



LETTER FROM
JOHN CARR TO
RALPH CARR
ABOUT
INVASIONS
MADE BY THE
FRENCH ARMY,
1792

REFERENCE: ZCE F/1/1/1/125 | SUGGESTED AGE GROUPS: LIFELONG LEARNERS | FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS, MILITARY HISTORY, THE GRAND TOUR

LETTER FROM JOHN CARR TO RALPH CARR

This letter was written by John Carr, from Florence, Italy, to his father Ralph Carr at Newcastle upon Tyne.

In the first paragraph, John writes about his sister's health. Harriet had suffered from a persistent cough, thought to be tuberculosis, for some time and one of the reasons she was given parental permission to participate in the Grand Tour was that it was believed that the trip may improve her health. John writes of Harriet '... she is as well as ever she was in her life except that once or twice in a week a single cough may escape her ... It is my opinion that she has got the better of her disorder, nor do I see any reason to fear its return upon her going back to England. She has visibly gained flesh lately, and her appetite is more than equal to what I ever observed it in England'. Health was a common motivation for travel in the 18th century. In England, tourists visited the spa towns of



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Bath, Buxton, Scarborough and Tunbridge Wells where they would 'take the waters' - visit a spa with thermal healing waters. Popular European Spa towns included Aachen (Germany), Baden-Baden (Germany) and Spa (Belgium). The warmer climate and clean air of the Tour was also believed to improve health.

In the third paragraph John writes about the current political situation. It is this that has prevented John and Harriet's planned return home earlier in 1792. John comments that 'The crowds of English that pass thro' this place is astonishing, and the more so, since the usual passage by Mount Cenis is at present impracticable, the French being in possession of all Savoy, and preparing in all haste to make a descent upon Piedmont. Nice and the Sea Coast is already in their power, and the King of Sardinia appears in considerable danger'. The large number of tourists is likely to have been in part because like John and Harriet many had been unable to return home. Most tourists crossed the Alps to Italy rather than travelling by sea which was considered more dangerous. John refers to the Mount Cenis Pass, the popular route across the Alps. The Pass was not suitable for carriages which were dismantled at the foot of the Pass. Carriages were transported across the Pass by mules and visitors were carried across in sedan chairs by porters. Mount Cenis has become impassable because the French has taken possession of Savoy. Savoy, in the Western Alps, now part of France, was a separate state in the 18th century and was occupied by the French Revolutionary forces between 1792 and 1815.

John reports that the French are thought to be '... preparing in all haste to make a descent upon Piedmont. Nice and the Sea Coast is already in their power, and the King of Sardinia appears in considerable danger. The Milanese(sic) is threatened and would be an easy conquest. The sacred Pontiff himself is by no means secure'. Until 1861 when the country was unified, Italy comprised a number of states and republics, two of which were Sardinia and Milan. Several were papal states that were under sovereign rule of the Pope. John suggests that there was widespread support for the French Revolutionary forces, 'How far the French mania may extend is very difficult to say, but certain it is, that a French army would find more friends than enemies in every other state of Italy but this. The consequences are much to be dreaded throughout Europe ...'. John's letter describes the impact of the French Revolution in mainland Europe and support for republican government beyond France.

Florence formed part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. John closes his letter with a description of local celebrations for the Grand Duke of Tuscany - 'The acclamations and blessings of thousands of his subjects must have formed a pleasing contrast in his mind with the situation of many of his brother



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Sovereigns. The late prohibition of the exportation of Corn Oil and Wine was the cause of this tumultuous joy, but independent of that, he is honoured and loved. This Country is a Utopia in comparison of the rest of Italy, which is wretchedly governed'.

TRANSCRIPT

(No 32 Florence Sep[tembe]r 24th) No 33 Florence Oct[obe]r 11th 1792

My D[ea]r Sir

The last Post brought us your Letter of 12 Ult^o dated Ponteland, which gave us the greatest pleasure from the good accounts you give of yourselves, and the spirits in which you write. We have been so fortunate in every thing, that nothing has hitherto been wanting to compleat our happiness, but the frequent assurance of the prosperity and welfare of our friends at home. With regard to Harriet I can only repeat what I have said in most of my last Letters, that she is as well as ever she was in her life except that once or twice in a week a single cough may escape her. This I am convinced is totally without consequence, nor do I believe that it proceeds from any complaint in the breast, but rather appears to be constitutional as I well remember to have heard you cough from time to time but much more violently ever since I can recollect. It is my opinion that she has got the better of her disorder, nor do I see any reason to fear its return upon her going back to England. She has visibly gained flesh lately, and her appetite is more than equal to what I ever observed it in England. She is in constant good spirits, in this respect, (as indeed in most others) she is superior to almost any person I ever saw, and I sincerely believe she enjoys as much real happiness as our nature can well admit. Those who think they know her best, know but a small portion of her excellencies, and I trust in God that she will be continued to us for many happy years, our pride and our glory, and a model to others of as much perfection as I believe compatible with our Being.

The last Post also brought me a Letter from Sir Rob[er]t Herries & Co enclosing their notes for £300 for which my best thanks, at the same time we rec[eive]d a long letter from Ralph, who is a regular and good correspondent. I have sometimes omitted to advise the rec[eip]t with the date of your Letters, but I dare say that they have all reached us, at least we have no reason to complain of your silence.



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The crowds of English that pass thro' this place is astonishing, and the more so, since the usual passage by Mount Cenis is at present impracticable, the French being in possession of all Savoy, and preparing in all haste to make a descent upon Piedmont. Nice and the Sea Coast is already in their power, and the King of Sardinia appears in considerable danger. The Milanese(sic) is threatened and would be an easy conquest. The sacred Pontiff himself is by no means secure. How far the French mania may extend is very difficult to say, but certain it is, that a French army would find more friends than enemies in every other state of Italy but this. The consequences are much to be dreaded throughout Europe, but I hope they will have business enough at home to prevent them from spreading over this country. Here a different scene presents itself, this very morning the people went to the Grand Duke's country house to conduct him in triumph to his audience in Florence. The acclamations and blessings of thousands of his subjects must have formed a pleasing contrast in his mind with the situation of many of his brother Sovereigns. The late prohibition of the exportation of Corn Oil and Wine was the cause of this tumultuous joy, but independent of that, he is honoured and loved. This Country is a Utopia in comparison of the rest of Italy, which is wretchedly governed.

On this account the French principles are to be dreaded, for men loaded beyond what they can bear, may embrace the first opportunity to throw off the Weight[.] We shall continue quietly here 'till we find it adviseable (sic) to return to Rome. You will continue to direct to us at Florence 'till you hear of our being elsewhere, but we shall be in no hurry to leave such good quarters. Your Dut[ifu]l & Obed[ien]t Son John Carr

FURTHER READING

FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS

The Wars of the French Revolution: 1792-1801 by Charles J. Esdaile (Routledge (2018))

The French Revolutionary Wars by Gregory Fremont-Barnes (Osprey Publishing, 2014)

Revolutionary France's War of Conquest in the Rhineland: Conquering the Natural Frontier, 1792-1797 by Jordan R. Hayworth (Cambridge University Press, 2019)

The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars by T.C.W. Blanning (Routledge, 2017)



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Learning and Educational Archive Resources from Northumberland

HISTORIC STATES OF ITALY

A Brief History of Italy by Jeremy Black (Robinson, 2018)

The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, its Regions and their Peoples by David Gilmour (Penguin, 2012)