

## ***Witchcraft roots...another witch* ©**

It seems that some people enjoyed the text about witch archetypes in English folklore. So, prompted by some of the lovely crystal balls for sale at the Enchanted Market, I thought we could have a look at one of the most famous witches in English history – Ursula Southell. Ursula who? That was her real name, but she is probably more famous under her attributed married name of Mother Shipton.

### **Mother Shipton – the history**

Ursula Southell (or Southill) was born in Knaresborough (Yorkshire) in 1488 or, to be precise, she was actually born in a cave on the banks of the River Nidd, just outside the town. At her birth, the midwife claimed to smell sulphur and to hear the sound of thunder as the baby was born. Old wives' tales, I hear you say, but it is interesting that the cave was later discovered to contain a mineral well that has a petrifying effect, ie it coats ordinary items with a stone covering, much like stalagmites and stalactites.

Ursula herself didn't have a very good start in life. Her mother, Agatha was only 15 years old and would not say who Ursula's father was, not even to local magistrates. Ursula was reported to be an ugly and deformed baby – so much so that local people thought that she was a child of the Devil. She had a large, crooked nose, twisted legs and a bent back; she was teased by other local children. For the first few years of her life, Ursula was raised in the cave by her mother, but she decided to go to a convent and her child was taken in by a local family.

Ursula grew up around Knaresborough and spent many days living in the cave where she was born. She studied the forest and the plants, making remedies and potions for local folk, in the tradition of wise women in history.

In 1512, Ursula married a carpenter from York, Tobias Shipton. He died a few years later, before they could have children, but after that, she began to divine the future and she became the most famous soothsayer, prophet and witch in England until her death in Clifton in Yorkshire in 1561, at an age of 73 years.

## Mother Shipton's prophecies

As well as creating herbal medicines, Ursula had the gift of predicting the future, first with small premonitions, but then with greater and greater power. She was dubbed the "Knaresborough Prophetess" or the "Yorkshire Sibyl" and she was able to support herself by telling the future and issuing warnings.

Since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, there have been over 50 editions of her prophecies, some of which told her life and the others concentrate on her sayings.

One of the earliest books was by a woman, Joanne Waller, who died shortly after the book's publication at the age of 94 years – which puts the author in the right time frame to have listened to Mother Shipton actually make her prophecies.

There have been many accounts of Mother Shipton's predictions, both at the time and in today's world. Here are some reported examples.

1. The *Cardinal Wolsey* prophecy is very well known, because he tried to arrest her for witchcraft. When they confronted each other, Mother Shipton predicted that the cardinal "would never enter the town of York". Sure enough, as Wolsey rode towards York, he was arrested by King Henry VIII's soldiers and was taken back to London to face a charge of high treason.
2. Another well-known prediction related to the *Great Fire of London*, not due to occur until a century later, when Mother Shipton predicted that "disaster fill the world with woe, in London, in Primrose Hill".
3. Many students of Ursula's prophecies have correlated her words with *20<sup>th</sup> century technologies*. For example, Mother Shipton foresaw a time "when boats like fishes, swim beneath the sea", "a carriage without horse shall go", "in water, iron shall float, as easy as a wooden boat" and "around the world, men's thoughts will fly, in the twinkling of an eye". Are these prophecies from the 16<sup>th</sup> century a foreshadowing of vehicles, submarines, ships and the internet?

## Crystal divination

Far be it from me to suggest that anyone can have the divination or scrying abilities of Mother Shipton, but here is a fairly simple crystal divination ritual for you.

**What you will need:** a clear glass bowl filled with spring or mineral water, a white taper candle and a quartz crystal. If possible, do this spell during the evening and use a rough quartz crystal: not tumbled.

1. Place the crystal in the bowl, so that the water covers it.
2. Set the candle just behind the bowl and light it.
3. With your right index finger, slowly stir the water.
4. As you stir, chant, "Blessed spirits of the night, Bless me now with second sight".
5. Focus your attention on the water and it should start to cloud over with a fine mist.
6. When the mist starts to flow out of the bowl, stop stirring and concentrate on the crystal in the bowl.
7. Chant, "Fire and water, crystal clear, Let the visions now appear".
8. Visions of the future may now appear and when they start to fade, make a note of what you saw, perhaps in your Book of Shadows.
9. Put out the candle and sleep with the crystal under your pillow, because more visions may come to you as dreams.

