



1890



## Bram Stoker, Whitby and Dracula

Have you heard of the story of Dracula? Perhaps you know that some of it was set in Whitby. It was during a holiday in Whitby in 1890 that the novelist Bram Stoker was inspired to write the Dracula novel.

Irish-born Stoker was ill as a child, and to amuse him his mother told him supernatural tales where a vampire may have been featured. When he grew up, he studied in Dublin and developed his writing through non-fiction and theatre reviews, then writing two novels. Stoker became business manager to an actor called Henry Irving, who was impressed with his work. The two also became long-term friends.

It was Irving who suggested a restful holiday in Whitby for Stoker following a tiring and disappointing theatre tour. Stoker took lodgings on Whitby's West Cliff and was enchanted with the stunning landscape. He started writing the novel, which was eventually to become 'Dracula'.

Although he originally set his novel in Austria, Stoker soon realised that Whitby had the perfect backdrop to set his story and increase the drama. For setting some of his novel, he was able to draw on the eeriness of the ruined Benedictine Abbey, St Mary's Church, with its ancient gravestones and its bats, and the local legend of a white lady flitting by the Abbey windows.

During research at Whitby Library, Stoker learned about a 15<sup>th</sup> century prince called Vlad Tepes who impaled his enemies on wooden stakes. Vlad was also known as *dracula*, which means 'the devil' in the Wallachian language. Stoker was able to use the characteristics of Vlad to develop his character Count Dracula.

The first version of Stoker's story was a play for Irving called 'The Undead'. Irving was unimpressed. Stoker carried out further research and after six years the novel 'Dracula' was produced. The research helped him set the scene in Transylvania, where much of the action was set, although he never visited the area himself. The story is told through letters, diaries, newspaper cuttings and a ship's log, providing different viewpoints.

Whitby comes to the fore in the story when the ship 'Demeter' runs aground in fog without crew and passengers, but with only a sailor lashed to the mast; the vampire Dracula jumps ashore in the form of a large black dog. Stoker's story

drew on the reality of a Russian ship running aground under the East Cliff a few years earlier.

The story develops and Count Dracula sucks the blood of women in the plot. Eventually Dracula is followed back to Transylvania is defeated by the character Dr Van Helsing, who kills him by putting a stake through his heart and cutting his head off.



## QUESTIONS

1. What is the name of the novelist who was inspired in Whitby to write 'Dracula'?
2. When did he come to Whitby for a holiday?
3. Where was Stoker born and what did his mother do to amuse him when he was ill as a child?
4. What job did his friend Henry Irving do?
5. Why did Stoker come to Whitby for a holiday?
6. Describe the backdrop that inspired Stoker to set the novel 'Dracula'.

7. Who does Stoker base his character Count Dracula on?

8. How does this person kill his enemies?

9. When was the novel 'Dracula' actually produced?

10. If Stoker had never visited Transylvania, how did he know about it?

11. In the story, how does Dracula come to the shore in Whitby?

12. How does Dracula survive, and then how does he die?



**Find out more:**

- Ruins of Whitby Abbey, Whitby YO22 4LT
- Whitby Ghost Walks, <https://www.whitbywalks.com/>
- Whitby Goth weekends, twice per year, <http://www.whitbygothweekend.co.uk/>
- 'Dracula' by Bram Stoker (1897, many subsequent editions)