

Carcassonne by Ray Pearce

Readers may recall that last month I paid a steam train trip to St Valery sur Somme a small medieval town in Northern France.



This month I went to France but to somewhere I have not yet visited. Why Carcassonne? This goes all the way back to a French literature class at Waterloo Grammar School near Liverpool, in 1951,

the year I left school. We had to learn, in French a poem called Carcassonne. I can still recall fragments of it. *Je deviens vieux, J'ai travaillé toute ma vie.* Translated as "I am getting old, and I have worked all my life." It continues I have one ambition left in life. To see Carcassonne. On the allotted day, and a companion, set out on their journey by foot, the subject of the verses falls ill on the journey and never does get to see Carcassonne.



It is the largest medieval fortified town in Europe and the second most visited tourist attraction in France. The hilltop city is 2,500 years old and has been occupied by the Romans, Visigoths and Crusaders. The Order of the Cathar Knights lived there for over 500 years. The walls are over 2 miles long with 52 watch towers. The rest of the town is like any other with houses, shops and museums, leather goods and nougat being specialities.

The “modern” walls were started in 1247 and took over 40 years and was mainly the work of the Visigoths.

The population of Carcassonne is now some 46,000 and the town and citadel has over 3 million visitors a year. A medieval success story.

