

# **Yorkshire Autumn Review 2019**

**In this review**

**Debtor's Gaol, Halifax**

**The Phenomena of Stone Heads  
in Yorkshire**



# The Yorkshire Autumn Review 2019



Welcome to the Yorkshire Autumn Review 2019. Autumn is a great time to enjoy a walk in one of Yorkshire's beautiful woodlands with their magnificent display of red and gold leaves. The front cover illustrates one particularly attractive popular autumn walk along the Rochdale Canal near Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. Another stunning view along the Rochdale Canal in autumn can be seen on the front cover of Issue 3 Autumn 2016.

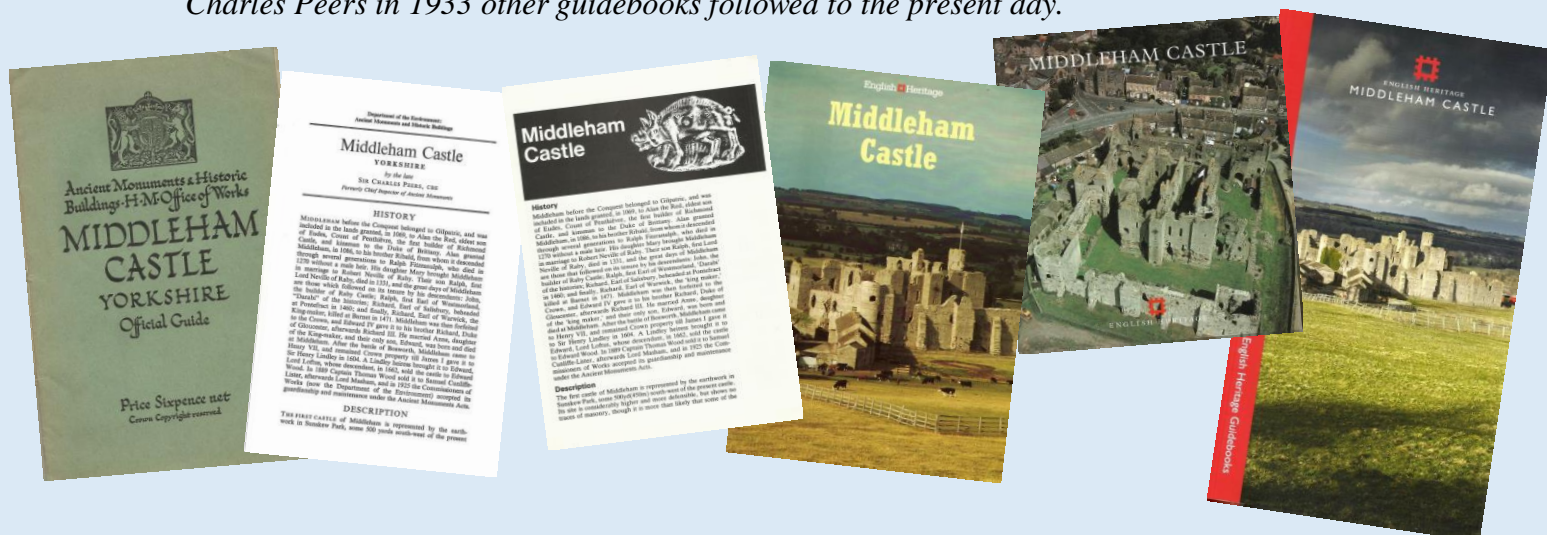
In this Autumn review are two articles that we hope you will find interesting, as always we welcome your comments, the first one is by Christopher Jennings on the Debtor's Gaol, Halifax which is a follow on from his complete account of 'The Halifax Gibbet' published in the annual journal 2018. He gives us an insight as to how the Debtor's Gaol was run. The second article is by Jeremy Clark, on the phenomena of stone heads in Yorkshire and gives a humorous story at the end of being over confident in dating them. Before these two articles there is a short note on Richard III's statue at Middleham Castle, North Yorkshire to replace the current sculpture with a new one that represents a better likeness of King Richard III.

## King Richard III

King Richard III was the last of the Plantagenet dynasty and the last king of England to die in battle. On Thursday 26th March 2015 he was finally laid to rest in Leicester Cathedral. The service was watched by the world and attended by thousands. Richard's reputation so much disputed and contested will like so many figures in history continue to clarify and evolve. Now that we know where King Richard III is buried, history books will have to be rewritten.

Before Richard became king he was Richard, Duke of Gloucester. He lived at Middleham Castle until about 1468, where he learnt the military skills and courtly manners appropriate to a young man of his rank. In 1471 he became Lord of Middleham and married Ann Nevill, Warwick's daughter, and gained other Yorkshire castles including Barnard and Richmond Castles. He attracted a large and loyal following, especially from Middleham, which he apparently preferred to other castles in his possession. Richard's only son, Edward, was born at Middleham in 1474 and died there at the age of ten. Richard had become king in 1483 but affairs of state meant that he did not visit Middleham very often. He died at the Battle of Bosworth Field on 22nd August 1485.

*Below: Middleham Castle was placed in state guardianship in 1925. The first guidebook was prepared by Sir Charles Peers in 1933 other guidebooks followed to the present day.*





# Richard III's Statue at Middleham Castle, North Yorkshire

Looking at the front of Richard III's full sized statue deprived of arms, there does not seem to be anything wrong, that is until you take a closer look. Around his shoulders is the arm and a hand belonging to a medieval demon that meets a curled tail of a dragon-like creature in the middle of his chest. The other hand of the demon can be seen holding Richard's left waist. All becomes clear when walking round the statue where these two creatures are seen clinging to Richard's back. There is no photograph or any mention of Richard III's statue in the 2015 English Heritage guide book of Middleham Castle to give visitors any explanation, or in the visitor's centre.

The grotesque figure of the demon is closely clinging to Richard's left side which is supposed to represent a cruel, evil person and the long, slender basilisk creature, which is a mythical reptile with a lethal gaze, hatched by a serpent from a cock's egg, has wings and the head of a cockerel.

The sculpture is by Linda Thompson and was erected in the bailey of Middleham Castle in 1996, long before Richard's remains were found and excavated in 2012 on the former site of the 13th century Greyfriars Church in Leicester situated under the City Council's car park.

Fortunately these hideous symbolic images are placed at the back of the statue and are barely seen from the front. These figures are supposed to represent the two mischief-makers of legend and imagination, which have previously been associated to Richard, but are very controversial and give a negative and dangerously wrong impression of Richard III.

In the light of the discovery of Richard's remains and the analysis of the bones which provided more evidence of his physical appearance that significantly differs from William Shakespeare's description, the Richard III Foundation plans to replace the current sculpture with a statue that would represent a more favourable Richard III.

*Right: The statue shows Richard III standing on a White Boar, his heraldic symbol and on his chest is the Yorkist collar of suns and roses.*





*Right: The long, slender basilisk creature, which is a mythical reptile with a lethal gaze, which has wings and the head of a cockerel.*



*Left: The demon figure closely clinging to Richard's left side that is supposed to represent a cruel, evil person*

*Right: White Boar, King Richard III's heraldic symbol*

Flowers are often placed at the base of Richard III's statue and visitors enjoy having their photograph taken standing next to him. Although the current statue is widely disliked.





In 1996 Linda only had portraits and paintings to work on to interpret his figure and facial features. These show Richard as being too old, he was aged 32 when he died.

A facial reconstruction based on the skull of Richard III has revealed how he may have looked. Also DNA testing suggested he would have had blond hair and blue eyes.

The body of Richard III was hastily buried after his death at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 beneath the choir of Greyfriars Church, Leicester.

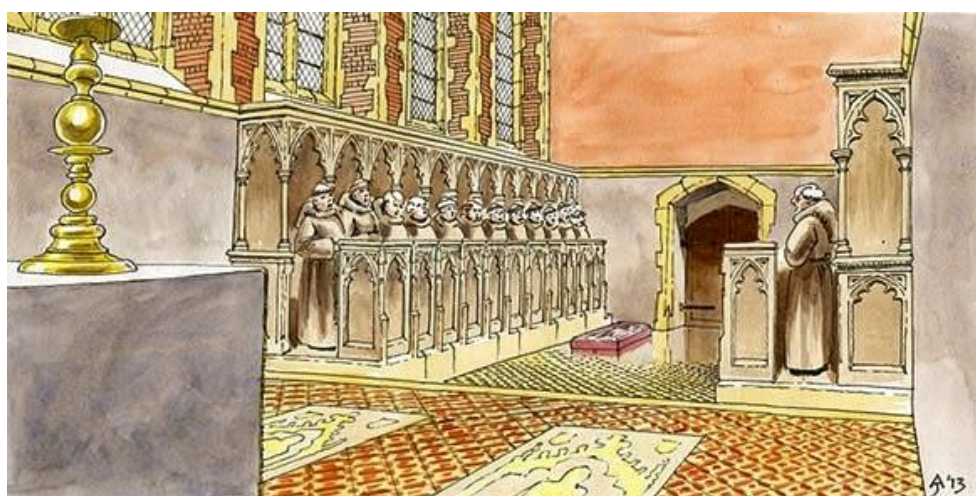
He was the last Plantagenet King of England who was succeeded by his rival Henry who founded the Tudor dynasty.



*Left: The tomb of King Richard III which features a Christian cross carved on the top of a Yorkshire Swaledale stone, sealing the remains of King Richard III beneath. It is located in the newly created Chapel of Christ the King at the east end of the Leicester Cathedral and the sanctuary (the most holy place, signified by the main altar) under the tower. This is a place of similar significance to the chancel where the Grey Friars buried King Richard in their church.*

*Right: An artist's reconstruction of the choir of the Grey Friars church looking west as it was in the late 15th century. It shows the alabaster slab laid over the burial place of King Richard III.*

Courtesy of Jill Atherton



The excavating of Richard III showed that his skull had been propped up against the side of the grave because it had been dug too short for him. The unusual position of his hands suggest that he may have been buried with his hands still tied. There were no signs of a shroud or coffin in Richard III's grave. Only the feet and one lower leg bone were missing these was probably removed when a Victorian outhouse was built on top of the grave.



# The Debtor's Gaol, Halifax

By Christopher Jennings

At the top of Northgate in Halifax there is a narrow sloping paved passage known as Gaol Lane that today leads down to the Royal Mail Delivery Office. It is now situated between the Halifax Bank Woolshops Branch and what was the Halifax Central Library before being relocated in 2017 behind the Piece Hall.



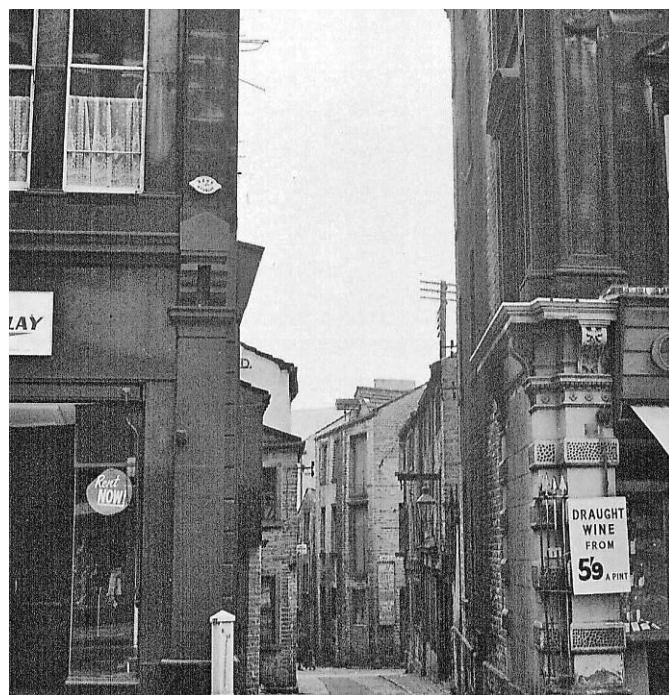
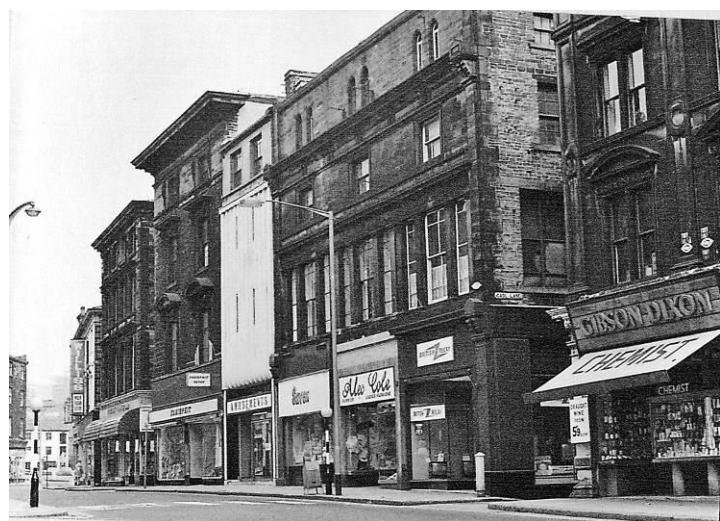
Before this area was developed and all the buildings demolished in the early 1970s Gaol Lane was a much narrower cobbled thoroughfare. It was crammed in on both sides with tall buildings all the way down to Winding Road. Gaol Lane got its name from the presence of the debtor's gaol which was on the left-hand side

going down and not far from Northgate. The debtor's gaol replaced the dungeon in Old Market and was opened in 1662, this date was carved on the building which was the property of the Duke of Leeds. It was largely rebuilt in 1700 and 1709 and continued in use until 1868 when the new gaol at Hanson Lane was opened.



*Left: Gaol Lane looking towards Northgate with the old Halifax Central Library building on the right and at the top on the left the Halifax Bank Woolshops Branch.*

*Below: The area in 1968 showing a view of Northgate Halifax. Gaol Lane can be seen on the right between British Relay and Gibson Dixon chemist.*



*Above Right: Another black and white photograph taken in 1968 looking down Gaol Lane from the top of Northgate. This photograph shows the narrower cobbled lane with tall buildings crammed in on both sides. The site of the debtor's gaol occupied by one of the buildings on the left near the top. After the gaol was no longer used as a debtor's prison the premises were kept on as the Duke of Leeds Inn, the licence was withdrawn in about 1910. All these buildings were demolished in the early 1970s for redevelopment of the area. None of these building in these two black and white photograph exists today.*



The debtor's gaol was for a group of people who could not or would not pay their debts. One of these debtors was Dr Samuel Midgley, a Halifax physician, and it was while he was imprisoned here in about 1690 that he wrote his *'Halifax and its Gibbet-Law Placed in a True Light'* in an effort to support himself, but he could not afford to have it published. A complete account of *'The Halifax Gibbet'* by the author is published in the annual journal 2018, see the postscript at the end of the article. It would seem that Samuel Midgley was constantly in debt towards the end of his life, his maximum debt was £2. In 1684 he was imprisoned in York Castle and was three times incarcerated in the Halifax Gaol. He may well have seen and examined the carefully preserved axe blade used to execute criminals by the Halifax Gibbet, it was kept in the gaol after the last execution of Abraham Wilkinson and Anthony Mitchell on 30th April 1650. Samuel Midgley died on the 18th July 1695 and his book was subsequently published by William Bentley in 1761.

*Right: The Debtor's Gaol looking towards Northgate. It has small exterior semi-circular windows and was rebuilt in the early 1700s. Originally this external wall had a small narrow opening of about 12 square inches to the lane for receiving provisions.*



*Left: The Debtor's Gaol from the Lower George Yard showing the full height of the building with semi-circular windows. It was small but solid and not a very impressive building.*



*Left: A view looking down Gaol Lane with the Lower George Yard on the right opposite the Debtor's Gaol with a light attached to the building. Smith Nicolson and West, a large ironmonger's can be seen next to the Gaol.*

There were two classes of debtors, those who could afford to pay for superior accommodation were located in apartments behind the gaoler's house in Gaol Lane, and these had a touch of respectability. They were set apart from the poorer debtors who occupied what was called the 'Low Gaol'. Inside the jail were long stone landings with iron railings. The

Duke of Leeds pub, originally a beer house was next to the debtors' jail and located behind the pub and adjacent to the jail was a rectangular yard.

*Right: Map of Gaol Lane taken from the 1907 25" Ordinance Survey Map.*

- 1. Site of the Debtor's Gaol
- 2. Site of the Duke of Leeds pub
- 3. Gaol Lane
- 4. Lower George Yard
- 5. Northgate





In 1706 inmates paid 2 shillings (10p) a week for the cell and 10 shillings (50p) for food. Many unruly happenings occurred in the gaol, such as the uproar in 1711, when it was reported that ‘prisoners brake the partitions of the Gaol and was so turbulent that . . . stronger fortifications be erected’, this additional work cost £15. The landlord of the pub was also the jailer and it was during one of the inspector’s visits to the jail that he noted several of the inmates were ensconced in the taproom. Later the connection between the jail and a public house was rightly dissolved. Between 1779 and 1788 the Gaol housed a total number of 16 male debtors.

The 1841 census records that John Marchant and 7 members of his family were listed at the Gaol, along with 28 prisoners. Later in 1841 there were only 5 prisoners one was a Mr Foster who died in the jail but the jailer refused to give up the body to the executors until his debts were paid in full. No payment was forthcoming and it is said that he was buried 4 feet down in the jail yard. However, no skeleton remains were discovered or reported when all the buildings were demolished in the early 1970s and the area redeveloped. It is also recorded that on 22nd January 1814 Mr. Chew ended his life in the Halifax Gaol, by hanging himself. By the early 19th century inmates paid £24 a year plus window tax and it was noted by prison inspectors in 1842 that the inmates paid a guinea (£1.05p) a week for food and lodgings, this was a large part of the jailer’s income.

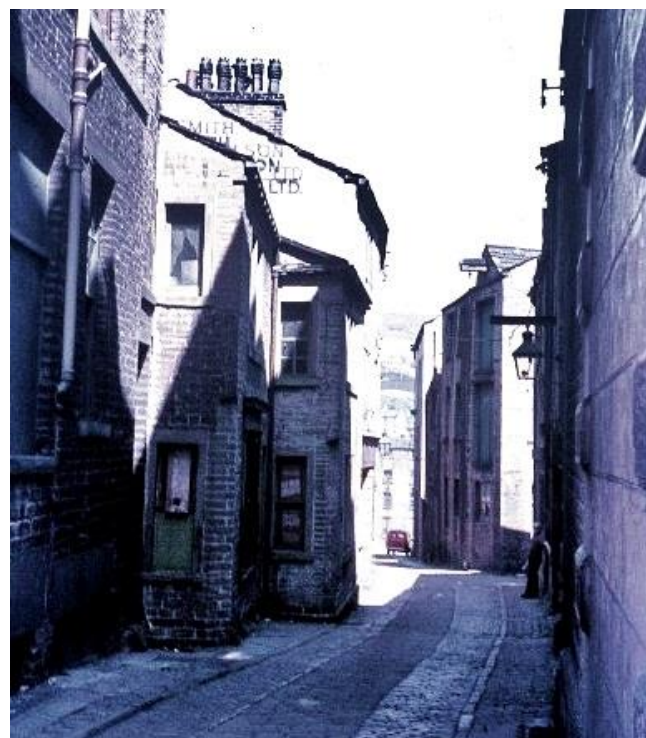
In 1851 there were only 13 prisoners in the jail, and it subsequently closed in 1868. The premises continued to be used as the Duke of Leeds Inn until 1910 when the licence was withdrawn. James Sladdin was the last landlord from 1905 to 1910. A few months before the Inn finally closed, and for some unknown reason and by whom, the paper and whitewash were stripped away from the walls in one of the cells at the top of the jail. To the amusement of the workers they discovered on wooden partitions 18th century portraits. These were brought to the attention of Arthur Comfort who was drawing buildings and views around Halifax published in the Halifax Courier in 1911-12. Although Arthur Comfort made drawings of these 18th century portraits he did not include a drawing of the jail. His complete drawings were published by Halifax Courier as an album in 1912 titled *Sketches of Old Halifax*.



*Left: Arthur Comfort’s drawings of the 18th century portraits discovered in the Halifax Gaol and published in ‘Sketches of Old Halifax’, frontispiece, 1912. Two of them are assigned to scheduled and unscheduled debtors.*

The building was taken over by Smith Nicholson and West, a large ironmonger’s. The ground floor of the interior was refurbished, but the cells in upper floors were left intact although the doors had been previously removed. The 18th century portraits, discovered in about 1910 painted on the panelling still remained in situ. They were titled Scheduled and Unscheduled and were without doubt the work of a talented inmate. Before the premises were demolished the panelling containing the 18th century portraits was removed to Bankfield Museum, Halifax and put into storage.

*Left: Looking down Gaol Lane, the wording Smith Nicholson and West Ltd can be seen on the tall building on the left.*





These days museum collections are mostly in storage and the public are rarely given the opportunity to see them. Occasionally exhibitions on a particular topic are put on temporary display. One such exhibition was held at Bankfield Museum, Halifax called 'Horrible Halifax' for four months in 2018 which included 'Crime and Punishments in Halifax'. This exhibition allowed visitors to see, probably for the first time, the 18th century portraits discovered in about 1910 in one of the cells at the top of the Halifax Gaol. Apart from a label attached to the wooden panel illustrating two portraits which reads 'Cell walls from Halifax Gaol' there was no information regarding their past, description or history for visitors to fully understand their significance.

*Right: This wooden panel illustrates two portraits on a bluish background, it appears to have been framed at some time. The one on the right is named 'Unscheduled'. The painting of this man does not look dignified. He appears to be old not wearing refined clothes or a wig. His receding hair is combed or brushed straight back with no curls.*

*The man painted on the left is named Scheduled and is in contrast to the man on the right. In appearance he is more distinguished and elegant. His dress is of the fashion and style of an 18th century gentleman. His wig is probably wearing a wig artistically styled in which curls are shaped predominately.*



*Left: The portrait painted on another wooden panel is not named. It also seems to have been framed at some time and has a bluish background. The man does not have a pleasing face with his bottom lip turned up and he appears to be scowling wearing a well-worn white wig, the curls at the top are gone. At some time the wig must have been in an artistic style with predominately great shaped curls that can be seen on the side of the wig curling down to the back of his neck in asymmetries, emphasizing the contrast, a dynamic and brilliant style. Although we cannot see much of his dress it can be assumed that he was an 18th century gentleman fallen on hard times.*

The 18th century was an age of elegance when the wearing of wigs in men started to be very popular. What could not be done with the natural hair was made with wigs.

To some extent these 18th century portraits emphasize the wearing of wigs even at a time of despair in their lives. What these portraits cannot tell us is who they represented or who the artist was, there is no signature on them. But what they do tell us, is that there was respectability in their appearance whilst surviving their debt in the gaol.

## POSTSCRIPT

Since the author's publication of 'The Halifax Gibbet' in the annual journal 2018, Calderdale Council have seen fit to make an information board explaining the history of the Halifax Gibbet which is situated at the entrance to the small public garden.





# The Phenomena of Stone Heads in Yorkshire

By Jeremy Clark

In the past stone heads were often disregarded as a minor architectural feature and it was not until the 1960s when they started to receive public attention. This was when Sidney Jackson, late Keeper of Cartwright Hall Museum, Bradford began publicising the abundance of primitive looking carved stone heads, which were turning up in the North of England in particular Yorkshire.



*Right: This stone head was found in a rockery at Gable Cottage, Crigglestone, near Wakefield in 1969. The stone head has a pear-shaped face with two unusually narrow eyes, an unusually slender nose, and a slit mouth. It has grooves on each cheek to indicate side whiskers. The hair at the top of the head is suggested by grooves and the ears are strongly pronounced. It has been tentatively dated to the Iron Age about 700 BC and is presently on display at the Wakefield Museum.*

Press publicity also increased the awareness of stone heads in Yorkshire. Jackson was the first to realise that the carvings were an important and overlooked part of our historical heritage with a significant number found throughout West Yorkshire. As a result he wrote many short articles on their discovery in the Cartwright Hall Museum Archaeology Group Bulletins (Jackson 1960) suggesting that they had ancient origins. This was because the features on most of the carvings were often primitive. Many stone heads have been found in gardens serving as ornaments and some were found built into dry stone field walls. Most of them are three-dimensional and free-standing. They also appear in buildings above doorways, on either side of a window, or on a gable end. Other common locations are bridges, wells and springs.

These crude carved stone heads were considered ‘Celtic Heads’ by Dr Anne Ross in her *Pagan Celtic Britain* (Ross 1967) and *Everyday Life of the Pagan Celts* (Ross 1970) in which she illustrated many examples. The Celts who inhabited parts of Britain, especially Northern Britain before and during the Roman occupation, had a traditional respect for human heads which formed a sophisticated religious cult. However, in the 1970s it gradually became apparent that Celts were not responsible for most of these stone carved heads found in Yorkshire. The same doubt attached itself to some of the heads that Ross had supposed to be Celtic (Ross 1967).

Dating stone carved heads is problematical; there is at present no technique available for dating them, unless a head is associated directly with Iron Age or Romano-British artefacts or at an archaeological level appropriate to these periods. It became apparent that stone heads were being deliberately carved in the same manner and resembling Celtic heads up until the 20th century and which still continues today, so style ceased to be a reliable guide to their age. Another problem is that stone heads incorporated into a datable building does not necessarily solve the problem, since a number of heads in stone farmhouses and other stone buildings have evidently been introduced from other structures and locations.

In fact most of these stone carved heads can be dated to the 17th century or later. The carvers clearly and deliberately chose similar themes based on Celtic heads and in doing so removed their claim to genuine Celtic heads. Jackson (1973) has catalogued over 600 and Billingsley (1992) has listed over 100 in the upper Calder valley, West Yorkshire.



The most plausible explanation for the vast number of stone heads is that they were intended to keep evil influences away from the house or other properties they were protecting. There could be a link between the Celtic tradition and these later stone heads. Ross (1967) suggests that a human head was a very powerful symbol for the Celts all over Europe, and they are found later in stone at the entrances to temples and submerged at many famous Celtic water-shrines. The cult of the severed head was important in Celtic tradition, severed heads would be carried off by warriors of enemies defeated in battle and were thought to protect the household in which they were kept. They were believed to have religious significance and to be a source of supernatural power, providing inspiration, fertility and healing.

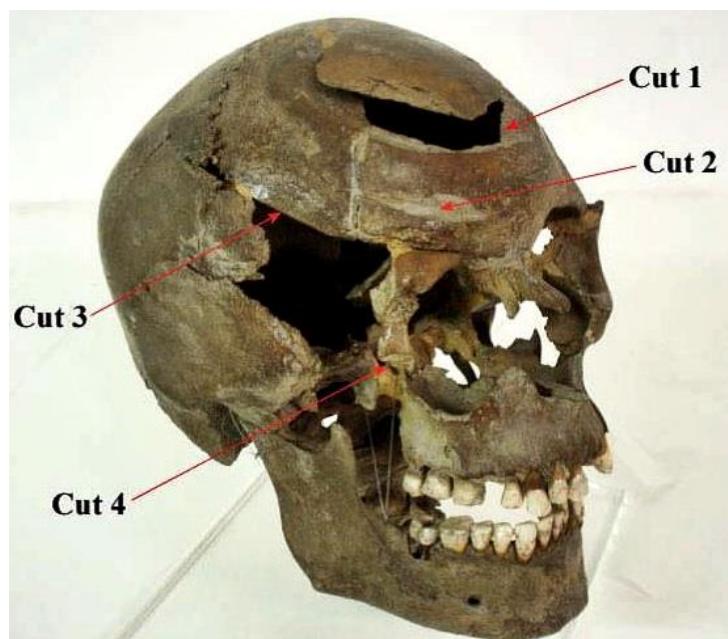
Classical texts are of assistance in forming an understanding of how important a human head was for the Celts. Strabo described this activity, basing his account on the writing of Poseidonius who visited southern Gaul in about 90 BC and appears to have witnessed the act:

‘In addition to their witlessness they (the Celts) possess a trait of barbarous savagery which is especially peculiar to the northern people, for when they leave the battlefield they fasten to the necks of their horses the heads of their enemies and on arriving home they nail up this spectacle at the entrance to their houses . . . they embalmed the heads of distinguished enemies with cedar oil and used to make a display of them to strangers and were unwilling to let them be redeemed even for their weight in gold’ (Tierney 1960).

*Right: A triumphant British warrior holding up in joy the decapitated head of a Roman soldier.*



Strabo’s text refers to an observation in Gaul, but there is archaeological evidence from Britain consistent with the curation of heads (Ralph 2007). At All Cannings Cross, Wiltshire, a Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlement, 32 skull fragments were excavated which have been interpreted as evidence of head hunting (Cunnington 1923) and a decapitated skeleton was excavated at Stanwick, Yorkshire (Wheeler 1954). The Osteological Analysis of the Stanwick Skull undertaken by Lauren McIntyre (2011) found that the individual was a male, aged between 25-50 years. He had suffered several severe cuts that were consistent with a fatal edged weapon with four cuts to the skull before decapitation.



*Left: The Stanwick Skull showing four cuts to the skull before decapitation. Courtesy of the University of Sheffield.*

The practice of severing human heads was eventually transferred to carving stone heads by the Celts, which could have been a substitute for the real thing. However, given the difficulties in dating stone heads, many of which were found in disturbed contexts, it is uncertain how many examples of Celtic stone heads occur.



One of the most famous and impressive stone Celtic heads comes from Mšecké Žehrovice, near Slaný, Czech Republic. It was found in 1943 in an iron-foundry and sanctuary. It dates from about 150-50 BC and has a 'cigarette hole' in its mouth, a mysterious feature which occurs on Celtic heads over a wide area of Europe including the British Isles.

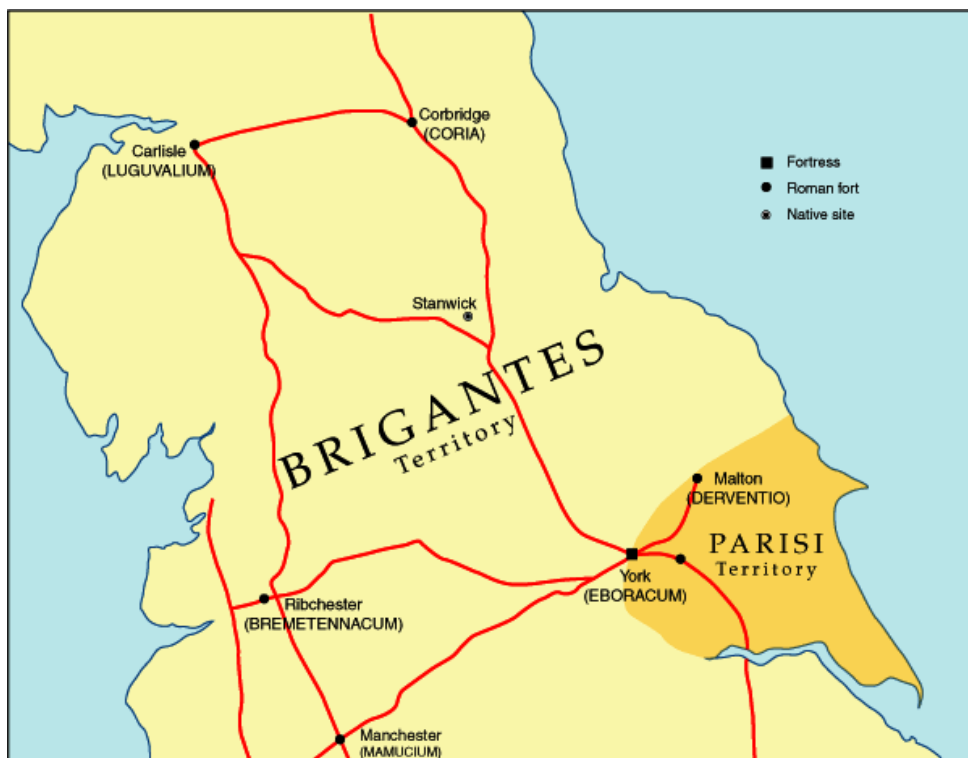
*Right: Stone Celtic head from Mšecké Žehrovice, near Slaný, Czech Republic. Ever since its discovery in 1943, the stone head became one of the most photographed, reproduced and published. It is on display in the Prague National Museum.*



The large number of stone heads that have been found in Northern England could be attributed to a continuity of this custom even after the Celts had passed into history. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that, and in particular Yorkshire which was once occupied by the Celtic tribe of the Brigantes (Cavendish 1993), the tradition of sculpting carved heads continued. Although the post-Celtic heads are unlikely to have the same religious meaning once held by them.



*Left: An artist reconstruction of the appearance of a Celtic man with full masculine and curly hair based on Celtic skulls found in archaeological excavations. He is wearing a flanged twisted gold torc with elaborate ends around his neck.*



*Right: Map of Northern England showing Brigantes Territory during the Roman conquest in about the years 69-71*



However, the following humorous story is an example of being over confident about stone heads; care should be taken, not only in attributing them, but also in dating them.

## A Museum in Yorkshire in the late 1990s

The tour of the museum led to a display of the Iron Age. Taking pride of place were two recently donated stone 'Celtic' heads. The guide paused to explain what archaeologists had implied about the ritual beliefs and practices, from the objects on display. At the back of the small party an elderly man strained to look at the carvings. As the guide finished her talk, he went to the front to have a better view. 'Ah,' he exclaimed his face lighting up. The guide looked pleased at his evident interest. 'Aren't they nice?' she asked. 'Aye,' came the reply. 'Wondered what had happened to 'em.' 'Yes, wondered what had 'appended to them after t' war 'ad ended.' 'I'm sorry I don't understand?' 'After m' brother was called-up in t' war we lost track of what 'ad happened to 'em.' 'You mean you've seen them before?' 'Seen um? It was m' brother what carved them.' Members of the party began to shuffle uneasily and the tour guide appeared not to know what to say. 'Surely you're mistaken? These heads are two thousand years old.' 'No, m' brother carved 'em in t' war, and we used to push 'em about in a wheel barrow, to raise money for t' war effort. Can't you see? That one's Hitler and t' other one's Mussolini!

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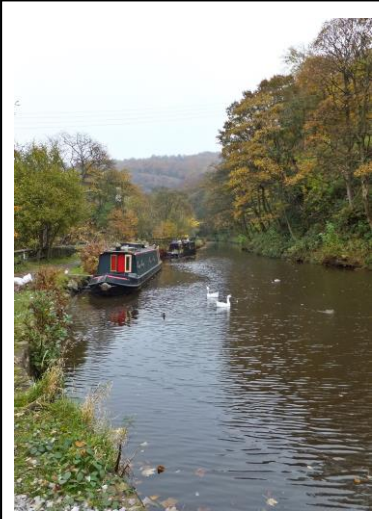
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The front cover is of the Rochdale Canal near the Stubbing Wharf, Hebden Bridge. The Rochdale Canal crosses the rugged heights of the Pennines from Manchester to Sowerby Bridge. A short walk along its towpath is a peaceful place to escape the crowds. Autumn is a great time to enjoy the stunning views of the woodlands with their magnificent display of red and gold leaves. There are also lots of locks that boats have to navigate which make a walk more interesting.

The Rochdale Canal re-opened to boats in 2002 after an ambitious volunteer restoration project that brought an end to more than 50 years without through navigation.

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