
ANTIQUES

FOR EVERYONE WINTER

ART, DECORATIVE & INTERIORS

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PRESS RELEASE

VELVET BLACK AND HIGHLY COLLECTABLE – THE WHITBY JET EXHIBITION AT THE NEC REVEALS ITS DARKEST SECRETS AND UNDYING APPEAL

20 September 2015

An exhibition of Whitby Jet, being shown to the public for the first time, will be the main feature of the Antiques for Everyone Winter Fair which takes place at the NEC Birmingham from 19-22 November.

It tells the story of the world's largest fashioned and rough Jet specimen collection of over 200 pieces and will be brought to the fair by Whitby Jet specialist jewellers W Hamond who were established in 1860 and have over the years amassed one of the most diverse collections of antique Whitby Jet on the planet, (including the largest single piece of Whitby Jet ever found at a staggering 21 feet long). It is truly a unique collection of period designs which have been passed down through the generations.

Antiques for Everyone Fair Show Manager Dan Leyland said: "We are very excited to be staging this unique display of antique Whitby Jet at the winter fair. It will be fabulous to have such an extensive range of brooches, locket, pendant and chains, earrings and bracelets at the NEC and it is testament to the enduring passion for this remarkable gem."



Dark, mysterious and mesmerizing, formed millions of years ago Whitby Jet has held a fascination and attraction for mankind from its discovery in early pre-history through to the present day. This stunning exhibition not only embraces its historical links

to the world-famous Bram Stoker *Dracula* novel, but also to the large ostentatious designs of the Victorian era. In terms of its quality, depth of colour and polish Whitby Jet reigns supreme amongst all known Jets the world over.

What is Jet and why is Whitby jet so special?

Whitby Jet is a gleaming black-velvet fossil about 180 million years old, which emerged from the local cliffs and has been skillfully transformed in items of beauty – brooches, lockets and earrings. It derives from one ancient species of tree *Araucaria Araucana* similar to Monkey Puzzle, which sank into the seabed millions of years ago in the Jurassic period. This explains why jet feels so light because it is wood not stone. The hardest, purest, saltwater jet comes from a seven-and-a-half-mile stretch of coast around Whitby. The unique geomorphology of the area created Whitby Jet, characterised by a very deep black colour and homogenous appearance. It is harder than other forms of jet so local craftsmen can give it a high polish when worked.

Why does Whitby Jet have such a timeless appeal?



Jet was used by people in the Bronze Age to make jewellery especially necklaces. The Romans used it to make hairpins and earrings; referred to as 'black amber' they believed it to have medicinal properties. It was also popular amongst the Vikings.

So Whitby Jet has been used to make jewellery and body adornment for thousands of years right up to the present day. It can be turned on a lathe, but it cannot be mass-produced. Consequently it has never been cheap. This, combined with its rarity value, makes it attractive for collectors.

Beware of imitations!

Other pretenders throughout history have tried to pass themselves off as Whitby Jet. Black glass, also known as 'French Jet' or 'Vauxhall Jet', was very black and shiny, but much heavier than Whitby Jet and therefore not suitable for big statement pieces. Another is bog oak from Ireland but it lacks the deep black colour and polish of Whitby

Jet. While the first semi-synthetic plastic, a derivative of rubber mixed with sulphur 'vulcanite / also know as 'ebonite', came close it was still no substitute for the real thing.

When was wearing Whitby Jet all the rage?

Whitby Jet achieved its height of fashion during the Victorian era popularised by Queen Victoria when she wore it in mourning following the death of her beloved Prince Albert. Her royal patronage greatly increased demand for the gemstone. Whitby became something of a tourist destination; fashionable Crinoline-clad ladies would buy pieces of handmade Jet jewellery as a souvenir of their visit.



At its zenith in the early 1870s there were about 200 manufacturing shops and approximately 1500 people employed in the Jet trade in and around Whitby. The style for fuller dresses so beloved of the Victorian, led to larger pieces of jewellery being produced. Whitby Jet was the ideal material given its distinctive colour yet very lightweight nature.

A wealth of designs was created by the town's workshops ranging from delicate floral designs to mythical and classic motifs. Facetted beads and bold geometric shapes were also popular at the time. The sombre colour of Whitby Jet proved perfect at mirroring the deep mourning felt by Queen Victoria and her court following the death of Prince Albert from influenza on 14 December 1861, aged just 42, but this sad association meant that for many years Whitby Jet was associated with mourning. By the end of the century tastes had changed and Whitby Jet fell out of favour.



Whitby – a seaside tourist destination or a Gothic mystery?

A traditional seaside town with a ruined Gothic abbey on one headline, quaint cobbled streets, sandy beaches, fine Victorian terraces and a colourful, maritime history.’ But behind this genteel façade there lurked another more spine-chilling aspect as the town was one of the settings for Bram Stoker’s *‘Dracula’* which even today brings in Goth tourists by the hearse-load.



Taking inspiration from the steeping slopes of Whitby Abbey, the churchyard, and the town’s strong connections to folklore, Bram Stoker visited North Yorkshire’s seaside town in 1890 to research the ethereal backdrop to his novel. It is said that the author discovered the name "Dracula" at the old public library. There is now an annual Goth Festival which takes place in the town twice yearly around spring and Halloween.

Classic vintage but with a modern appeal

Black, shiny and seductive Whitby Jet has continued its undying appeal up to the present day. The 2002 movie *Possession*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow, featured W Hamond's Whitby boutique as a backdrop to a forbidden love affair, while an antique Whitby Jet brooch was central to the storyline.



Three years ago the gem was seen on the red carpet when W.Hamond joined forces with British fashion designer Scot Henshaw to fashion an intricate spider and cobweb dress worn by Donna Air for the premier of 'The Amazing Spiderman'. The expensive design featured Whitby Jet and diamonds woven together around a little black number.

More recently still W. Hamond has come up with a Gothic collection which display motifs echoing the spooky nature of the Gothic horror novel with jewellery designs including the Whitby Jet Spider collection and a hand-crafted signet ring and matching pendant which are replicas of the Dracula family crest. Through inventing these contemporary designs which pay homage to legend and history, Whitby Jet has managed to maintain its appeal for contemporary buyers.



About the Whitby Jet exhibition at the NEC

Antiques for Everyone Fair Director Mary Claire Boyd said: "We are very excited to be staging this unique display of Whitby Jet at the winter fair and we are delighted to welcome W Hamond the longest established Jet Manufacturers. With such a long and illustrious history going back over 150 years, it is a testament to their continuing passion and enthusiasm for this remarkable gem."

The fair is one of the largest of its kind in the UK and is now in its 30th year, attracting collectors and enthusiasts from all over the world who come to purchase items from around 230 specialist dealers. There's something for everyone at the fair which now includes more decorative and contemporary items with prices starting from around £10 and rising to several thousand.

The fair remains one of the most important events in Britain for pottery, porcelain and glass collectors and will also feature art deco, antique and decorative furniture, treen, silver, maps, prints, armour, dolls, bears, watercolours, oils, jewellery and vintage clothing. Buyers can purchase with confidence as all items have been vetted and datelined meaning that they have been independently authenticated by leading industry experts.

Antiques for Everyone will be at the NEC, Halls 17-19, from 19th-22nd November. Admission costs from £12 and includes free parking and a visitor guide. For further information and to book advance ticket visit www.antiquesforeveryone.co.uk

Ends

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