

The Brigantes And the Mam Tor Settlement

Exhibited in the Castleton Centre is a very important carved stone head, said to be Brigantia, goddess of the Mam Tor Brigantes.

Over 3000 years ago a “splinter group” of Celts left their tribe in Northumbria and came to live on Mam Tor the large hill dominating the western end of our lovely Hope Valley. Mam Tor is often called “The Shivering Mountain” because of the continuing erosion of the face, the part that looks like a quarry.

On the top of Mam Tor the Brigantes built their settlement, enclosing about 16.5 acres within double earthworks. Some of these earthworks are still clearly visible on the north east side of Mam Tor.

Over many years several excavations have taken place on Mam Tor revealing the postholes of the Brigantes crude huts and a few bits of pottery etcetera.

In the early 1970’s a carved stone head turned up in a rockery in the garden of Rose Cottage, Waterside, Castleton. Most of the people who saw the head thought it was a gargoyle that had rolled down from Peveril Castle.

That is, until the head was seen in 1975 by Miss Greatly, an archeologist from Manchester University. Miss Greatly became very excited and rushed around the village trying to find out who the head belonged to. This she eventually did!

After a considerable amount of time and trouble researching the head Miss Greatly came to the conclusion it was a very important discovery, and more likely than not, was Brigantia, the goddess of the Mam Tor Brigantes, probably with the status of “queen”.

Look at the carved head carefully and note the following clues; her left eye is open, her right eye is closed, like the winking eye of an enchantress, her thick sensuous lips and the weathered remains of her hair more apparent on her left side.

The head was discovered only a few metres away from the Russet Well, a natural resurgence of pure water seeming to come from the depths of the earth and that never went dry. (The Wells average flow year round is about 9000 litres per minute)

Bearing in mind the lack of water on Mam Tor, Miss Greatly suggested what better place could the Brigantes have found to worship their goddess and perform their fertility rites about 3000 years ago.

© PCH. 2010.(Chairman CHS)