

KNOWE and then....a potted history of The Knowe

The Knowe is a late Victorian, former Manse House (or Vicarage) and was built in 1898. The history which surrounds its very existence is an interesting one, steeped in scandal and intrigue.....

The Parish Church (or Kirk) of Carsphairn was built in 1815 on the site of an earlier church and can still be seen today. It is a traditional stone-built building, painted white and is situated at the opposite end of the village from The Knowe. It has a very pretty Kirkyard and stunning views beyond looking over The Rhinns of Kells.

In the mid-Victorian era, the majority of Carsphairn villagers would have attended Church every Sunday and listened astutely to the Minister's sermon and taken part in prayer. This was a way of life back then, attending Church and living by God's will was very important, the Minister of the Kirk was a very well-respected figure within the community and his title held him in great esteem. The residing Minister of the Church lived in the Manse House, situated just to the left of the Church, a rather grand dwelling set amongst the trees overlooking the Kirkyard.

During the mid-1890's the Minister at that time was the Reverend Peter Charles Findlay M.D. he had applied for the living and moved from Rothes in Morayshire to take up his position in Carsphairn. He was a young bachelor and came to the village with his sister, she became his Housekeeper. Another young woman, Miss Isabella Niven, was employed as Cook at the Manse. During his induction year the Rev. Findlay became a little over friendly with his Cook and it is said that she became pregnant; it was thought that the child she was carrying was in fact that of the Minister. This caused huge outrage throughout the parish and in April 1885 the Rev. Findlay was charged with the offence of Fornication, it became known as '**The Carsphairn Clerical Scandal**'. The case lay open for more than thirty years! Although the case was never proven a large part of the congregation lost respect for the Rev Findlay and broke away from the main Kirk. Eventually a new Church was built, a much smaller building than the original one. It became known as the 'United Free Church of Carsphairn'. The building can still be seen today, it is situated across the road from The Knowe a little further into the village, strangely enough it is now also a B&B.

As the United Free Church congregation grew in numbers it became necessary for it to have a resident Minister, therefore he would need a place to live. In 1898 'The Knowe' or 'North Manse', as it was known back then, was built. The land on which the house was erected was formerly owned by the McAdam Family, an important family in their own right (*see footnote*).



There were several Ministers who lived here at The Knowe throughout its Church ownership, one of which was The Reverend Sibald, a keen cyclist – his photograph can be seen at the foot of the stairs, it was taken in 1923, you can just make out his bicycle leaning against the front wall. There are also other photographs on display which show the house at different stages throughout its life.

The United Free Church closed in 1930 and the congregation of that time amalgamated once again with the original Church, and so the story turns full circle. As the smaller Church was no-longer in use it was decided that it and the North Manse would be sold and for the first time it became a private dwelling and was renamed 'The Knowe'. It is believed that this name was taken from the small hillock situated just behind the house which is recorded on Ordnance Survey Maps as 'Preachers Knowe'. (*A knowe is a Scottish term for a knoll or small mound*).

Since that time there have only been three further owners: Mr Hunter, a wealthy Tea-Merchant who spent a lot of his time overseas trading in India; he bought the house for £550.00. Then in 1973 it was purchased by the Lawrence Sisters, Helen and Diana, two ladies who had previously run Carsphairn Village Shop for many years. The Knowe became the home to which they would retire and see out the remainder of their years. In our front garden you will see a commemorative plaque on a bench, which was presented to the sisters by the community as a retirement gift.

Finally, in September 2012 The Knowe became the pride and joy of Karen & Harry who since then have lovingly and meticulously restored and renovated the building back to its former glory. They have tried to keep as many of the original features of the house as possible, mixed with a few modern comforts and detail. They are thrilled to be able to share with you today, not just its character but also its fascinating history and hope that you grow to love the place as much as they do?



1905

John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836)

The land that The Knowe was originally built upon was once owned by the McAdam Family.

John Loudon McAdam was a Scottish engineer and roadbuilder. He invented a new process, 'Macadamisation', for building roads with a smooth hard surface that would be more durable and less muddy than former soil-based tracks.

Modern road construction still reflects McAdam's influence. Of subsequent improvements, the most significant was the introduction of tar (originally coal tar) to bind the road surface's stones together; 'tarmac' (or Tar Macadam) – followed later by the use of hot-laid tarred aggregate or tar-sprayed chippings to create better road metalling. More recently, oil-based asphalt laid on reinforced concrete has become a major road surface, but its use of granite or limestone chippings still recalls McAdam's innovation.



John and his family lived in Lagwyne Castle; a grand home situated just to the North of Carsphairn Village. The building was almost destroyed by fire in December 1762 when John was only 6 years old, the ruins are still visible today.

The section of very straight road just as you leave the village of Carsphairn to the north is said to be the original site upon which John Loudon McAdam first laid his macadamised road surface!