

Case study

Carlisle State Management Scheme

Extract from *Bowled Over - the Bowling Greens of Britain* (Historic England, 2015)



Seemingly ready for business, this is the bowls storage cupboard at the Redfern pub in Carlisle, the fourteenth and last pub built under the Carlisle State Management Scheme. Another pub in the scheme was the Horse and Farrier on Wigton Road, built in 1929 and closed in 2010. Four years later its bowling green was still gathering weeds as the future of the site remained in limbo (right).

In terms of design and strategy, there was much in common between Birmingham's Reformed Pub movement and the Carlisle State Management Scheme.

Not least, both resulted in a flurry of pub greens being laid between the wars, in defiance of those who continued to argue that, if offered the likes of bowls, skittles, quoits, darts or billiards, people were likely to drink more. In fact, as the Mass Observation investigation into public habits conducted in Bolton from 1937 onwards observed, it was usually the opposite. Pub goers who engaged in games actually drank less, and more slowly.

But the Carlisle scheme had its roots in a rather different problem.

During the First World War, in 1915 the otherwise rural area to the north of Carlisle, around Gretna Green, became home to a vast workforce of some 25,000 munitions workers, brought in mainly from Ireland and Glasgow.

It was dangerous work and led hordes of men to congregate in Carlisle on a nightly basis.

After a year or so of escalating absenteeism and 953 convictions for fighting and vandalism, the Government decided to nationalise the entire Carlisle brewing industry at a stroke, pubs included, and put it all into the hands of a Central Control Board.

Similar schemes were set up in other areas where sensitive war work was in hand; for example in the Cromarty Firth in Scotland and Enfield, north London.

In all parts of Britain in 1915 pub opening hours were cut to aid munitions production, a cut not fully reversed until 2003.

But in Carlisle the restrictions went further. These included the provision of weaker beer, the payment of landlords with a fixed wage (rather than one based on sales) and the introduction of a 'no treating' rule, meaning that no-one could buy rounds of drinks.

At the same time over a third of all Carlisle's licensed premises were simply shut down.

In 1918, instead of reverting to pre-war market forces, supervision of the city's pubs was devolved to the Carlisle and District State Management Scheme, or SMS.

It was this scheme that then went ahead with an ambitious programme of pub construction along lines similar to those in Birmingham; that is, each in a distinct, light and airy architectural style, designed to be more welcoming to women and families, to serve snacks and food, with smoke extractors as standard, and equipped with a range of pub games.



Architect Harry Redfern (1861-1950) was put in charge of the programme. Based in London, Redfern seemed an unlikely choice, having done his most extensive work before then in various Oxbridge colleges.

But working with assistant Joseph Seddon, Redfern's 'Model Inns' were just that. Starting in 1927, 14 were completed in Carlisle, four with bowling greens.

The greens were no mere add-ons. Redfern insisted on clinker beds under the turf – Cumberland turf, naturally – to ensure good drainage. At the Horse and Farrier the building was designed in an L-shape, on a north west to south east axis, so that the green received maximum sunlight.

Clearly the SMS greens were popular, for in 1938, E Mitchell, president of the SMS Bowls League, called for more to be made available as those in the scheme were having to host 480 matches in fourteen weeks.

Indeed the SMS was a great success with the public overall, and its pubs remained profitable until in 1971 the government decided to auction off the scheme's assets. Greenall Whitley bought some of the pubs and took on sponsorship of the league but, with dwindling numbers of bowlers (caused partly by the steadily deteriorating quality of the greens), fixtures came to an end in 1993.

As of 2015, seven of the SMS pubs in Carlisle remain in use as pubs. As for the bowling greens...



◀ Last but not least – opened in 1940, **The Redfern** on **Kingmoor Road** in **Etterby, Carlisle** ranks as one of the most sumptuous of the fourteen SMS pubs built between 1927-40, and is accordingly listed Grade II. Its architect was Joseph Seddon, but it was named after Harry Redfern as a tribute to all the work he had done in making the SMS such a success.

Note how the end bays were canted, with a verandah and first floor balcony offering prime views over the bowling green – a green which, sadly, by the time the author tried it out, as seen here in August 2012, was barely playable.

It is a familiar dilemma for a pub that no longer has a resident club. A well maintained green can bring in business, but an average or poor quality green has no appeal at all, even to casual bowlers.

Over at **The Magpie Inn** on **Victoria Road, Botcherby** the scene, also in 2012, appears more promising. Opened in 1933, this Redfern designed pub, also listed Grade II, demonstrates again his attention to detail. Every angle, every finish, was carefully considered. Redfern even specified the varieties of shrubs and flowers to be planted on the terrace.

And when in 1949 Seddon proposed glazing in the verandah to create a darts area, he made sure to get Redfern's approval first.

In 2010 the Magpie was restored to its sparkling best and the green made playable for casual games amongst the regulars.

But in 2013 the shutters went down, as they did too at the Redfern in January 2015.

Since then, Samuel Smiths Brewery has rescued the Magpie and the green. At the time of going to press, however, the Redfern remained boarded up.