laid out by a Mr Ponto, Edwards' head gardener at Fixby Park and included an oriental garden complete with monkey puzzle trees whilst the main fountain discharged water to a height of 130 feet, making it the second highest fountain in Europe after the one at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire. Roads and paths across the Castle Carr estate had long been used by local people for access to the moor for peat gathering and for travelling through to Oxenhope but in 1868, roads across the estate were closed off with Captain Edwards paying out some compensation. The closures gave rise to a rumbling dispute amongst the local people leading to a trial at Chancery in London on 24th February 1898, thirty years after the captain had passed.



Castle Carr from the South West

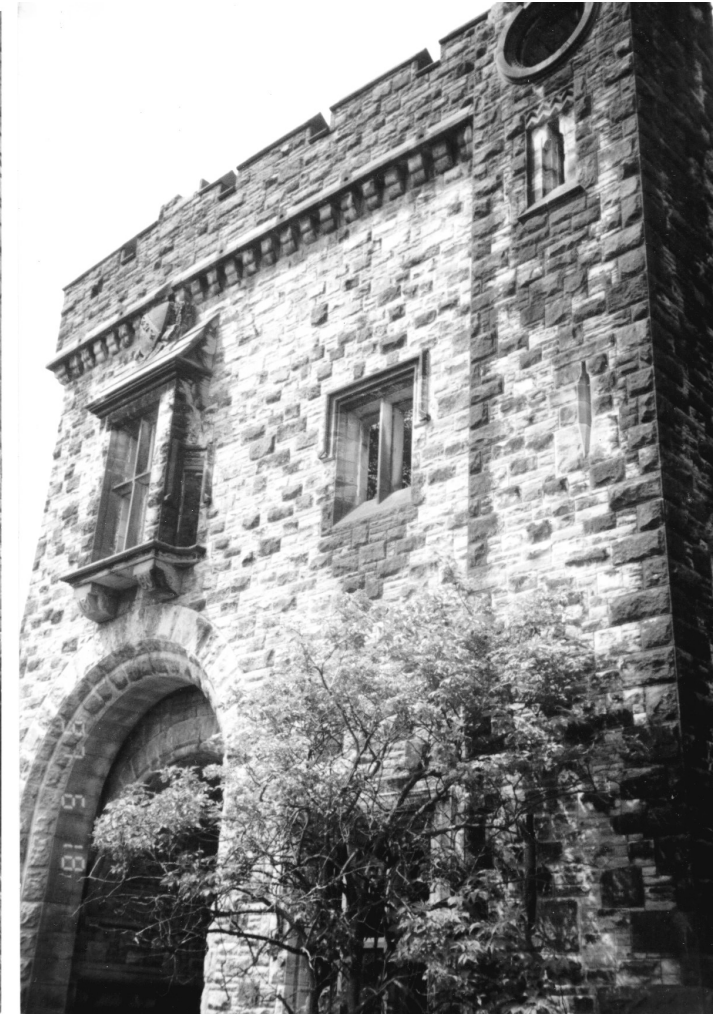
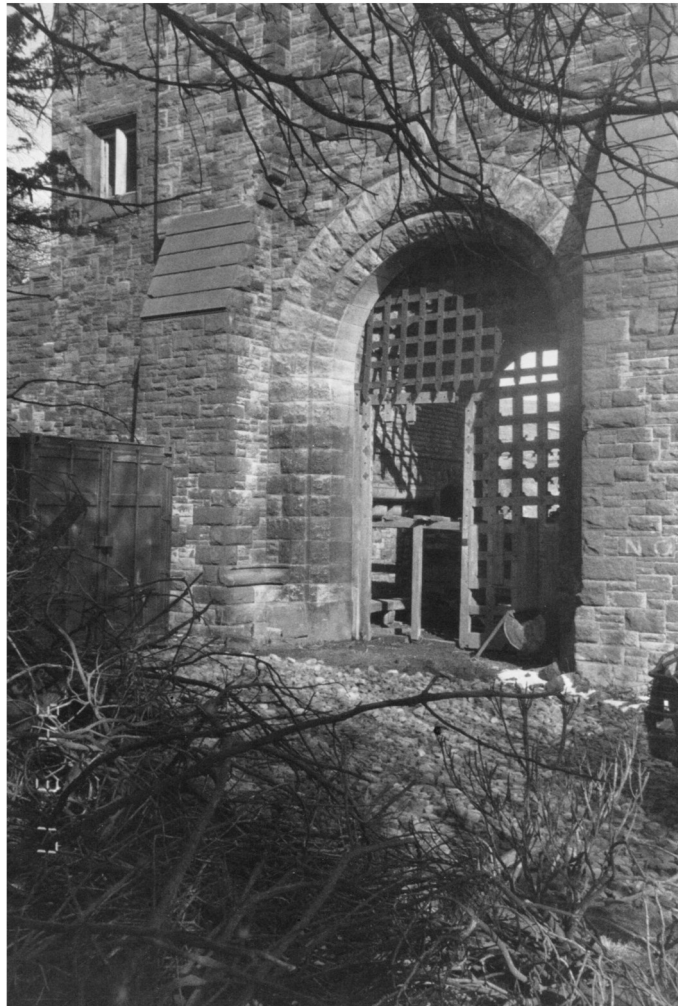
Joseph Priestley Edwards had everything it seemed, including a relatively new divorce, the exception being the one thing none of us has power over, our fate. Captain Edwards' one-way journey, which he was to share with his son, Priestley, began on the morning of Thursday, 20th of August 1868 when, at 8am, they were driven by carriage to Huddersfield Railway Station to catch the 9am train to Chester via Manchester to visit his sister, Mrs Clarke at Lavel Hill in the County of Dublin, Ireland. At Chester the passengers had to change to the Irish Mail Express to continue to Holyhead where they would then embark on the steamer to Dublin. At 7.15am the Irish Mail Express had left Euston heading for Chester. Along the way, 50 casks of paraffin oil were loaded onto another 'pick up' train, also heading for Ireland.

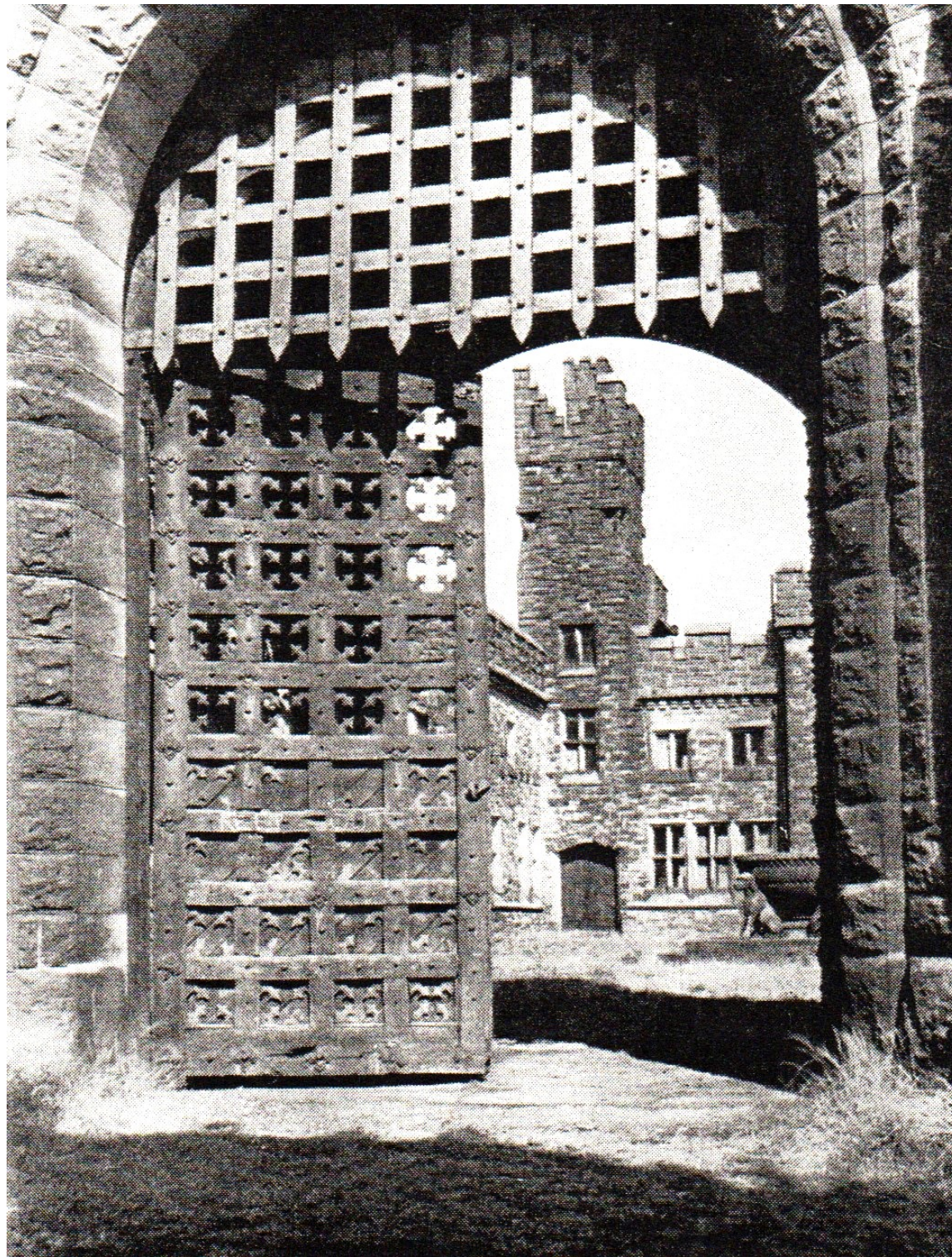


These casks were placed to the rear of the train next to the brake van which then continued its journey to Abergele. It left there at 12.15pm. Three miles outside of Abergele shunting was to take place on the Llysfaen line works sidings but the sidings were occupied. The train had to be divided, in order for any shunting to take place, which meant that the brake van and the 50 casks of paraffin oil remained standing on the main line which had a steep gradient pointing in the direction of Abergele. The wagon brakes were not pinned down fully and a decision to allow three wagons to slowly run down to the stationary vehicles as part of the process of moving the train proved fatal. The three wagons hit the stationary vehicle with enough force to move it down the track eventually picking up speed so as to render any attempt by the brakes man to catch them and put the brakes on high impossible. Meanwhile, the Irish Mail Express was heading towards the runaway wagons with Captain Edwards and his son locked, as was customary at this time for the passengers safety, in one of the First-class carriages at the front end of the train.



The Irish Mail Express passed through Abergele, picking up speed to be able to manage the gradient when the driver, Arthur Thompson, saw the runaway wagons but because of the sharpness of the bend assumed that they were on another line. When he realised that they were on the same line it was too late. He applied the brakes but was helpless to do any more so shouted to his fireman Joseph Holmes to jump. Holmes remained but Thompson was saved and within seconds the front van and three coaches of the express became an inferno as the paraffin kegs on the runaway wagons collided with the red-hot coals of the Irish Mail Express's engine. Thirty-two passengers, including Captain Edwards and his son were killed. Such was the horror that the only way the bodies could be distinguished as male or female was the fact that the fashion of the day was for ladies to wear steel crinoline hoops.





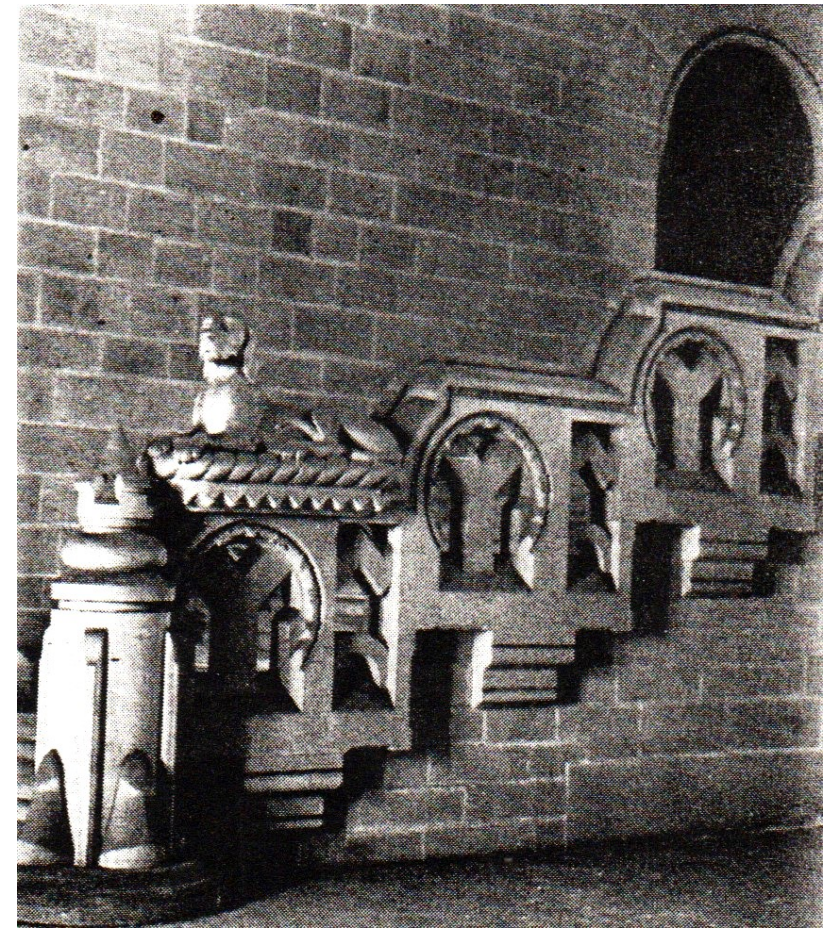
An inquest took place on August the 24th, 1868 in Abergele and was attended by Captain Edwards' brother, Sir Henry Edwards who took with him two of Captain Edwards' sons, Lea Priestley and Alfred Delafont Edwards. The verdict was one of accidental death.

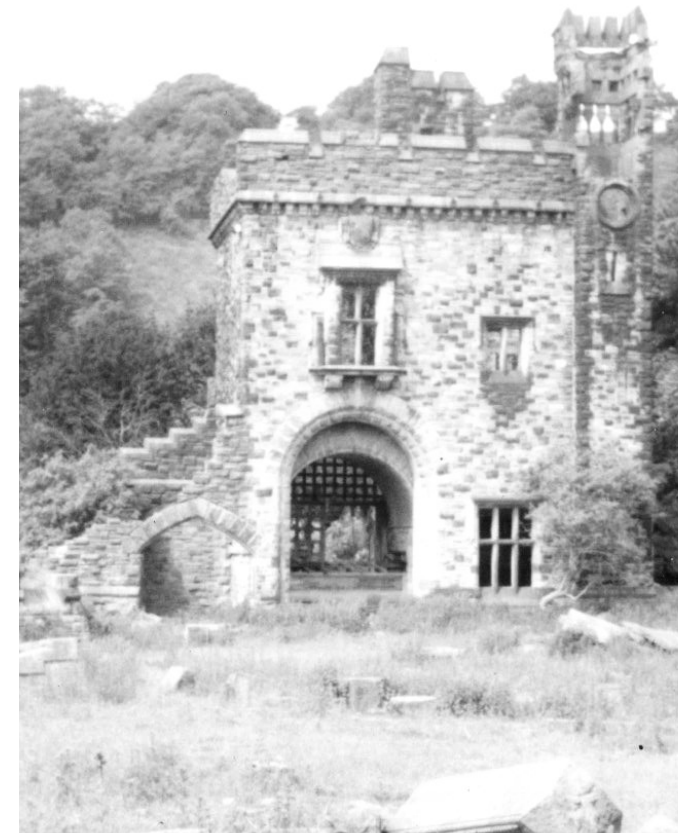
Captain Edwards' remains could only be identified by a mourning ring and a set of keys. His son had no identification of any kind and so the Coroner refused to issue a certificate of burial. They were, however, buried along with the other thirty in Abergele churchyard and on the day of the funeral many shops in both Halifax and Huddersfield were closed.

Despite the death of Captain Edwards, Castle Carr was completed under the guidance of his son Lea Priestley Edwards, who employed local architect John Hogg, the designer of the Crossley and Porter School, to finish the house.

By 1872 Castle Carr was almost completed in Norman and Elizabethan styles, comprising battlements and turrets that included a clock tower with a curfew bell which tolled at 10pm.

The buildings surrounded a courtyard and stables, in the centre of which was a massive stone basin supported by four carved Talbot hounds. Entrance to this court was by way of a fine Norman arch and heavy portcullis oak gate. The building was a memorable place to anyone fortunate enough to view it in its entirety, the banqueting hall was sixty-two feet long and had molded panels and a ceiling oak-framed on corbels with inlaid panels and an enormous stone fireplace on marble pillars. The floor of the hall was built on springs to allow for dancing. Over the doors, stone carvings represented a boar hunt as well as a stag hunt whilst antlered heads and other trophies of the hunt covered the walls. The Grand Hall measured sixty feet in height and forty feet square with the great stairway complete with balustrades, elaborately carved in white stone, its newel capped with a Talbot hound, an animal that would hold some significance in the castle's later story. The fifty-two feet gallery to which this stairway led had Norman arches forming the gallery's side walls, the rails adorned by swords, shields and other ancient paraphernalia. To continue the theme, two carved stone crusaders guarded the head of another stairway and more stone Talbot hounds stood faithfully by another huge fireplace in the thirty-three feet billiard room. A kitchen took up most of the basement and had three large wall ovens. Heat and light for Castle Carr was by gas and created on the estate near the lower lodge. It was said that when the building was fully functional that a load of coal was required every day to maintain these fires and ovens.





The last portion to be built was the north-east wing, which occupied the site of the earlier 17th Century house and in 1873 Lea Priestley took up residence there. In 1874 the house was offered for sale at auction but was withdrawn at £36,500 and Lea remained there until 1876 when it was sold to a Mr Laycock who lived there for a further sixteen years. In 1889, another attempted sale at auction was unsuccessful but then Mr William Leppington bought it in 1892 but sold it on to John Murgatroyd of Midgley in August of 1895 but the house was rarely fully used with the Murgatroyd's only using part of the house as a hunting lodge. However, it stayed in the Murgatroyd family until Ronald Hawley Murgatroyd, the last owner, put it up for sale at auction. Harold Gillings of J. E. Gillings & Company Limited of East Ardsley, Wakefield bought the sadly run-down building for £4,200 on the 29th of September 1961 and started the demolition a year later.

At one time work demolition stopped when the workmen refused to continue saying that the building was haunted. Who or what by was anyone's guess, given its history the Castle could offer a multiple choice.

In 1939, the grounds closed but on 27th May 1947 they were re-opened, this time to the public for the first time. Two years later, on the 5th of July it was once again put up for sale by auction but withdrawn when bids only reached £9,250. Wood paneling from the house was bought and used in the local pub the Cat i' th' well, Luddenden Dean and many of the farms on the estate were sold to the tenants but what of the Talbot hounds? In the 1990's, the once majestic fountain from Castle Carr's courtyard was lying in pieces in a Yorkshire stonemason's yard when Crowthers of London, the City's oldest specialist dealers in architectural antiques took the pieces away and reassembled. Further research led them to discover its origins and although the hounds could no longer go back to Castle Carr, by now demolished for thirty plus years, they did find a new Yorkshire home in Trevelyan Square, Leeds, just a walk away from the train station.



The ghosts of Castle Carr remain, be it in Trevelyan Square, Leeds, in the wood paneling at the Cat I'th Well pub, in the memories of the people who still visit its fountains and maybe even Captain Joseph Priestley Edwards standing up there alone on that bleak but beautiful broken landscape where the enormity of his vision was only bettered by the physical properties of Castle Carr itself.

Howard Priestley, 2021

On Surveying The Ruins Of Castle Carr

That massive pile, so wantonly thrown down,
An unfulfilled ambition scattered wide.
Does he see, I wonder, what he ne'er could own?
This monument to his tragic pride.

What manner of man whose crest of Talbot Hound,
created he in his immeasurable thought
A castle, on this wild and lonely ground,
A dozen years, by Midgley craftsmen wrought?

The Coat of Arms in stone that on the gallery stood,
Now slanted lies, part buried in the grass.
'OMNE BONUM DEI DONUM' – From God comes all good

Aught but good that this great house should pass.

Gas lights glow through pointed windows clear,
The restless horses in the stable chafe.
Carriage lanterns up the drive draw near,
Reflect on oaken gates made fast and safe.

Spirits of the past haunt this hollow still,
From stone arched cellar to crenelated tower,
Across the plating fountains, o'er the hill,
The lonely gatehouse clock chimes out the hour.
Nothing now is heard upon the moorland wind,
Save the plaintive cry of curlew and crow.
Very few remember now, those years so far behind,
The secrets there that we may never know.

Unknown September 1971

