This elegant stone viaduct over the River Nidd was built through the picturesque town of Knaresborough to carry a branch of the Leeds & Thirsk Railway. The four-span bridge stands 78ft high above the water, each span measuring 56ft 9in across. The viaduct was designed to blend in with the architecture and character of the town and was completed in 1851.

Photo by Jeremy Clark
Above: 18th century arches carrying an aqueduct over the B6160 road at Bolton Abbey, North Yorkshire. In the central arch the headroom is 10' 9" and the width is 9' 5"

Cover: Whitby harbour

Editorial

The idea behind an e-journal for Yorkshire is the result of the closure of many Yorkshire magazines over recent years such as Smith Settle’s Yorkshire Journal taken over by Dalesman then closed down, Milltown Memories, Around the Wolds and North Yorkshire, Pennine Magazine, which was taken over by Dalesman, then closed down, and Old Yorkshire Magazine which has not been published for many years. An e-journal could fill the space of all these now defunct publications. There are many readers and writers out there who have in the past enjoyed these publications and some have had their work published in magazines like the ones that have now closed due to the financial slump.

The proposed new e-journal called ‘The Yorkshire Journal’ has been designed to appeal to all readers and writers with an interest in Yorkshire’s heritage past and present. It will also include features on people and places. The journal is a non-profit e-magazine dedicated to Yorkshire and is a quarterly publication, published in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, online free of charge.

Editorial contributions are welcome. Please submit articles and photographs by email directly to The Yorkshire Journal at theyorkshirejournal@hotmail.co.uk for more information please see notes for contributions.

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This is the first issue of The Yorkshire Journal; it contains three interesting articles, two on the East Yorkshire coast. The first one is about the history of Whitby jet, which appears to be back in fashion as jewellery, being worn by celebrities and royalty. The second one is the story of the Scarborough Spa, which made Scarborough the first British seaside resort. It is also home to the Scarborough Spa Orchestra, the last remaining seaside orchestra in Britain. The last article is about Mother Shipton and the Petrifying Well at Knaresborough, which is believed to be England’s oldest tourist attraction. Mother Shipton is England’s most famous Prophetess; but it could all be a hoax. The Petrifying Well is real, and does turn objects into stone.

I hope you enjoy these contributions.
We welcome your comments.

Andrew Simpson
WHITBY JET NOW BACK IN FASHION
AS JEWELLERY AND COLLECTORS ITEM

By Sarah Harrison

Whitby on the East Yorkshire coast is divided in two by the River Esk. The Abbey which dominates the skyline on the East Cliff of the town is seen by visitors and many tourists climb the 199 well worn steps to take a closer look at the ruins.

The town is famous for people and places, Bram Stoker’s Dracula, Captain James Cook and the world famous photographer Frank Meadow Sutcliffe just to mention a few. Goathland near Whitby is home to the TV series ‘Heartbeat’. But what makes Whitby unique is Whitby Jet, which has been made into innumerable ornaments and used for jewellery for thousands of years.

The Meaning of Jet

Jet is simply a fossilised wood of an ancient tree named Araucaria known as a monkey-puzzle tree, which flourished in the Jurassic period about 180 million years ago. It is similar to, but harder than coal and turns from a natural brown colour to the deepest black with a glossy smooth surface. It occurs mainly in the Upper Liassic deposits at the base of Jurassic rocks and is found not in seams like coal but in lumps. The best hard jet outcrops are found at a number of locations along the north east Yorkshire coast near Whitby. Nowhere else in England does it occur in such quantity or quality.

History

Although jet started to be used for jewellery in the Neolithic period 4000-2200 BC it was not until the Bronze Age that its potential was recognised. Beautiful necklaces consisting of rows of barrel-shaped beads with rectangular spacer plates, beads, buttons, toggles, studs, armlets, bracelets and rings were all made in jet by Bronze Age people in 2200-700 BC. Necklaces were often combined with bones, teeth, amber or other natural objects to make them more attractive.

Carving jet is a skilful business, especially when it comes to making holes in beads. In Prehistoric times people used a tiny chip of flint and a bow drill. The completed jewellery was then polished to give a deep black shine. Hard jet retains its polish even after thousands of years in the ground and looks as though it had been made yesterday.
Jet continued to be used in the Iron Age and on into Roman times and a Roman jet workshop was discovered in 1873 when the foundations for York railway station were being dug.

The use of jet declined when the Romans left Britain but some Viking women did wear jet bracelets and rings. In Medieval times crosses of jet were thought to counteract the effects of witchcraft. One such cross was found on a witch post in a cottage at Egton, North Yorkshire. It dates to about the 14th century and can be seen in the Whitby Museum, Pannett Park. The well known phrase ‘as black as Jet’ was coined by Shakespeare and is still in common usage today.

But it was not until the Victorian period that jet became really fashionable again and Whitby which has the most important deposit in Britain was the centre of the jet industry.

Examples of Bronze Age jet jewellery can be seen at the Hull and East Riding Museum in Hull, Sheffield City Museum in Sheffield and the Yorkshire Museum, Museum Gardens, York has one of the largest collections of Roman jet; many examples are on permanent display.

**Whitby Jet in and out of Fashion**

The first Whitby Jet shop was opened in about 1808 and since then it has become synonymous with the town. Queen Victoria took an interest in Whitby jet and fashionable ladies followed suit. In 1851 jet ornaments and jewellery were popularised at the Great Exhibition in London arranged by Prince Albert where some very talented carvers from Whitby exhibited their work in response to the rising popularity of Jet jewellery.

One of Whitby’s jet carvers, Isaac Greenbury secured an order from the Empress of France. The demand for jet grew rapidly after the death of Prince Albert from typhoid fever in December 1861, when Queen Victoria entered into a long period of deep mourning. She wore more jet then ever, during which time only jet jewellery of a more sober tone was allowed to be worn at court. Jet was now extensively used for mourning jewellery.

With the rapid development of the railways it was much easier for Victorian visitors to reach Whitby and many visitors bought the extremely fashionable Whitby Jet. Shops selling jet at this time were located in Church Street, whilst jet workers are known to have lived in Henrietta Street.
The boom in the jet business continued to rise and by 1872 there were 200 workshops in Whitby employing 1,500 men, women and children. At the peak of its popularity, many shop windows in the town were filled with splendid black ornaments. Extremely fine work on jet was achieved; cameos and flowers could be carved delicately and in great detail. The annual turnover of the jet industry was about 100,000 pounds, equivalent to about three million pounds in today’s money. This was a huge amount and the jet industry was clearly a major economic force for the small harbour town of Whitby.

But eventually the trade fell into decline. This was due to the importation of cheaper jet and changes in fashion. Competition from bead glass and cheaper plastic substitutes which were more easily mass produced, also contributed to the decline and jet working had virtually died out by 1900. The regrettable decline of the industry meant that talented men with the ability to produce fine jet jewellery were no longer needed and by 1921 there were only 40 men still producing jet jewellery, this dropped to 5 in 1936 and by 1945 there were only 3 left. With the death of the last Victorian jet worker in 1958 the skills of this great era were lost but their memory remains in the examples of their work that serve as a reminder of jet’s illustrious past.

Over 500 fascinating examples of jet ornaments and jewellery made in the 19th century along with jet makers’ tools and a 110 year old mechanical model of a jet workshop can be seen in the Whitby Museum, Pannett Park Whitby. In fact the jet workshop working model is one of the most interesting items in the museum. It was made by George Wood, a jet worker, in 1889 and the model stood for many years in the doorway of Elisha Walker’s jet shop in Church Street Whitby. The heads of the 6 jet workers were carved from the bowls of clay pipes and were caricatures of George Wood’s fellow jet workers. It is driven by clockwork and by placing a penny in the slot visitors could watch the men treadle their machines such as polishers, turners, finishers, grinders, working the jet, whilst the foreman’s head turns periodically to see that everyone is working hard! These days it is rarely run but is popular with both schoolchildren and adults.
Making Jet Jewellery in the 19th Century

Before the lathe was used, jet was carved into jewellery using files and homemade carving implements. When by 1800 the lathe had been introduced the jet industry started to take off and jet was made into earrings, finger rings, brooches, lockets, pendants, rosaries, cameos and ornaments for the hair. In fact turning jet on a lathe was a new idea at the time and was so successful that the first Jet workshop was set up at John Carter’s house in Hagersgate in 1808 and soon there were a dozen shops engaged in the manufacture of beads.

An original workshop was discovered by accident when a local builder purchased a property in the centre of Whitby. During the course of renovation work, he knocked down a wall and found a workshop that had been completely sealed up in the building. It has been carefully removed and set up at The Whitby Jet Heritage Centre located at the end of Church Street at the foot of the 199 Steps. The centre is proud to display the last remaining example of an authentic Victorian jet workshop which now forms part of Whitby’s cultural heritage.

This particular workshop was first registered in 1867 and provides some insight into making jet into jewellery pieces. First the raw jet was examined for flaws; it was then cut into manageable pieces and sent to the grindstone. The grindstone was in fact the most dangerous wheel in the workshop and was operated from a single foot pedal. Surrounding the wheel was a strong hide belt, which in turn drove the grindstone. Jet was placed against the wheel and a soft lead held an abrasive paste so that the jet could be cut and carved to create a jewellery piece.

The next procedure was to clean the jet jewellery using what is called a ‘Pig bristle’ which was a brush on a revolving wheel composed of coarse bristles. The final stage was to polish the pieces using polishing abrasives which brought a deep velvety shine to the jewellery.

Left: The milling wheel which was operated at high speed (Whitby Jet Heritage Centre)

Below: The sign above the entrance to the Whitby Jet Heritage Centre
Back In Fashion Again

In recent years there has been a revival in jet as a fashion accessory thanks to celebrities and royalty wearing jet jewellery. Only the hardest and finest quality of Whitby jet is used to make modern jewellery which is mounted in gold and silver. The small jet industry now uses modern high precision equipment to create jewellery, ornaments and souvenirs. In Whitby both antique and new jet jewellery can be found on sale.

Antique jet can be bought for as little as £140 for a brooch but serious collectors can pay as much as £1,350 for a jet necklace in excellent condition. Modern jet set in gold or silver starts at £45 for earrings and the price rises to about £300 for a necklace, also set in gold or silver.
The First Lighthouse at Flamborough Head

Flamborough Head is a long promontory on the east Yorkshire coast and is a chalk headland, Bridlington. The name in the Domesday Book, meaning an arrow or a headland resembles.

Flamborough headland has always been a dangerous place for shipping. There are many chalk reefs and outcrops obscured by the crashing waves. The area is also notorious for the strong tidal currents that are funnelled to be wrecked off the headland.

The earliest recorded vessel was in 1348 when La Katherine, a sailing boat, stranded on the rocks during a raging storm. Between 1770 and 1806 one hundred and seventy five ships were wrecked off the headland, this is one every twelve weeks. A lighthouse at Flamborough was designed and built.

But there was a lighthouse present one was built. It is set further back from the coast and was a Beacon octagonal chalk tower, surviving lighthouse in by Sir John Clayton, who three light towers around. Dues were to be around the headland. bankrupt before he tower was designed for lit on its top but recent doubt on whether a This may be because ships were inadequate Sir John Clayton was has been put to other uses, notably a marine telegraph station in the 19th century. Today it stands silent a gleaming monument on a golf course.

The lighthouse is non-operational and is not open to the public. It can be viewed very easily from the road. You can park Flamborough Head, and walk back the octagonal Beacon tower. The tall four storey 79 feet high is in fact the oldest surviving lighthouse in England. It was built in 1674 by Sir John Clayton, who was given permission to build three light towers around the country by King Charles II. Dues were to be collected from ships sailing around the headland. However, Clayton went bankrupt before he could build the other two. The tower was designed for a coal or brushwood fire to be lit on its top but recent restoration work has cast doubt on whether a fire was ever actually lighted. Voluntary dues from passing ships were inadequate and so the light was never lit.

Sir John Clayton was knighted in 1644. The tower has been put to other uses, notably a marine telegraph station in the 19th century. Today it stands silent a gleaming monument on a golf course.
Scarborough Spa and the First British Seaside Resort

How it all began over 300 years ago

Staff Reporter

Above: The Scarborough Spa Complex showing the steps leading down to the well

It happened by chance in about 1626 when Mrs. Farrer discovered natural springs bubbling out beneath the cliff to the south of the town. She also saw that the waters stained the rocks a reddish-brown colour and that it tasted slightly bitter but the spring water was later found to cure minor ailments. Mrs. Farrer was the wife of one of Scarborough’s leading citizens, John Farrer who was several times Bailiff of Scarborough. So when she told her neighbours and friends about the beneficial effects of these waters they too drank the waters which became the accepted medicine for Scarborough’s townspeople.

The mineral waters were analysed by the medical profession and were found to contain a high level of magnesium sulphate, its healing properties were just as effective as Andrews Liver Salts are today. Dr Robert Wittie of Hull was the main medical supporter promoting the mineral waters and in 1660 he published his book “Scarborough Spa”, in which he proclaimed the waters as a cure for all ills. He recommended that the waters were best drunk in the summer season, mid-May to mid-September. He also began promoting the health benefits of sea bathing. By the middle of the 1660s with all this publicity the wells were famous and Scarborough developed not only as a fashionable spa town but as the original English seaside resort. “Taking the Water” quickly became Scarborough’s accepted medicine attracting a flood of visitors to the town.

The first Spa House with two conveniences was built on or near this site in about 1700. The Spa House was a basic wooden structure designed for the sale and dispensing of the waters and to provide basic amenities to visitors eager to try out the waters for their aches and pains. The water was also bottled and sold further afield. Dickie Dickinson was appointed the first Governor of the Spa and was responsible for keeping order and collecting money from its visitors.

Right: Dickie Dickinson the first Governor of the Spa
All went well until a massive landslide buried the Spa House, conveniences and the springs in 1737. Fortunately the springs were quickly located and new and better buildings were constructed. Then in 1739 a sizeable building or saloon was built which had fine views over the sea and the wells were reached by a long flight of stairs.

Right: The Spa, a plate from The Poetical Sketches of Scarborough 1813

Scarborough was now well established as a seaside resort as well as a Spa town providing every fashionable amenity. There was a Long Room in St Nicholas Street that provided nightly dancing, music, gaming tables and billiards. In the afternoon plays were acted under the management of Mr. Kerregan in 1733 and from 1776 evening performances were given in the Theatre.

There were coffee shops and bookshops with circulating libraries and the added attractions of horse racing on the beach, boating and sea-bathing. In fact Scarborough was one of the first places, if not the first, to use bathing machines. There was also a whole range of accommodation to suit every pocket, board and lodgings, rooms at inns and hostelries, renting a Georgian house and later top quality hotels.

During its Victorian heyday the Spa was considered the most popular music hall venue outside London. The first orchestra appeared in the 1830s. But once again in the 1800s a series of mishaps and disasters happened to the Spa but each time new stylish buildings and facilities were built, showing its importance and popularity. The Saloon was damaged by heavy seas in 1808, but the worst storm, according to some, of the century, devastated the building and it had to be completely rebuild in 1836.

Left: The Cliff Bridge across the valley

Before this disaster, such was the Spa’s popularity that in 1827 the iron Cliff Bridge was erected across the valley, giving easier access from the cliff and the town, where elegant hotels and Georgian lodging houses were being more and more heavily used by visitors.

The new “Gothic Saloon” designed by Henry Wyatt was opened in 1839 and included a concert hall to seat 500, a garden, promenade and an external area in which orchestras were to perform.

But by the time it opened, the Gothic Saloon, an impressive turreted building, was already too small. So Sir Joseph Paxton, the landscape gardener and architect responsible for the grounds of Chatsworth, Derbyshire and the Crystal Palace, London was called in to redesign the complex and in 1858 his Spa was officially opened.

Right: The Gothic Saloon
Above: The Grand Hotel and the Cliff Bridge. The Cliff Tram in the centre of the photo is now closed and it is expected to be demolished

When the York and North Midland Railway came to Scarborough in 1845 it was much easier for visitors to reach the town, which led to a more large-scale investment in tourism. In 1867 the Grand Hotel was completed, which was one of the largest hotels in the world and one of the first purpose-built hotels in Europe. A blue plaque outside marks where the novelist, Anne Brontë died in 1849. Another first for Scarborough was the cliff tram built in 1875 to link the South Cliff Esplanade to the Scarborough Spa. In 2006 Scarborough Borough Council closed the St Nicholas Lift near the Grand Hotel because it was operating at a loss and it is expected to be demolished.

Only eighteen years after the official opening of the Scarborough Spa on 8 September 1876 this beautiful building was destroyed by fire and once again no time was lost in yet again rebuilding the Spa. By June 1879 the new Grand Hall was opened to the public, with the formal opening ceremony taking place on 2 August 1880. So began a great era of music and entertainment with the leading musicians, conductors and performers of their day all performing at Scarborough Spa.

Additions and alterations have been made over the years and a major restoration programme was carried out in the early 1980s to reinstate some of the original features and decorative styles. Today the Scarborough Spa complex is a Grade II listed building which includes the Spa Theatre, the Grand Hall for concerts, the Ocean Room, the Promenade Lounge, Sun court for open air concerts, and various other rooms, café and bar areas. It is also home to the Scarborough Spa Orchestra, the last remaining seaside orchestra in Britain. The orchestra gives 10 concerts every week during the summer months, playing music from an extensive repertoire of classical and light music.
Although taking the waters tended to decline in popularity during the 19th century, the Spa’s reputation as a fashionable place of entertainment and relaxation grew in popularity. Also the chemical composition of the water altered considerably over the years and so the practice of “Taking the Water” came to an end in the late 1960s.

Today the only visible evidence of the Spa water that made Scarborough the first seaside resort in Britain is a well set in the wall on the steps leading down to the beach on the north side of the Spa Complex. The strong mineral content of the water is the cause for staining the wall’s stones a reddish-brown colour, which was the reason why the waters were originally discovered as they trickled over the rocks and stones somewhere near this site in about 1626. Anyone wishing to sample the water today can do so though it does not look very appetizing and actually tastes rather bitter. There is a sign above the well which reads “Not Drinking Water”.

Without Mrs. Farrer’s discovery Scarborough would not have developed into the first and most famous English seaside resort. Maybe one day the Spa will open again when the water is safe to drink and the well given a new look.

Left: In the late 1700s, wealthy visitors whiled away the afternoon at the theatre on Tanner Street, now St Thomas Street, where many famous actors performed. In 1825 a seat in the boxes cost three shillings, in the pit two shillings and in the gallery one shilling. The theatre was demolished in 1929.
Mother Shipton and the Petrifying Well - Knaresborough

England’s Oldest Tourist Attraction

By Jeremy Clark

Knaresborough has been described as one of Yorkshire’s most picturesque towns situated beside the River Nidd. It has many attractions for visitors including the Castle with good views over the town and river, the Petrifying Well, Mother Shipton’s Cave, boating on the river Nidd and the oldest chemist’s shop in England established in 1720. There has been a market in the town since 1206 under a charter granted by Edward II in 1310, making Wednesday the official market day. The most famous tourist attractions are Mother Shipton’s cave and the Petrifying Well which are set in a picturesque location at the bottom of the Nidd Gorge, on the opposite side of the river from Knaresborough Castle. It was once the heart of the Ancient Forest of Knaresborough, and the Petrifying Well or Dropping Well was first put on view to the public in 1630. This is England’s oldest tourist attraction. Nowadays the Petrifying Well and Mother Shipton’s cave are very much commercialised.

Right: Boating on the River Nidd

Mother Shipton

It is said that Mother Shipton is England’s most famous prophetess that she lived some 500 years ago during the reigns of King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I and that her prophetic visions became known and feared throughout England.
For a century and a half everything known about Mother Shipton seems to have been passed on by word of mouth and the stories were sometimes embroidered. As a result, there are many versions of how Mother Shipton, Ursula Southeil, her unmarried name, was born and spent her childhood. It is generally accepted that she was born one night in the summer of 1488, to the young Agatha Southeil who was 15 years old, in a shallow cave beside the River Nidd, on the other side of the river from Knaresborough castle.

According to some of the accounts, her birth was accompanied by strange and terrible noises. The woman who acted as midwife is said to have reported a smell of sulphur and a great crack of thunder at the moment Ursula appeared into the world, but most suggest that the birth was unattended. Some say that the devil himself had been the child’s father; this story grew up as news of Ursula’s abilities spread. The truth of the child’s paternity has a far more mundane and earthly explanation.

Agatha was generally recorded as an orphan of “slothful and idle” tendencies, who had been subject to the scorn and derision of local women for her loose morals, and there is some evidence that while she was pregnant, she may have been tried as a common prostitute.

Some versions of the story say that Agatha gave up Ursula at the age of two and supposedly went to live in a convent in Nottingham. But most versions say that Agatha died in childbirth, her body being found the next day beside the newborn Ursula, a child described as grotesquely deformed. Her head was too large and her limbs were twisted and ill-formed. This did not stop a kindly townswoman taking in Ursula. Most of the earliest tales of Ursula’s childhood tell of the mischief she wrought on her foster mother, and strange events are said to have plagued the cottage as she grew up such as furniture moving up and down stairs of its own accord.

The great ugliness of Ursula and her bad temper, both of which are said to have become worse as she grew did not put off a carpenter by the name of Toby Shipton courting her. When Ursula was 24 they married in 1512 but they had no children. A tale developed after their marriage that Ursula a sadly deformed creature had used a love-potion to bewitch her hapless suitor and in addition to her powers of prophecy, Ursula Southeil, now the respectably married “Mother” Shipton, was clearly also a witch.
As a young woman, Ursula had already begun to gain something of a reputation as a soothsayer. This reputation extended beyond her local area and people travelled to Knaresborough from some distance around to consult her.

In those days people were simpler and more easily influenced and prepared to believe a supernatural explanation. Ursula seems to have been particularly successful in solving personal disputes that must have been commonplace and few appeals for help from wronged townsfolk went unresolved. This pattern seems to have been established very early in her married life and continued until her death.

Thieves would publicly return stolen goods, apologising to the astonished owners for their sin; wandering husbands would beg forgiveness and mend their ways; corrupt officials would make spontaneous acts of restitution.

It is easy to see how she might have used an insider’s knowledge of her neighbours and perhaps use threats to bring about these results and also even to “predict” the future within the confines of her own small community. Her habit of making her prophesies in riddles and poems, does rather leave some of them open to a fair degree of “interpretation” after the fact.

She is said to have foretold much of the future history of England, for instance, she predicted that Cardinal Wolsey would see York, but never go to it. Sure enough, in 1530 Cardinal Wolsey was travelling to York. He climbed to the top of a tower and saw the town in the distance, but just then received a message from King Henry VIII asking him to return to London. He died on the way back to London, thus fulfilling Mother Shipton’s prophecy. The medieval tower Wolsey is said to have climbed can still be seen today. It is the tall 15th century gatehouse all that remains of the former palace of the Archbishops of York at Cawood.

Other predictions include Drake’s defeat of the Spanish Armada, the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the succession of James VI of Scotland and union between the England and Scotland. In 1665 the Great Plague ravaged London and a year later the Great Fire of London started in Pudding Lane. The famous Samuel Pepys recorded in his Diary: “See - Mother Shipton’s word is out”. Ursula, it seems, had seen this too.

Her most famous prophecy of all was this: *The world to an end shall come, In eighteen hundred and eighty one.* In this she was shown to be wrong. She later made other prophecies, the most famous of which described future technology:

> Carriages without horses shall go,  
> And accidents fill the world with woe.  
> Around the world thoughts shall fly  
> In the twinkling of an eye....  
> Under water men shall walk,  
> Shall ride, shall sleep and talk;  
> In the air men shall be seen,  
> In white, in black and in green....  
> Iron in the water shall float,  
> As easy as a wooden boat.
It is now widely accepted that many of these apparently prophetic writings including the end of the world were the work of a man by the name of Charles Hindley in 1862, which does somewhat change their apparently visionary nature. Ursula Shipton died at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth I’s long reign in 1561. It is said that she predicted her own death to the very day and hour. In her own way Ursula Shipton had been a part of the turbulent age which had seen so much great change in England.

Mother Shipton was said to have been buried in un-consecrated ground somewhere in the outskirts of York. A stone monument was supposed have been erected on the site, bearing the inscription “Here ly’s she who never ly’d, Whose skill often has been try’d, Her prophecies shall still survive, And ever keep her name alive”. Some time later, according to local folk lore, the stone was removed to a museum in York, from whence it subsequently disappeared. Its whereabouts today is unknown.

The first written record of her life was in a pamphlet written in 1641 eighty years after her death, which associated her with York, or possibly Yorkshire. A woodcut illustrating the cover of this pamphlet shows Mother Shipton’s supposed likeness as an unattractive Tudor woman, not yet with traditional witch-like features. But witchcraft is mentioned in the pamphlet. This drawing has none of the jutting chin, hooked nose, hump or tall black hat evident in later versions. Since this pamphlet was published there have been more than 50 different editions of books about her and her prophecies. The most important edition of her work appeared in 1686, edited by Richard Head, this edition included the earliest biographical information about her. Head later admitted to having invented almost all Shipton’s biographical details, and in 1862, a second edition edited by Charles Hindley was published. Mother Shipton’s prophecies are probably hoaxes, because it now appears that almost all of them were written by others after the events they described had already happened. For instance, the first record of her prophecy about Cardinal Wolsey dates from 1641, long after the man had died.

Her prophecies about future technology, and about the world coming to an end in 1881, first appeared in print in the 1862 edition of her sayings, and Charles Hindley, the editor of that edition, later admitted that he had composed them.

The existence of Mother Shipton herself is uncertain. Her 1684 biographer, Richard Head, apparently invented most of the details of her life. In fact, she may never have existed outside of Yorkshire legend.
Beside Mother Shipton’s cave is the Petrifying Well formerly known as the Dropping Well, it is not a well in the sense of a hole in the ground, but cascading water down the face of a rock which is called a Well. It is believed to be the only one of its kind in England and the oldest visitor’s attraction. By 1630 the Well was so well known and visiting it was so popular that the owner Sir Charles Slingsby placed it on exhibition and charged for guided tours around it. He had no idea he was creating England’s oldest visitor attraction.

At the time Mother Shipton was born, Knaresborough townsfolk believed the Well to be magic and never ventured near it; they had seen small twigs and leaves turned to stone in the Well’s falling waters. They were very superstitious in those days and believed that if they touched the waters they too would be turned to stone!

But now scientific analysis has revealed exactly what lies behind the “magical” petrification process. The water springs from an underground lake and seeps up through the earth’s crust via a layer of porous rock called an “aquifer”. The water’s extremely high mineral content means that everything in its path is turned into stone. The minerals that are most abundantly present are calcium, sodium and magnesium with traces of lead, zinc, iron, manganese and aluminium. These exist in the form of sulphates and carbonates with some chlorides and a little silica.

The proportions have remained more or less the same for centuries. The waters leave behind mineral deposits that build up to form a crust of new rock. As the waters flow down the front of the Well they leave a small deposit on its face, slowly building up over the years.

Twice in its recorded history this build up has led to the collapse of the Well itself, in 1816 and again in 1821 when large pieces became top heavy they snapped off. Some large pieces can still be seen in the river. There is no danger of this happening today because the Well’s face is scrubbed and scraped with wire brushes every 8 weeks. It is a painstaking job but stops the Well’s face becoming too top heavy.

The Well is made of two types of rock; Tufa, a soft porous, coral like rock. This is the fastest forming deposit of the Petrifying Well; it grows where a constant flow of air causes rapid evaporation and crystallization. Travertine is a harder more compact rock formed where the water flows constantly so that smaller crystals are formed more slowly. At different times of the year the mineral content of the water varies slightly this makes the colours dark and light which causes a banding effect on the face of the Well.
The spring has never been known to dry up, a measured 700 gallons or 3,200 litres of water flow over the Well every hour, summer, winter, rain or drought.

There are two large bumps that stick out from the rock face of the Petrifying Well. These are a gentleman’s top hat and a lady’s bonnet, placed there by a young couple on their way to the York Races in 1853. For some unknown reason they never returned to collect them.

When placed there in 1853 the hat and bonnet would have been hanging at the bottom of the face under the waters just as existing items do today. They clearly show the build up and accumulation of rock in 150 years.

Visitors to the Petrifying Well can see many everyday objects and other items dangling from the lip of the Well that have been placed there to be slowly petrified in the cascading waters down the face of the Well. Similar petrified items can be viewed in the small museum. It usually takes between three and five months to turn soft toys into stone, larger non-porous objects can take up to 18 months.

At the back of the Petrifying Well is a wishing-well just up a few steps. It is set in a natural rock formation of a ledge where the waters pool. If you want to make a wish you have to crouch down and place your right hand in the water.

It seems the petrifaction process may no longer be a mystery but it’s still “magic”.

The First Lighthouse at Flamborough Head

The chalk Beacon light tower at Flamborough Head.

It was built in 1674 by Sir John Clayton and is the oldest surviving lighthouse in England.