The Yorkshire Journal

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Scarborough South Bay, the Spa lies at the south end of the beach and the Grand Hotel can be seen on the right, the harbour is in the foreground.
Welcome to the second issue of The Yorkshire Journal, Summer 2010. We have had a very good response to our first issue, with many encouraging e-mails throughout Britain and overseas. Summer is the time when people go on holiday or take day trips to the seaside or interesting places. The summer issue includes some places you may like to visit over the summer period as well as other articles.

In the Summer issue:

- **Castle Hill: The Most Conspicuous Landmark In Huddersfield With Over 4,000 Years Of History**
  Jeremy Clark investigates Castle Hill, Huddersfield and finds out why it is one of Yorkshire’s most important archaeological sites, with its imposing Victoria Tower. Also find out why you can no longer have a drink at the Castle Hill Pub that was.

- **Otley – Where The World Famous Furniture Maker Thomas Chippendale Was Born**

- **The Yorkshire Men Of Straw**
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- **Those Naughty Saucy Seaside Postcards - Whatever Happened To Them?**
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- **The Mysterious Crop Circles Phenomenon, Appear At Last In Yorkshire**
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- **The Pickering World Famous 15th Century Wall Paintings And Their Interpretation**
  Julian Giles visits Pickering’s parish church, St Peter and St Paul and examines the world famous 15th century wall paintings that cover both the north and south nave walls. This is a very interesting article which illustrates the story and the interpretation of these medieval wall paintings, considering that they have survived the Puritan Reformation and Reverend Ponsoby, who had them covered over again.

But there is much more to these articles, please read and enjoy them.

We welcome your comments.
CASTLE HILL: THE MOST CONSPICUOUS LANDMARK IN HUDGERSFIELD WITH OVER 4,000 YEARS OF HISTORY

By Jeremy Clark

Castle Hill, near Almondbury is a striking natural landmark nearly 1,000 feet (305m) high, covering some eight acres (3.2 ha) and surrounded by very steep slopes. Today it is best known for the Victoria Tower that stands on its top and dominates Huddersfield’s skyline. It is a beauty spot, popular with families and attracts ramblers and picnickers.

The Castle

Castle Hill is also Huddersfield’s most important archaeological site and has been occupied on and off for over 4,000 years. After reaching the summit and taking in the spectacular panoramic views of the surrounding area, visitors can wander round a series of grass covered earthen banks and ditches that circle the edge of the hill top. These belong to a motte and bailey castle constructed in the twelfth century. This type of castle was built by the Normans to ensure their security and to impose control over the area. They were fortified with a wooden stockade at strategic points dominating the surrounding countryside.

The motte was simply a huge, flat topped mound of earth with a timber or stone tower or keep built on top, protected by a wooden or stone palisade. This is where the Victoria tower now stands. At one side of this was the bailey, an irregularly shaped enclosure. Castle Hill had two baileys a middle and an outer one. The middle bailey housed the lord’s hall, kitchen, stables and garrison. The lower bailey may have been to safeguard livestock. A strong timber palisade enclosed the perimeter and a deep ditch encircled the castle.

There is an 85 foot deep medieval well which can also be seen, but a low stone wall has been built around it and is covered over with an iron grating for safety. After its disuse as a water source in the early 1200s, it was used for dumping rubbish. This is where most of the archaeological evidence was found for the occupation of the Castle, which includes pottery, iron work and two wooden buckets. The wooden parts were preserved by the damp conditions.

Right: One of the buckets from the well, dated to about 1200. The metal hoops and rope handle have been reconstructed. The bucket is on display at the Tolson Museum, Huddersfield
The castle was held by the De Lacey family and probably fell out of use at the end of the 13th century; it then became a hunting lodge used sporadically by people from the estate. After the De Lacey family fell out of favour it was passed first to the Crown and then to the Ramsden family, who in 1920 sold it along with their estate to the Huddersfield Council.

Right: An artist’s impression of the Castle in about 1200. Below: plan of the Castle in about 1200

The Iron Age Hill-Fort

Underneath the medieval earthworks and unseen by visitors is a series of earlier defences of an early Iron Age hill fort similar to Maiden Castle in Dorset but smaller, which is regarded by archaeologists as one of Yorkshire’s most important Iron Age sites.

Castle Hill had clearly been chosen for settlement since Neolithic times because of its natural promontory position. The first fortification was a small one at the western end. It consisted of a single rampart of stone and timber, topped with a palisade of sharpened stakes. The one entrance was marked by a small guardroom with a hearth for the sentries.

The settlement was later enlarged to cover the entire hill top. A foot path ran all the way through the interior with a number of circular houses, which had thatched roofs and wattle and daub walls built on both sides, which represented a small village. More banks and ditches were added to give multiple lines of defence. The stone rampart at the top of the hill was strengthened by increasing its size, and it was raised and widened. On top of it, there may have been a walkway behind a stone wall and behind this in some areas a wooden lean-to shelter was erected. A new entrance was constructed at the eastern end, which would have had a wooden gate with a bridge over it to allow a sentry to pass from one half of the defence to the other. A rectangular enclosure containing a small two roomed house was also added at this end, which probably protected cattle or sheep driven there in times of danger or bad weather.

The gate was approached by a hollow way leading to the bottom of the hill. If an assault was made on it, the attackers would find themselves in a narrow space and in cross-fire from defenders manning the ramparts on either side. Finally, an outer bank and ditch ran round the base of the hill with an entrance in the south west corner.

The construction of this great fortress would have required a large labour force, which suggests that the countryside supported an extensive and well-organised society. The final building work dates to the fifth century BC but it was not to last very long. In 430 BC, less than half a century later, this magnificent stronghold was burned to the ground. A great raging fire spread through the timbers, turning them into charcoal. The blaze must have been visible for miles around and was so intense that it destroyed substantial parts of the ramparts. The fort was then allowed to tumble down, fell into ruin and was abandoned.

Left: An artist’s impression of life at Castle Hill during the Iron Age. In the background are reconstructions of round houses, one in the making. To the right men attend sheep and in the foreground a woman is cleaning the skin of an animal by scraping it. The man carrying long sticks may be helping to make the round house.
The date of 430BC was arrived at by analysing the burnt clay from the ramparts, which means that the site was destroyed and abandoned long before the Romans came to this country.

Archaeological evidence has shown that the ramparts were not fired from outside, the source of the fire lay inside them. The fire is likely to have been the result of spontaneous combustion of the timbers but the burning down of the fort could have been either accidental or deliberate. If it was an accident, the Iron Age people decided not to rebuild it and moved on. Alternatively they may have abandoned Castle Hill in favour of an undefended lowland settlement, setting it alight before or after they left it, so that no other tribe could occupy it.

The site was not occupied again for 1,700 years until the building of the motte and bailey castle in the twelfth century. The medieval work removed the outer bank and destroyed most traces of the interior Iron Age occupation.

At one time, Castle Hill was the stronghold of a powerful Celtic chief who ruled over the local population and a large area of territory. It would have been full of noise and bustle and vigorous life. During the excavations storage pits for grain and rubbish pits were discovered in the small village. A variety of Iron Age pottery was also found in the shelters behind the inner rampart. Some of this pottery represented jars which could have come to the fort by trade or barter. What the inhabitants of Castle Hill had to offer may have been animal skins, as post holes were excavated, which may have been for drying frames. The Iron Age hill fort was a self supporting farming community, where the farmers who tilled the fields below and kept cattle and sheep only wanted to live in peace. The tranquillity and commanding views which please the visitor today originally gave the lookouts an early view of approaching enemies.

Castle Hill is a Scheduled Monument open all year, admission is free and it is located about two miles southeast of Huddersfield. The finds from the excavations of Castle Hill directed by the late Dr. W. J. Varley from the late 1930s to the early 1970s which include a model of the Iron Age hill-fort are on display at the Tolson Museum, Huddersfield. Admission is free and it is open all year from 11.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday, 12.00 pm to 5.00 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.
The Victoria Tower

Today the only building on Castle Hill is the imposing Victoria Tower overlooking Huddersfield that gives Castle Hill such a distinctive shape. It was built just before 1900 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. The corner-stone of the tower was laid on 25 June 1898 by Mr John Frechville Ramsden and despite some difficulty raising the £3398 required the tower was officially opened by the Earl of Scarborough on 24 June 1899. It is often referred to as the Jubilee Tower but the name is the Victoria Tower.

The tower was designed by Isaac Jones of London and built by the firm of Ben Graham and Sons of Folly Hall using stone from Crosland Hill. The walls of the tower are four feet thick at the bottom tapering to two feet at the top; it was renovated in 1960 when the top seven feet were removed. The tower stands 106 feet 32.3m high, added to the height of Castle Hill makes the top 1,000 feet, 305m high above sea level and can be seen from miles around.

There are 165 steps in the tower to climb to the top but the panoramic views are well worth the climb. There is a difference between the surrounding landscape of Maiden Castle which is of rich farm land compared with a post-industrial landscape that now surrounds Castle Hill, from which lots of mills can be seen, as well as the Galpharm Stadium and Emley Moor in the other direction. In an earlier period the landscape would have been a lot different, open fields and woods but even so the views are still spectacular. Inside the tower is an exhibition of the 4,000 year history of Castle Hill.
The Pub That Was

For those who remember the pub, well it is no longer there thanks to the two unscrupulous landlord brothers, it has been demolished. The original pub was built in 1810 adjacent to where the Victoria Tower stands and later it was rebuilt in the style of a shooting lodge. The two brothers Mick and Barry Thandi were given planning permission to renovate it providing some of the original walls were retained, the original dimensions were kept and with no increase of the cellars and overall size of the building. Not content with these conditions the brothers totally demolished the pub, increased the size of the cellars, the height of the roofline and the plan dimensions of the original building. It came as no surprise when local concerned residents objected but the two brothers were not in the least worried until the local council halted the building work. After a three year court case the pub was demolished the cellars filled in and the area covered, which is now a car park. So next time you visit Castle Hill you know why you cannot have a drink at the pub that was.

Improvement Plans for Castle Hill

Plans are now underway to improve Castle Hill which includes renewal of paths, repairs to erosion, viewing platforms and seating. The work will create a level path around the perimeter of the site to improve access to Castle Hill for disabled people and families with pushchairs and people with mobility problems. The centrepiece of the plans is for the installation of a bridge leading up to the Victoria Tower.

What is also needed is a visitor's centre with some amenities for the public and display boards that explain the history of Castle Hill with drawings and diagrams that show how it once looked at each period and why it is an important Historic site in Yorkshire.
Above: Victoria Tower

Artist's impression showing proposed bridge leading up to the Victoria Tower
OTLEY – where the world famous furniture maker Thomas Chippendale was born

By Sarah Harrison

Otley is an historical West Yorkshire picturesque market town, which lies in Mid-Wharfedale. The meaning of Otley is ‘Woodland clearing of a man named Otta’ and it is set on the banks of the River Wharfe that divides the town in two and is surrounded mostly by arable farmland. It is also at the centre of the rural triangle between Leeds, Harrogate and Bradford. The Wharfe Meadows Park on the north bank is a lovely spot to sit and admire the views of the town. Immediately to the south of the town rises the large grit stone escarpment, which overlooks Otley, called The Chevin and which gives magnificent views over Mid-Wharfedale.

In the past The Chevin provided much of the stone from which the town centre was built. It is also said that the foundation stones of the Houses of Parliament in London were quarried from the Otley Chevin.

Brief History of the Town

Otley dates from before the Romans and belonged to the Archbishop of York. The town also formed an important crossing point of the River Wharfe and was an administrative centre in the early medieval period. A regular market has been held at Otley for more than a thousand years it was granted in 1222 by King Henry III.
Nothing remains of the first church built in Otley in the early 7th century but in All Saints Parish Church on Kirkgate, there are the remains of several examples of Early Anglo-Saxon crosses. The chancel dates from the Norman period and the tomb in the south transept is that of the first Lord and Lady Fairfax of Denton Hall, grandparents of Thomas, Lord Fairfax who was the Parliamentary General during the English Civil War. He was commander at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644. Cromwell’s men are thought to have been drinking at The Black Bull pub prior to the Battle of Marston Moor, although legend has it that the Royalist cavalry was close by, having picketed their horses on the slopes of The Chevin.

In the graveyard there is a uniquely castellated memorial dedicated to the men who lost their lives during construction of the Bramhope railway tunnel between 1845 and 1849. The memorial is a replica of the tunnel’s north entrance, and a sign on the fence lists the names of those killed.

Otley also has a museum in Wellcroft House, Otley Cycle Club. The museum’s artefacts which are currently in store include the Eric Cowling Collection of prehistoric flints and stone tools, an archaeological collection from the excavation of the medieval Palace of the Archbishop of York at Otley, and an Otley Printers’ Collection including machinery. However, documentary and photographic archives are available for research on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday at 9.45am to 12.15pm.

Otley’s Fame and People

Otley has several claims to fame. The Artist J.M.W. Turner spent time in and around Otley in 1797, when commissioned to paint water colours of the area. The stormy backdrop of his picture “Hannibal Crossing the Alps” is reputed to have been inspired by a storm over Otley’s Chevin. Methodist preacher John Wesley was also a frequent visitor. More recently, Otley features as the town of “Hotton” in the ITV television soap opera Emmerdale.
But the most important claim to fame is Thomas Chippendale the famous furniture maker who was born in Otley. His life size statue stands in the town next to the old Prince Henry’s Grammar School in Manor Square that he once attended. The current Prince Henry’s Grammar School is now in Farnley Lane.

Thomas Chippendale

Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779) was born nearby Otley in 1718; he was the only child of John Chippendale joiner, and his first wife Mary. The exact date of his birth is a mystery, but we do know that he was baptised on June 5 1718. There are no records of Chippendale’s early life and training. Chippendale’s father re-married and had seven more children. Many of Thomas Chippendale’s relatives followed in the woodworking trade. So the young Thomas Chippendale probably served a practical family apprenticeship from his father and received an elementary education at Otley Grammar School, which was founded under Royal Charter from King James I in 1607 and named after his son Henry. There is a statue and memorial plaque dedicated to Chippendale outside the old school which is in Manor Square. As a young man Chippendale was almost certainly employed and had further training by Richard Wood, the leading furniture maker in York.

One of his apprentices, William Benson, reappears as foreman in Chippendale’s London workshop, and in 1771, while working at Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire, Chippendale asked his former master to supply six locks and to silver a looking glass. There is a tradition that as a young apprentice he made the dollhouse at Nostell Priory and also worked at Farnley Hall near Otley.

He moved to London and married Susan Redshaw in 1748 and had nine children. His eldest son, also named Thomas, was born in 1749.
Chippendale probably worked as a journeyman cabinet maker and freelance designer before embarking on his great project, the publication of his lavish book “The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker’s Director”. This appeared in 1754 and illustrated 161 engraved plates of ‘Elegant and Useful Designs of Household Furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and Modern Taste’. It was almost immediately sold out and was reprinted in a second edition the following year. A third edition, with many new plates, appeared in 1762.

The result of Chippendale’s “Director” was that his business immediately became known to a wide circle of potential clients and became a by-word for a distinctive rococo style. In fact his “Director” was used in the same way as a catalogue is today. It allowed the wealthy patrons to pick out particular elements for their furniture and the furniture would then be custom made for them by the Chippendale workshop. In the same year as the “Director” 1754, Chippendale acquired new premises at 60-62 St Martin’s Lane, in the heart of the fashionable shopping area of London where he remained until his death in 1779. He also formed a partnership with James Rannie, a Scottish merchant, who injected capital into the business.

For the next 60 years all his clients’ furniture emerged from this address, continued by his son Chippendale the younger 1749-1822, who inherited the business after his father’s death.

Chippendale senior died in 1779 from consumption, having re-married the previous year and fathering another two children. Chippendale junior continued the business at St Martin’s Lane with Thomas Haig, his father’s accountant and partner who now became a senior partner. After Haig’s death in 1803 his executors were obliged to find large sums to pay legacies out of the capital of the business. Unable to do so, Chippendale was declared bankrupt in 1804, although he continued to trade from the St Martin’s Lane premises until 1813 when he was finally evicted.

Chippendale was able to supply his clients with furnishings of every kind. In effect he was an entrepreneur running a large business employing perhaps as many as 50 in-house craftsmen and any number of out-workers.

He preferred long-running commissions to equip large country or town houses from attic to basement, with grand pieces of furniture. A number of houses bear witness to this practice to this day. In fact Yorkshire contains the biggest concentration of houses with documented furniture made by Thomas Chippendale the elder and younger, perhaps reflecting the family’s origins in the county. These included Harewood House, Nostell Priory, Cannon Hall, Temple Newsam, Burton Constable, Newby Hall, and Aske Hall to name only the most outstanding commissions. Chippendale furniture was supplied to these houses which are open to the public today.

**Chippendales Distinctive Styles**

When we talk about Chippendale furniture today, what we are really talking about is well-constructed, mid-to late-18th century furniture of the Chippendale style. This is not because the furniture was made by Thomas Chippendale or his factory, but because the word Chippendale has become synonymous with a distinguishable style. Surviving furniture actually made by Thomas Chippendale would be rare to the extreme and would require a verifiable location and handwritten documents.
The Chippendale style did not remain within the confines of the Chippendale workshop for very long. So popular were Chippendale designs with the wealthy class of the mid-18th century that soon other furniture makers were using “The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker’s Director” as a design book for their shops too. The designs were not really entirely the creation of Thomas Chippendale, but improved, stylized or modernised versions of popular existing designs. Chippendale created his “Director” as a catalogue from which his wealthy patrons could choose particular elements for their furniture, which would then be custom made for them in his workshop.

The Chippendale style reflected many elements of the Rococo, Chinese, Gothic and, later, the Neoclassical styles. Publication of the “Director” clearly had a stimulating effect on Chippendale’s career since all his known commissions date from after its publication and is probably the major reason why he is one of the world’s best-known furniture makers. Chippendale’s name is particularly identified with the extensive variety of chair types that he developed and his varied output included desks, mirror frames, hanging bookshelves, settees with which he was especially successful, china cabinets, bookcases and tables. Chippendale used solid mahogany wood which was his favourite for most of his furniture, with elaborate hand carving and was always carefully fitted and joined.

Prince Charles saves a unique collection of Chippendale furniture

In 1759 William 5th Earl of Dumfries 1699-1768, commissioned Thomas Chippendale to manufacture a richly-carved rosewood breakfront bookcase which cost him £47 5s in 1759, in today’s money that’s around £30,000. It was carefully placed and remained exactly where it was positioned by the earl, under Chippendale’s watchful supervision, for over 250 years. This spectacular piece of furniture along with a number of other pieces was going to be offered for sale in 2007 and it was estimated to fetch up to £4m well in excess of the world record price for an item of English furniture at auction. Fortunately for our heritage, Prince Charles saved the day and averted the sale of the house and contents by personally rallying the heritage bodies to raise £25m between them. Prince Charles authorised a further payment of £20m from the Prince’s Charities Foundation in order to keep this historical house intact and accessible to the public.
Dumfries House was opened to the public in June 2007 by the Prince Charles, it houses a unique collection of Chippendale furniture. Dumfries House has been described as an 18th century time-capsule since the principal rooms and their contents have remained virtually unchanged for 250 years.

Right: Dumfries House, Cumnock, Ayrshire. Saved for the nation due to the direct intervention of the Prince of Wales

Buying a Chippendale today

Chippendale never employed a maker’s mark, so the only method of establishing his authorship is to find one of his original bills, usually preserved among estate papers, or equivalent documentation. Even when a piece can be attributed with certainty to Chippendale’s workshop, it is impossible to say for certain that he worked on the furniture himself. As the Chippendale firm became successful, his workmen, rather than Chippendale, carried out most of the work.

In 1993 and 1997 armchairs and an Anglesey desk made by Chippendale in 1765, sold at Christie’s for £1.7m each. A Chinese fantasy mahogany cabinet designed to display exotic ceramics made in 1755-1760 went for £2,729,250 at Christie’s in London at the Exceptional Furniture auction in June 2008. This may have set a new sale record for the most expensive piece of British furniture sold to date!

So if you find a genuine 18th century Chippendale style chair in an antique shop, you are going to have to pay thousands if not millions of pounds for it. If your budget is modest but your taste is expensive, you can buy very fine quality modern reproduction Chippendale style chairs for around £130.00 each.
THE YORKSHIRE MEN OF STRAW

An Annual Scarecrow Festival at Muston, Near Filey, North Yorkshire

By Robin Gilbank

How do you get eighteen thousand people to flock into a small village in the space of little over one week? How do you get your community to appear in the national and international press and on TV? A North Yorkshire parish seems to have found the solution with its annual Scarecrow Festival.

A dozen years ago the village of Muston, near Filey, was a quiet rural backwater. It possessed one public house, a parish church, a chapel, and a shop with post office which opened only seasonally. Now for nine days each summer the place is awash with tourists pressing their way down the country lanes, purchasing ice creams and posing for photos by the straw-stuffed mannequins.

I must confess that I find scarecrows a little creepy. This aversion may go back to my childhood when I used to cover my eyes at the sight of Worzel Gummidge twisting his own head off. When a recent episode of Doctor Who featured killer scarecrows that were possessed by aliens I was definitely behind the sofa. This did not prevent me from being curious about how the festival began and how it had become such an out-and-out success.

In the run up to the year 2000 Muston residents mulled over how to mark the Millennium. They agreed that the celebration had to be novel and connect to the country way of life.

Godfrey Allanson, a district councillor for over thirty-five years, believed that the scheme should be something which would also encourage children to join in. Visiting some friends at Sawley, near Ripon, he and his wife were entertained by their festival of straw-men. The idea of replicating this type of event was put to the villagers back home at Muston, where at first it met with a little apprehension.

Godfrey’s wife Maisie recalls “A trial run was suggested for 1999 to let the villagers know what the idea was and the committee expected about a dozen scarecrows - we ended up with about sixty - it was a success”. Now more than one hundred exhibits are put on display each year and virtually every household participates.

The summer scarecrow festival 2009

The Allansons’ own effort for the 2009 festival had a deep personal significance. Forty nine years ago they holidayed at the foot of the “Jungfrau” in the Bernese Alps. The couple recreated a model of the mountain plus resting climber on the grass verge outside their cottage.

Last year, different locals responded to the challenge of the competition in their own ways. Most people seem to opt for subjects that are humorous or topical or both humorous and topical.
Hence one could see a shop window mannequin made over to look like Michael Jackson, performing *Thriller* near the entrance to Muston Hall. The late TV presenter Tony Hart was represented by his Plastiscine sidekick Morph. Figures of Gordon Brown and Hazel Blears skulked about close to the pub presumably meant to be canvassing for support. The Daily Telegraph took great delight in publishing a photograph of the straw-filled premier.

Mary Corner of West End, meanwhile, adorned her front border with a meerkat in a scarlet smoking jacket – a clear allusion to a current TV advertising campaign!

The traffic island on the road up to the coast became the set for an unusual singing contest dubbed “Muston’s Got Talent”. Taking to the stage was a shy, middle-aged lady, who looked strangely familiar.

Modern day events cleverly interwove with local history in this particular exhibit. The name “Muston” is believed to derive from “mouse infested town”, suggesting that mice and not crows were once the most dreaded pest in this parish. Somebody had knitted a box full of little toy rodents, who billed themselves as “Muston Mouse Voice Choir”. They seemed to be the backing singers for Ms. Boyle.

**Ascent of Scarecrows**

My own personal favourite was the handiwork of Mrs. Snell of West End. To commemorate the bicentenary of Charles Darwin’s birth, she constructed her own tableaux illustrating the “ascent of scarecrows”. This witty take on evolution moved not from ape to man, but instead from dried grass to fully-formed straw dummy. It began with a fragile arc of straw which looked like it could be blown away by even the slightest gust of wind. Gradually becoming more upright and humanoid the next figure loped with a monkey-like stoop. Stage three acquired a garb of hessian sacking and the fourth was a dungaree-clad peasant. The end product of the sequence was a foppish aristocrat, with a comb-over made from strands of wool. He sported a crepe poppy in his buttonhole.
The judge - in this instance the editor of the Scarborough Evening News - evidently appreciated the originality of Mrs. Snell’s work as he awarded her second place. The ultimate winner was a papier mâché replica of Sir Alan Sugar, which was to be seen wagging its finger fiercely from behind Mal Magson’s hedge. If the judge was looking for an entry which would frighten away the birds this certainly appeared to be a good choice.

Left: The all out 2009 winner, a papier mâché replica of Sir Alan Sugar

Of course, visitors chewed over whether the top ten for 2009 deserved their reward. Everybody is a judge, it seems, where scarecrows are concerned.

As Councillor Allanson admits, the popularity of the Festival is both a blessing and a challenge. In a village where most adults have full-time jobs finding enough hands to perform essential duties such as manning the makeshift car park needs careful planning. Preparations for the next festival now have to begin almost as soon as this year’s straw dummies have been packed away. A special committee now oversees the event and liaises with the local authority to ensure smooth-running.

Proceedings are never entirely without glitches. Last year Humpty Dumpty went missing from his wall on the village green, and a stuffed cat mysteriously vanished from Geppetto’s workshop in the Pinocchio installation.

A small price to pay, perhaps, for all those visitors and, I suppose, for ridding the parish of crows forever.

Don’t miss the 2010 scarecrow festival

It’s time once again for the Muston Scarecrow Festival. So if you fancy a change from your everyday festival you can’t go wrong with Muston’s fantastically unusual festivities. It’s free, fun for all the family and you’ll be guaranteed to leave with a smile on your face.

### Details for event

Entry: Free
Open: The festival is open daily from 9am to 9pm
Dates: 24th July - 1st August
Venue: Muston, Scarborough Road, Filey

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THOSE NAUGHTY SAUCY SEASIDE POSTCARDS

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THEM?

Staff Reporter

The British naughty saucy seaside postcards with cartoons and captions were as much a part of our seaside holiday tradition as striped deckchairs, candyfloss, sticks of rock and fish and chips, so what happened to them? Well just over fifty years ago they ended up in the court-room. The best known saucy seaside postcards were produced by Bamforth’s & Co at Holmfirth in West Yorkshire. They began manufacturing postcards in about 1900 and by the early 1930s the first of the cartoon-style saucy seaside postcards were being produced and became very popular. For many they represent a far simpler age, when children were happy to spend holidays doing little more than making sandcastles on a beach and when Filey was seen as an exotic destination.

The beginning of postcards

The tradition of sending picture postcards first began in 1894 when the Post Office gave permission to manufacture and distribute picture postcards which could be sent through the mail. In the north the earliest postcards were pictures of famous landmarks, scenic views, Blackpool’s Illuminations, Scarborough’s coastline and Whitby harbour. These picture postcards were used to tell friends and family of their time at the seaside and served as a useful souvenir of their holiday. When postcards appeared featuring overweight landladies, busty sunbathers and men of the cloth caught in compromising situations, holiday makers just could not get enough. The cartoon-style saucy postcards took off in the early 1930s and were selling 16 million a year. Even in an age when sex was still very much a taboo they were seen by most as harmless fun.

Above: Old Postcard of Whitby harbour in the 1900s

Bamforth’s was one of the largest publishers of saucy postcards and became synonymous with the saucy seaside postcard tradition. Although, over the years they introduced many different photography-related products, Bamforth is best remembered mainly for its comic postcards. The company was founded by James Bamforth in 1870 in Station Road, Holmfirth and only employed four staff artists. The longest service was put in by Douglas Tempest, he was the first artist who started in 1912. Together with Arnold Taylor, Philip Taylor and Brian Fitzpatrick it was made easier to maintain a distinctive house style with bright colours and exaggerated characters.

They were cheeky, a little naughty but a lot of fun and the artwork is fantastic and there is still a great fascination with the saucy seaside postcards produced by Bamforth’s.
What Made Them Saucy?

Today the cartoon characters and antics of the saucy postcard era would hardly lift an eyebrow. But back in those days of sexual repression it was a very much taboo subject bordering on obscene. To some the saucy postcards were a breath of fresh air but to others they were disgusted and offended by them.

The cheeky and often sexually-implied innuendos and double meanings could be either visual or textual, though usually both picture and text played a part. No section of the community was spared; fat people, thin people, mothers-in-law, hen-pecked husbands, waiters and waitresses, lower class, middle class and upper class, vicars and clergymen, glamorous ladies, doctors and nurses, etc, were all represented in cartoon characters. They were often portrayed in risqué, embarrassing or suggestive situations.

The postcards were produced in bright primary colours, and were typically displayed outside seafront gift shops on a traditional revolving postcard stand. Holiday-makers and day-trippers browsing the saucy postcards would often be seen nudging each other and giggling.

The Down Fall of the Saucy Seaside Postcards

In the early 1950s, the newly elected Conservative government were concerned at the deterioration of public morals. After censoring about 167,000 books they turned their attention to the saucy seaside postcards and decided that they too contributed greatly to the apparent deterioration in public morals and they were cracked down on. Almost every seaside resort in Britain was appointed with a Watch Committee, whose duty it was to decide which saucy postcards were allowed to be displayed and sold to the public. Those they considered unfit were confiscated. Local moral crusaders also joined in.

The renowned artist Donald Fraser Gould McGill (1875-1962) was the main target on their hit list, known as and remains ‘The King of Saucy Postcards’. He produced approximately 12,000 designs between 1904 and 1962, with around 200 million printed and sold. McGill’s popularity was sealed when he became the subject of an essay “The Art of Donald McGill” by George Orwell in 1941 as “the most prolific and by far the best of contemporary postcard artists… the most perfect in the tradition”. Some of McGill’s designs, as well as those of other artists, resulted in police raids which led to the arrest and prosecution of both the publishers and the artist.

“Four nice marrows you have there, Mrs. Ramsbottom!”

One of Donald McGill’s postcards

Donald Fraser Gould McGill (1875-1962)
One of the postcards used by the prosecution was Donald McGill’s ‘Hard Rock’ saucy design. This depicted a fully dressed male cartoon character holding a giant stick of rock on his knees between his legs, pointing up towards the sky, with a few non-revealing bathing suited characters in the background, and the words at the top of the postcard were ‘A Stick of Rock, Cock?’

By today’s standards, with sex used to sell everything from perfume to Pot Noodles, it is difficult to raise even an eyebrow at McGill’s designs.

On 15 July 1954 Donald McGill at the age of 80 was brought before the Lincoln Quarter Sessions to face charges under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. McGill’s defence lawyers, after seeing the jury, advised him to plead guilty on four of the cards to avoid being imprisoned. Reluctantly he did so and was fined £50 and ordered to pay £25 court costs.

The outcome of this trial had a devastating impact on the saucy postcard industry. Many postcards were destroyed as a result and retailers cancelled orders. Several postcard companies were hit hard, some going bankrupt, others only just managing to survive.

By the late 1950s the Watch Committees had disbanded, and censorship was relaxed. In 1957 McGill decided to give evidence before the House Select Committee in order to amend the 1857 Act, as he felt a national system of censorship would be open to the vagaries of individual interpretation. One of his postcards, “Do you like Kipling?” “I don’t know, you naughty boy, I’ve never kippled!” holds a world record for selling the most copies at over 6,000,000.

In 1939 a million copies of McGill’s cards were sold by one Blackpool shop alone, and in 1994 the Royal Mail brought out a set of commemorative stamps featuring McGill’s postcards. McGill died in 1962 having spent most of his life in Blackheath, South London aged 87 with all his designs for the 1963 season already prepared. Despite their wide circulation, McGill earned no royalties from his designs, at the height of his fame he never earned more than three guineas per design and left only £735 in his will.
Comeback and the end of the Saucy Seaside Postcards

In the more liberal attitudes of the 1960s the saucy postcard returned to popularity, and was considered as a form of art by some people, which helped its popularity and gave it an easy ride through the decade. But during the 1970s and 80s the quality of the artwork and humour started to deteriorate. This, together with a change in attitude and taste of the general public and with the age of equality and the introduction of political correctness, there was no room for gags about busts and bottoms, which resulted in the demise of the saucy seaside postcard.

Bamforth’s was one of the largest publishers of saucy seaside postcards. They had been producing various types of picture postcards since the late 1800s, but in 1990 Bamforth’s officially closed down. Ten years later, Bamforth’s was facing bankruptcy and was given a new lease of life when a Leeds company, Fresh Faces, purchased its name and assets.

Although some British seaside resorts still sell saucy postcards, they are not as popular as they used to be. Today, the traditional British seaside resort has been hit partly by changes in lifestyles. Nowadays in a more adventurous and prosperous Britain with low-cost airlines and cheap foreign holidays, most people go abroad. There are also many different attractions to choose from so the British seaside is not often seen as a first choice holiday destination, but the saucy seaside postcard is a perfect reminder of those good old seaside days.

Four old Bamforth’s saucy seaside postcards
Collecting Saucy Seaside Postcards

Deltiology is the name given to postcard collecting and is considered to be the most popular collecting hobby with philately, stamp collecting as the first. Nostalgia is now big business and original saucy seaside postcards by the likes of McGill and Bamforth’s which closed 18 years ago are now greatly sought after and can reach high prices at auction. There is also a new generation out there waiting to find these classic cards.

In 2006 the film director Michael Winner sold his collection of 180 signed original watercolour drawings of saucy seaside postcards by Donald McGill previously unseen, which he had kept stored secretly for over 30 years. Winner bought the drawings in the 1960s and 1970s, “way ahead of the market”, according to dealer Chris Beetles, who exhibited the collection in his Ryder Street gallery in London in March 2006. The collection of watercolour drawings on which some of his postcards were based sold for £250,000.

Above: Unseen McGill title on reverse - I'M HIGH AND DRY ON THE COAST HERE!

Another large collection of Donald McGill legendary works were sold at auction at Harrogate, North Yorkshire in individual lots, in 2006 after 40 years confined to a bank vault in York. The collection of 82 pieces each of them signed by McGill fetched around £50,000. Few individuals appear to have considered McGill’s work collectable during his life, though a prominent and unnamed pillar of York society, whose family sold the collection, seems to have been an exception. The bawdiness of the collector’s purchases may explain the decision not to display the body of work but to store it in the vault. Certainly the pieces demonstrate the full McGill range of innuendo.

Left: Unseen McGill title on reverse – I SLEPT WITH SOMETHING HOT LAST NIGHT!
The Bayle Gate-house was a 12th century two storey stone building of the Priory of Augustinian Canons at Bridlington, which was founded around 1113 and was one of the largest houses of the order. The word Bayle is derived from the French Baille meaning ‘enclosure’ or ‘ward’. In 1143, during the Anarchy in the reign of King Stephen, the priory and The Bayle were fortified by William le Gros, after he took control of Bridlington Priory. In 1388 the priory was granted licence to crenellate or fortify it by King Richard II. The Bayle had now a court room on the top floor and arrow slits for defence.

Left: The Bayle Gate exit circa 1911

The large vehicular archway of The Bayle was the priory’s main entrance and the interior passage gives access to small wings, both with a garderobe, one being the porter’s lodge and the other a prison. Although altered and repaired in brick during the 17th century, the Bayle gate-house still retains its original form and arrangement.

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1537 the Bayle was virtually the only building left intact, apart from the church, as nearly all the rest of Bridlington Priory was pulled down. Since then it has been used for many different purposes including a Prison, Court, a School, Garrison, Town Hall and meeting room for the Lords Feoffees.

Today the Bayle gate is a museum founded in 1928 and a Grade 1 listed building which is a scheduled Ancient Monument. It is of great interest historically and architecturally and is well worth a visit. The Bayle is located in the Old Town, off Baylegate, Bridlington.
The Mysterious Crop Circles Phenomenon, They Appear at Last in Yorkshire

By Marcus Grant

The crop circle phenomenon first began to be noticed in Britain in the late 1970s and became widely known in the 1980s after the media started to report crop circles in Hampshire and Wiltshire. But it was not until 1999 that the first crop circles were first reported in Yorkshire. What took them so long to get here I wonder?

The first crop circle to be recognised was discovered in a field near Barnsley in South Yorkshire and was reported on the 29th July 1999. Since then the mysterious crop circle phenomenon has been revisiting the areas around Barnsley South Yorkshire which seems to be a favourite place to locate them.

One of the best crop circles to be discovered was at Dodworth near Barnsley, it appeared on 30th July 2000 and 15 days later a smaller second circle appeared next to it. These two circles were in a wheat field that was ready for harvesting. The first one to emerge, which was the larger of the two was of a circle which had a series of intersecting triangular shaped curves outside it and a second ring enclosing the whole formation. The second smaller circle contained a grid of lines, leaving rows of squares of standing crops.

Above: Two crop circles at Dodworth near Barnsley

Another interesting sighting of a crop circle was also made near Dodworth on 27th June 2002; it was of a large pentagonal design, a five point star inside a large circle. In fact the circle appeared in a field next to a church and graveyard and created quite a stir amongst the local community.

Left: A Five point star circle near Dodworth, Barnsley
At Darfield, also near Barnsley, South Yorkshire a large ‘galaxy’ type circle was reported on 19th July 2002. One large ring, made up of approximately twenty-six circles. The circle enclosed two concentric rings, plus an unusual extended antennae type feature of two circles connected by a line.

Right: The large ‘galaxy type’ crop circle at Darfield, near Barnsley.
Photo Google Earth

Further south at St Catherine’s Well, Loversall near Doncaster a formation of three plan interlocking circles gradually decreasing in size, although the largest one is more square than circular, was reported on the 19th April 2005.

Over in Humberside, crop circles appeared at Boothferry Bridge near Hull on the 18th August 2000. The most interesting one was found at Howden near the Ouse Bridge, which had six smaller circles radiating from the main centre circle, which had six curved spokes inside the main circle and was found on 11th July 2003.

Left: View of the same circle taken from the ground.
Photo James Pierce

Above: Aerial view of interlocking crop circles at Loversall, Doncaster

Left: Boothferry Bridge circle, near Hull, taken from the ground
A number of crop circles have been reported in West Yorkshire. The best ones appeared at Sandal Castle near Wakefield on the 25th June 2003 and at Collingham near Bardsey on the 23rd of July 2007. The Sandal Castle crop circle had three rings around it and the Collingham circle enclosed two concentric rings and an unusual extended antennae type feature.

Above: Crop Circle at Sandal Castle, near Wakefield

Above: Diagram of the Collingham circle

Left: Collingham circle, near Bardsey.

Two complex designed crop circles appeared in North Yorkshire at Devils Arrows near Boroughbridge on the 3rd August 2003 and at the Thornborough Henge near Ripon on 22nd June 2003. The Devils Arrows circle is a complex ‘spirograph’ design consisting of overlapping circular paths and the Thornborough Henge circle is a complex mandala design consisting of numerous petals and segments in a circular design.
In East Yorkshire, at Rudston near Bridlington a crop circle appeared on 19th July which had 24 segments arranged around three circles. But no photos were taken of this crop circle.

The most recent crop circle and the last one to appear in Yorkshire was at High Kingthorp near Pickering in North Yorkshire on 29th July 2008. It was discovered in a field next to the main Pickering to Whitby road A169 and consists of a circle surrounded by 5 concentric rings, with additional paths joining each ring.
Most of the crop circles that have appeared in Yorkshire seem to be around the Barnsley area, in particular at Dodworth, South Yorkshire, but they only represent a small number compared with the 1,000s that have appeared in the South of England. So why did the crop circle phenomenon start and who or what is responsible for creating them? To answer these questions we must go back in time.

**HISTORY OF CROP CIRCLES**

Many believe that the crop circle phenomenon is a relatively modern occurrence beginning in the mid-1970s when the first circle was photographed in 1976. But many farmers have reported circles in their fields going back considerably further than this date.

But no one knows just how far back in history crop circle sightings go, probably the first recorded image of what appears to be a crop circle is illustrated in a 17th century woodcut entitled ‘The Devil Mower’. It depicts the Devil with a scythe cutting a circular design in a field of oats. This woodcut appeared in a Hertfordshire newspaper dated 22 August, 1678 with an article describing the apparition overnight of a strange design in a field of oats, so neatly pressed that ‘no mortal man was able to do the like’ so it was attributed to the ‘devil or some infernal spirit’.

![The Devil Mower](image1)

Simple circles have appeared on farmland for generations but these mysterious formations were often not reported since they were considered by country folk to be the result of natural causes, such as rutting deer, hedgehogs, or crows feeding on ripened seed heads and trampling the crop in a ring. Circular damage has also been attributed to strange diseases, magic, fairies, and the intervention of demons. So consequently silence was guaranteed either for fear of ridicule and ostracism from the community, or fear of losing a buyer for the crop.

These days many farmers on whose land crop circles appear, rather than hush up and deny their existence, charge the public to access the site to compensate for any damaged crops and also making a profit too! In 1996 a circle appeared near Stonehenge, the farmer set up a booth and charged a fee for people to enter the field making £30,000 in 4 weeks!

![Right: The most visited formation at Stonehenge in 1996. It is estimated around 10,000 people entered this pattern once it was opened to the public by the farmer who made £30,000 in 4 weeks, because it was visible from the road and appeared near Stonehenge](image2)
Crop circles are a global phenomenon, but mainly appear in the Northern Hemisphere, with southern England as the main centre of activity, mostly around Hampshire and Wiltshire. England has the most recorded crop circles formations so far, but places as varied as Germany, Canada, North America, The Netherlands, The Czech Republic and Russia, to name but a few, have also recorded many appearances.

Many people suspect that all crop circles are man-made but others believe that the majority of them are not man-made and that there is some transpersonal force at work. But who or what is responsible for them remains a mystery. It is undisputable that many crop circles are man-made, but not necessarily all. There is a possibility that unknown forces are at work!

The majority of crop circle activity takes place in the South of England within the down lands of Wiltshire and Hampshire. They have now come as far as Yorkshire in Northern England and in fact two or three have been reported in Scotland, so will they continue to spread? Only time will tell.

Crop circles also mainly occur in the vicinity of ancient sites like Stonehenge, Avebury and Silbury Hill which are revisited year after year. Such sites are said to derive their power by ley lines which are straight lines linking prehistoric landmarks and many dowsers have found these ley lines crossing within crop circles.

Facts and Figures

Crop Circles are beautiful, complex geometric patterns that appear mysteriously in crop fields. The crop is not cut, the stalks are gently bent down flat to the ground most often swirled into an attractive floor pattern and often with complicated multi-level layering and spiralling patterns. Most patterns appear in cereal crops such as wheat and barley.

The first circles can start to occur in April and May, reaching their height in late July and August. Crop circles are formed in all weather unheard and unseen. Several circles can appear in one night during the few short hours of darkness in the summer months and by first-light they are complete with no flaws in their designs!

Although prime areas for formations are extensively watched during the growing season, so far there have been no official sightings of a 'genuine' crop circle in the process of forming. The season ends with the harvest then the fields in which they occur are wiped clean for another year.

It is estimated that over ten thousand crop circles have been documented since the early 1980s the vast majority appearing in southern England.

In the early part of the 1980s crop circles started off as just one simple circular shape but over the years they have evolved to become more complex, escalating in size and with recognisable patterns. This is because they became more prominent, attracting worldwide media interest and bringing the subject to the forefront of public attention and debate.
Many crop circles in the last 10 years have been 200-300 feet or more in diameter, that’s about the size of a football pitch. But perhaps the largest crop circle of all materialized over night in bad weather at Milk Hill, Wiltshire on 12th August 2001 and measured over 900 feet in diameter. The design was made from 409 circles all arranged in a circular spiral ranging in size from 70ft down to about a foot in diameter and looks like a unique jewel.

The most complex circle discovered so far was near Barbury Castle, an iron-age hill fort above Wroughton, Wiltshire on 1st June 2008. It appeared in a barley field and the formation was 150 feet in diameter and was a code, representing the first 10 digits, 3.141592654, of pi and has been described by astrophysicists as ‘mind-boggling’.
The longest crop circle formation to date occurred at Etchilhampton, Wiltshire; in 1996. The formation was an elongated chain of circles and lines resembling the DNA strand, approximately 4100 feet long, that is over one kilometre crossed from one end of a field to another.

Most visited formation was at Stonehenge on 7th July 1996, it is estimated around 10,000 people entered this pattern once it was opened to the public by the farmer, because it was visible from the road and appeared near Stonehenge. It has been named the ‘Julia Set’, a staggering 915 foot long formation with 151 circles and appeared in broad daylight within a forty-five minute period.

To fully appreciate the formation and pictorial design of crop circles they are best viewed from the air. This is usually undertaken by dedicated researchers who study and document crop circles every year.

Ever since crop circles became newsworthy in the early 1980s, they have aroused wonder, intrigue and scepticism. Many people believe crop circles to be the product of hoaxers but there are some groups like new age mystics and neo-scientists which attempt to find an explanation for the effects of ‘genuine’ circles. With so much interest generated it is not surprising to find diverse, and often contradictory, beliefs and theories concerning the mysterious crop circle phenomenon.
The Hoaxers

Mass hoaxing has become the standard accepted explanation for crop circles, by the mainstream media and also the general public. In fact elaborate hoaxes continue by people trying to expose the phenomenon and perhaps to gain publicity for themselves. There are also circle makers who see it as an art form. In the art of circle making, the simplest technique is to flatten crops using a plank held with a piece of rope and with a garden roller.

The most infamous circle makers were retired Doug Bower and Dave Chorley, who claimed to have invented the crop circle phenomenon as a joke and in 1991 admitted to producing a great number of ‘artworks’ since 1978. They could not have been aware that almost 300 documented formations predated their alleged exploits. Dave Chorley died in 1996, but Doug Bower has alleged to have made crop circles since then.

They confessed when there was talk of the government commissioning some kind of inquiry into the whole thing. Doug and Dave did not want to see taxpayer’s money wasted on so-called crop circle experts for a study that was going to be nothing but nonsense. They had had their laugh but enough was enough. They went public with radio and television interviews and did an exclusive in the Today newspaper for which they were paid £10,000. They even demonstrated how they made the crop circles with a plank of wood. At that time, Doug was 67 and Dave was 62. They could not have made all the crop circles they claimed, there were too many for two people and far apart, but they believed their efforts had inspired imitators elsewhere.

In July 2001, circle makers John Lundberg, Rod Dickinson and Will Russell were suspected to have created a complex 240-foot crop circle formation near Silbury Hill, Wiltshire, which took them four hours to construct under the cover of darkness. There have also been numerous cases in which researchers declared crop circles to be ‘genuine’ but were exposed along with the people who created the circle and documented the fraud.

A study of circle hoaxing in 1999 and 2000 concluded that 80% of all circles studied showed irrefutable signs of having been man-made in the way of post-holes used to layout circles and human tracks underlying the circle sites. No conclusion was reached of the remaining 20% of the crop circles studied.

So this does not prove that all crop circles are man-made, only that it is possible to create a copy. The existence of hoaxers is undisputed, but human intervention might seem unlikely an explanation for all crop circles given the sheer size, complexity and rapid appearance of many of them.

Theories and Beliefs

There are many theories about who or what makes crop circles including the plasma-vortex theory, a natural wind/electro-magnetic vortex but this theory became unsustainable with the appearance of complicated and very accurate pictograms in the 1990s.

Some circles were reported to contain swollen, stretched, burst or split nodes on plant stems in a manner similar to ‘microwave energy effects’, rapid, intense internal heating, dehydrated/shrunken seeds and significant changes in seed germination and growth rate either faster or slower than normal. These studies are scientific and have opened up new areas of research but they do not tell us how or why crop circles are made.
Balls of light the size of a football or larger have been seen and captured on film moving over formed crop circles, which may have something to do with crop circle formations. But some of these sightings that have been filmed during so called formations of crop circles, where a ball of light seems to make a circle appear in a field are in fact hoaxes.

Other favourite theories are telepathic communication, extraterrestrials and UFOs but none are satisfactorily explained and what makes the crop circle subject so fascinating is that anyone and everyone can take part in the search for answers.

**CONTROVERSY**

There is still no definitive explanation or consensus about who or what is creating these crop circles and everyone has a different view on the subject. To see crop circles as a mystery to be solved, as alien communications or transmissions to be deciphered for the sole benefit of humankind, is somewhat misleading.

Controversy about crop circles continues and many books have been produced on the subject containing beautiful aerial photos of the best designed crop circles found and there are a number of interesting documentary DVDs on the subject.

Whether you are convinced that crop circles are caused by some extraterrestrial force or believe it is all the work of humans, you have got to admit that some of the designs are amazingly incredible, let’s hope they continue to materialise and fascinate us for a long time to come.

Below are five crop circles reported near Barnsley in South Yorkshire between 2000-2002 two from Kexbrough and three from Dodworth.
The Pickering World Famous 15th Century Wall Paintings and their interpretation

By Julian Giles

Pickering is a tranquil, historic market town in North Yorkshire, formerly known as Piceringas and Pykering. It is located between York and Scarborough and during the summer months the town draws a large number of visitors and day trippers to its North Yorkshire Moors Steam Railway, which is the longest in England, and is Pickering’s main visitor attraction.

Pickering Castle and the Beck Isle Museum are also popular with visitors.

Right: The Church Spire

Another place of interest is Pickering’s parish church, dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, situated on a small hill. Its spire dominates views of Pickering from all directions and on entering Pickering town centre by the busy Scarborough-Whitby-York-Helmsley roundabout, visitors cannot help but notice the tapering octagonal spire with its battlement parapets in the background. The church is located at the eastern end of Market Place, but the main building of the church is hidden by a cluster of cottages and shops, but can be accessed by one of three flights of stone steps that cut through the surrounding buildings.

What makes Pickering’s parish church remarkable, is its series of mid-15th century wall paintings which are extensive, covering both the north and south walls. In the Middle Ages up to the early 16th century virtually all churches in England had paintings on their walls. Not all had so many figure subjects as those found in Pickering church.

Brief History of the Church

The church is a Grade I listed building that dates from the 12th century. There was probably a Saxon church on the site because there is evidence of carved stones, possibly belonging to an early church built in the walls of the present building. Also, there is a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon cross shaft which lies in the south aisle of the nave and the circular bowl of the font is possibly Saxon. This Saxon church may well have been wasted during William the Conquer’s ‘Harrying of the North’ and was replaced eventually by a Norman church.

Like most medieval churches it was extended to meet the demands of a growing population. The earliest serving part of the present building is the north aisle which dates to about 1150 and the south side was added towards the end of the 12th century. The present west square tower was built in the early part of the 13th century and sometime in the 14th century the chancel was widened and the large south porch added to the entrance.

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In the 15th century, a chantry chapel was constructed on the south side of the chancel in memory of Sir David and Dame Margery Roucliffe, which still contains their alabaster effigies. The most impressive alteration of the 15th century was the reconstruction of the upper part of the walls of the nave by a clerestory consisting of five square-headed windows along each wall.

At the same time, battlement parapets were added externally to all the walls. This major rebuilding would have destroyed the wall paintings and so itinerant painters would have been called in to repaint and decorate the walls. More recently, the church has undergone modern refurbishments and improvement to invigorate the church.

Left: Entrance to St Peter and St Paul Church, Pickering

Right: Carved stones, possibly belonging to an early church, built in the walls of the present building

The Discovery of the Wall Paintings

At the time of the Puritan Reformation, churches became plainer, statues, candles, and all colourful decoration disappeared. In the Pickering Church, the 15th century wall paintings were hidden from view with coats of whitewash and over the centuries forgotten. It was not until 1852, when repairs in the nave, accidentally revealed the series of wall paintings on the north and south walls. Then, for two weeks many people travelled from quite long distances to view them. The vicar at this time was the Reverend Ponsoby, who had them covered over again because he disliked them. In a letter to the Archbishop he wrote..... “as a work of art (they are) fairly ridiculous, would excite feelings of curiosity. And distract the congregation”. He went on to say that “the paintings are out of place in a protestant Church, especially in these dangerous times”. Before the paintings were subsequently recovered in a thick yellow wash, they were seen and drawn by William Hey Dykes, a York architect.

In 1876-79 the church underwent extensive restoration, which included the uncovering and restoring of the paintings. The restoration work on the paintings was undertaken by the firm of Shrigley and Hunt of Lancaster, but a lot of damage was done to them when removing the covering paint and in taking memorials off the walls of the nave. The decision to restore the paintings was made by the Reverend Lightfoot and rather than leave them in a fragmented state he decided to have them repainted. Only two scenes, the martyrdom of St. Catherine and the lower part of the body of St. Edmund, appear to have been recreated. Both had been severely damaged by funerary monuments, but sufficient evidence within the scenes survived to make the reconstructions plausible. The restoration work of the paintings was completed by 1895.

The Wall Paintings

In the Middle Ages most churches were painted to decorate blank plastered walls and also served two objectives. The first was to inspire devotional contemplation in the eyes and minds of their beholders and the second to teach. Until the end of the 15th century, it was not possible to learn the teachings of Christ or the lives of the saints from books. This was because there were no printed books and hand written religious books that existed were rare and owned by only a few. In a small market town such as Pickering most inhabitants would also be illiterate so the parish priest could use the paintings as a visual aid to teach about saints and to help the congregation understand basic teachings.
The paintings cover the north and south nave walls above the arcades and between the clearstory windows. They appear to date from around 1460 on stylistic grounds, the evidence of this comes from the costumes and armour, which some of the figures depicted and there is documentary evidence that they were more extensive than those that have survived today.

The paintings on the north wall are mainly of saints including St. George, St. Christopher, John the Baptist, St. Edmund and St. Thomas à Beckett. The paintings on the south wall seem to serve a teaching purpose especially with the telling of the legend of St Catherine of Alexandria and the depiction of the Corporal Acts of Mercy and the Passion of Christ.

**St. George**

Taking the subjects from the west end, the first on the north side is the representation of St. George in full armour. He is shown on horseback, slaying the dragon by thrusting his lance into the defeated dragon’s mouth which is trampled beneath his horse’s feet. The maiden he is rescuing from the dragon is missing from the scene. Although it is possible that she originally appeared as a diminutive figure to the west of St. George beneath the clerestory window. The figure of St. George extends up between the clearstory windows and appears to have been damaged before the church restoration of 1875-78 but sufficient traces remained to complete the scene.

Legends about St. George date from the 7th century, but his popularity in England stems from the time of the early Crusades when it is said that the Normans saw him in a vision and were victorious. In 1222, the Council of Oxford declared April 23rd to be Saint George’s Day and he was recognised as the patron saint of England in the reign of Edward III, 1312-1377. By the 15th century and up to the Reformation he appears to be well known throughout England.
St. Christopher

Next to St George is the most striking giant figure of St. Christopher, which can be seen immediately on entering the church above the second pillar from the west. This is opposite the entrance to the church, where medieval travellers and pilgrims would have expected to have found him. By the 15th century St. Christopher was popular amongst those who undertook difficult and often dangerous journeys.

In the painting he is crossing a river using a staff, which is a young sprouting tree. On his left shoulder sits the Christ child and round his right leg there is a serpent, probably representing the adversity that the saint had to struggle against. On the bank, standing on a rocky outcrop waiting for him, with a lantern that gives out great rays of light, is a figure in a habit, possibly the abbot of the monastery that the saint was serving or perhaps the hermit who is said to have baptised him. His hermitage is behind him and a dark wood beyond in the background. The colossal size of the figure is in keeping with the tradition, which states that the saint stood twelve cubits high.

The figures of St George and St Christopher are the largest painted on the church walls and they both extend the full height of the wall from the spaces between the arches and of the arcade arch to the top of and between the square clearstory windows. There are no clear architectural or decorative borders framing the images, which run into each other, although St. Christopher is separated from the adjacent images to the east by a thin line.
**John the Baptist**

In the sequence to the east of St Christopher is the depiction of Herod’s feast. The story sequence is a little confusing; it shows one long trestle table in an interior with a tiled floor depicting a feast. Behind the table are seated eight figures, but these are in fact four figures repeated twice for the sequence of the events. The crowned bearded figure is of Herod Antiphas and the crowned female his bride Herodias, the ex-wife of his half-brother. They are accompanied by a male and female courtier. The story starts at the east side of the scene where St. John stands rebuking Herod for his unlawful marriage whilst Salome, the daughter of Herodias, carries out a tumble dance on the tiled floor. The story then switches to the left end of the scene where Salome holding a dish against her chest, witnesses the beheading of St. John and then moves back to the centre of the painting where the saint’s head is presented to the King on a large dish.

This painting illustrates two important features of medieval wall paintings, the running together of several incidents of a story into one scene and the importance of costume. The characters are put into contemporary costumes of the late 14th or early 15th century; this enables the medieval viewer to recognise rank, status and sometimes occupations.

*Left: Detail of St. John rebuking Herod and his head on a large dish presented to the King*
Coronation of the Virgin

Between the clearstory windows, above Herod’s feast is the Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity. A saint is seated on both sides of Mary and behind them are more saints standing. Above her appears the community of Heaven, represented by men and women depicted in 15th century dress leaning over a castellated battlement. The painting depicts her as a devotional image and as a presentation of the theological doctrines of the Trinity and Divine Grace.

Right: Coronation of the Virgin

Saint Edmund

The scene of Herod’s feast is separated by a border of foliage to the east end of the north wall which is represented by the depiction of the martyrdom of St. Edmund and the assassination of St Thomas à Beckett, which are the last in the sequence on the north side wall.

The naked crowned figure of St. Edmund is at the centre bound to a tree and pierced with a number of arrows, he has already a halo. At each side are two archers poised ready to shoot their arrows and two other archers look on. A scroll on the right, curving around the head, shoulders and elbow of the upper right-hand archer is inscribed, ‘Heaven blys to hys mede. Hem sall have for his gud ded.’

Left: St. Edmund pierced with a number of arrows

Edmund was born in 814 and died 20th November 870. He was king of East Anglia in 855, while still a boy of fourteen years. In 869 the Viking army which had conquered Northumbria marched through Mercia into East Anglia. Edmund engaged them in battle and according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle he was killed on the battlefield. The more popular version of the story makes Edmund die as a martyr by arrows when he had refused to renounce Christ or hold his kingdom as a vassal from heathen overlords. The story is embellished with detail about Edmund’s flight and his rejection of threats to kill him if demands are not met. It is not known which account is correct.

This painting had suffered damage caused by a funerary tablet fixed to the lower part of the scene, but sufficient survived to make a complete restoration.
St. Thomas à Becket

Above St. Edmund’s martyrdom, separated by a border of continuous bands of foliage is the assassination of St. Thomas à Becket. The scene illustrates four fully armed figures of knights, St. Thomas is kneeling before an altar and behind him stands Thomas’ chaplain, Edward Grim, holding his cross and arguing with the four knights.

Above: The assassination of St. Thomas à Becket

The knights in the scene represent Reginald FitzUrse, Hugh de Moreville, William de Tracy, and Richard le Breton. They grip the hilt of their swords, ready to draw them and murder Thomas à Becket. The scene takes place in the cathedral, complete with a tiled floor and leaf shaped canopies with liere arched ceilings. To the east of the scene is a structure which may represent an inner chamber or chapel.

The knights killed Thomas à Becket on 29th December 1170 aged 52, because of Becket’s refusal to meet the demands of the king. This story is well known. Soon after Becket was venerated as a martyr, and in 1173, barely three years after his death, was canonised by Pope Alexander III. On 12th July 1174, Henry humbled himself with public penance at Becket’s tomb, which became one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in England.

Both St. Edmund and St. Thomas may have been painted together on the same side wall because they were both English martyrs whose popularity in the south-east had spread nationally by the 15th century. The armour that the knights are wearing is of the type used in the time of Edward IV.

There is a border of continuous bands of foliage to the east of these two scenes, which bring to an end the sequence of paintings on the north side.

Above: Paintings on the North Walls

Paintings on the South Wall

The paintings opposite on the south wall are generally on a smaller scale and tell the story of St Catherine of Alexandria and the depiction of the Corporal Acts of Mercy and the Passion of Christ.
St. Catherine of Alexandria

The series of paintings on the south walls of the nave west of the south transept above the arches, illustrate the history of St. Catherine of Alexandria. This scene is an impressive depiction of her life; St. Catherine became a very popular martyr. The illustrations have been arranged in four horizontal tiers and read from east to west.

It begins with pagan idol-worship, Catherine is protesting to the Emperor Maxentius. The idol in the painting has upstanding hair resembling flames and holds what looks like a spiked club and stands on a red plinth. A pedestal next to it could represent a pagan altar with fire burning on top of it, which may be a sacrifice. Men stand and kneel in adoration accompanied by music, being played on wind instruments like trumpets. Catherine is seen standing with her hands clasped in prayer, the Emperor presides from his throne holding a curved sword. Then Catherine, with hand raised in protest is dragged off to prison.

In the next tier below, Catherine seems to have been released from prison, on one side of her, she is seen disputing with the fifty philosophers sent by the Emperor to debate with her and converts them to Christianity instead. On the other side of her, they are condemned and martyred. Catherine is back in her prison cell, looks on through the barred window, she is then taken out stripped and flogged with the Emperor again looking on.

In the third tier she is put back into prison only to be brought out again to be condemned with the now converted Empress Faustina, Maxentius’ wife. Both women are shown kneeling, attended by, what look like angels. One angel holds a covered chalice or incense jar and perhaps a book. Catherine is then tortured on four wheels, two on either side (hence the firework, the ‘Catherine Wheel’). By divine intervention the wheels are broken and its spikes fly off killing soldiers and bystanders, the emperor watches from his throne.

Above: In the centre is St. Catherine of Alexandria being tortured on four wheels, two on either side (hence the firework, the ‘Catherine Wheel’)

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In the final tier, the scene depicts her beheading. Catherine kneels, her long hair over her face and her crown on the ground beside the Emperor’s chair. A hovering angel blesses her as the executioner raises his sword. The Emperor looks on holding an elaborate sceptre in his left hand awaiting her to be beheaded.

This final scene has been badly damaged by a funerary monument placed over it before the paintings were revealed. All that survived of this scene was the officer with his sword at the prison door, an angel’s wing, the attendant and part of Maxentius’ head. The interpretation of St. Catherine’s beheading is a Victorian reconstruction.

Inscriptions are visible in the second tier of this painting, and the form of some of the letters suggests a mixture of Latin and late Middle English. These kinds of inscriptions are also found elsewhere in the paintings at Pickering but so far these have not yet been deciphered.

St. Catherine was venerated in the eastern Mediterranean from before the 10th century and became popular in the west from the time of the Crusades until the 18th century. What is told of her life is mostly made up of legends which have many variations and little historical basis. The most popular account was that she was the daughter of Costus, the governor of Alexandria and was born in 282 AD and was converted to Christianity as a student. Catherine was eighteen when Maxentius, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire started persecuting Christians and the painting tells the story of Catherine’s reaction in a form similar to a modern strip cartoon.

**Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy**

To the west of the life of St. Catherine is a horizontal broad strip running east to west above the south nave arches just below the clerestory windows, which contains two scenes. To the east are the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy and further west, the Passion of Christ.

In the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy the works are performed by a man, although there is a woman in attendance in visiting the sick. The first scene from the east illustrates feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty; two men are shown receiving what look like loaves of bread.
They seem too well-dressed to be beggars, so they may represent pilgrims, for whom charity was obligatory. In the next scene are two men, one is drinking from a bowl given to him by the man in the doorway holding a flagon.

Next is receiving a stranger and clothing the naked, these are shown together, a man seems to be falling into a doorway supported by a man standing to his left, perhaps being welcomed in. To the right of this man, shown separately, are two men receiving new robes and being clothed.

Right: The man on the right with a pouch at his belt is handing something to a man in prison, his head is visible through the barred window

The rest of this scene to the left, is visiting the imprisoned and features a man with a spear who maybe a jailer. Besides him is a small prison with a grille on the window. On the other side to the right is a man with a pouch at his belt handing something to a man in prison, his head is visible through the barred window.

In the next scene to the left is visiting the sick, the man in bed is being offered a small bowl by another man, the object he holds seems to be a tall medicine jar. A woman in a fashionable 15th century headdress is beside him. The final scene is burying the dead. A shaved head priest is blessing a shrouded corpse with two other men in attendance. The shroud has a red cross on it, and is gathered and tied on top of the head in a manner familiar in the 15th century. There are no divisions between the scenes.

Left: Details of the last two scenes, visiting the sick and burying the dead

**The Passion of Christ**

There is no division between the last scene of the Corporal Acts and the first associated with the Passion of Christ. Part of the priest officiating at the burial of the dead from the Corporal Acts, is visible at the extreme left of the painting and immediately to the right of him the Passion of Christ begins with a highly compressed scene of the betrayal and arrest of Christ. This is the first scene and shows Judas and Christ at the moment of betrayal. It is difficult to see where one subject ends and the other begins.
Christ is painted with a very large lobed halo in the centre of the scene, healing the ear of the High Priest’s servant, Malchus, who has fallen to the ground, still holding the lantern he traditionally carries. Standing behind and on the left of Christ is Peter, who cut off Malchus’s ear, is shown sheathing his sword. Soldiers surround the group, one of them grasping Christ by the right arm. Between the soldier and Christ is the head of a bearded man, inclined confidentially on Christ’s right shoulder. This could be Judas significantly, among the group of disciples and soldiers shown behind Peter and Christ, he is the only one with neither helmet nor halo. There is a very irregular black dividing line separating this scene from the second scene, Christ before Pilate and from the rest of the story of the Passion. It could be either a 15th century painter or a Victorian restorer who placed the break in the wrong place.

In the next scene Christ is standing before Pilate who is seated on a canopied throne holding a sceptre, representing his authority, Christ is held by attendants. In the following scene, Christ is bound to a pillar and flogged by two men, one is wielding what could be a birch and the second is using a knotted or leaded whip. To the right the scene becomes the road to Calvary with Christ carrying the cross, escorted by two men, the one at the right is a soldier in 15th century armour. The story continues with the crucifixion with Mary and John on either side of the cross. Set up above the crucified Christ, painted as a scroll is the title of a mocking description. In the next scenes, Christ is being taken down from the cross by a bearded man while another removes the nails with very long pincers. Two women are present, along with the youthful, beardless figure at the top end of the coffin. Another man at the bottom of the coffin is wrapping Christ’s body in a white winding-sheet.

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Descent into Hell

In the space between the arches directly below the first and second scenes of the Passion is the descent into Hell represented by a shaggy, curled hair Hell-creature with great black teeth. At the far left of the scene, rays of light break from clouds, illuminating Christ, who stands at the Mouth of Hell grasping Adam by the wrist and holding a cross. Christ is shown ministering to those who had died without knowledge of Him, including Adam and Eve who emerge from the mouth of hell. Adam still holds the apple and Eve with her hair loose, is behind Adam, and a bearded man behind her. Other figures follow in turn, while two extremely ugly looking devils stand watching.

The most remarkable feature of all is the apparent censorship. Adam, Eve and the other visible figures coming, naked, out of Hell have large discs superimposed on their genital area. Medieval painters could always find ways around the problem of full-frontal nudity, usually by careful arrangement of legs or by simply leaving out what is between them altogether. This detail seems to demand some kind of symbolic interpretation.

The Resurrection and Ascension

In the space between the arches below the burial is the final scene in the series that make up the Passion of Christ. The resurrection portrays Christ emerging triumphantly from a sarcophagus holding a sceptre to show his authority. On both side of him are two angels and two of the soldiers guarding the tomb are present, one behind Christ’s right shoulder, the other in a reclining attitude and probably asleep, to the right of the sarcophagus. Another interpretation is that the soldier falls back in amazement.

Above the Passion of Christ, between two clerestory windows and framed by a foliate border is a scene that could represent the Ascension of Jesus. It depicts six Apostles standing in a row, Peter in the centre holding the keys and Andrew with his diagonal cross second left. The other Apostles could represent James the Great, James the Less and St. John. There is what looks like the remains of Jesus foot’ above Peter’s head in the upper part of the frame about to disappear into Heaven. If it is, then it is possible that this scene represents the Ascension of Christ and could be read as the conclusion to the images of the Passion, Descent into Hell and Resurrection immediately beneath it.

Another observation about this scene is that the Apostle’s feet and robes are allowed to run into the Passion scenes below. This Ascension scene is not separated with a bottom border unlike the two other paintings on either side of the clerestory windows, which portray the Death and Ascension of the Blessed Virgin Mary; they are separated from the Passion by a border.
Death and Ascension of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Above the Corporal Acts of Mercy and the Passion of Christ are a series of three paintings on either side of the clerestory windows. They are framed by similar foliate borders and have been interpreted as the Death and Ascension of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are designed to be read in conjunction with the Coronation of the Virgin scene, located directly opposite at clerestory level on the north wall. It has been revealed above, that the first scene represents the Ascension of Christ rather than the Death of the Virgin.

To the east of this is a scene depicting the funeral of the Virgin with a row of apostles in front and the Jewish prince Belzeray sitting astride the coffin. The final image appears to show the Assumption of the Virgin, with angels to the left and a fragment of the girdle thrown down to St. Thomas on the right of the scene.

The Paintings and the future

The paintings were described by Nicholas Pevsner in Buildings of England, Yorkshire, The North Riding as “one of the most complete series of wall paintings in English churches and they give one a vivid idea of what ecclesiastical interiors were really like”.

The Church has stood for almost 900 years in the centre of Pickering. Changes have occurred throughout these centuries to meet the spiritual needs of the community and plans are under way to carry out improvements so that it can serve the parish and its visitors, many of whom come to see the wall paintings, better in the 21st century.

This is an excellent guidebook available in the church bookshop; it details each scene and describes the architectural history of the church.
Pickering Castle

This aerial view shows how Picking Castle looks today

Pickering Castle is another interesting place to visit. It is a well-preserved example of a 12th century motte-and-bailey castle. It was first built in earth and timber by William the Conqueror in the years following the Norman Conquest. The castle was rebuilt in stone and extended by subsequent kings, notably Henry III and Edward II, in response to the threat posed at different times by rebellious barons and the Scots.

There is a special exhibition in the chapel that explores the castle’s fascinating history.

Right: A reconstruction of Pickering Castle as it would have looked in 14th century completed in stone. Courtesy of English Heritage Library, By Ivan Lapper
The Bayle Gate-house, Bridlington

Today the Bayle Gate-house is a museum. It is of great interest historically and architecturally and is well worth a visit.

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