



## Water in Turner's Yorkshire

Let the rivers & waterfalls  
guide you...

This is a Turner Trails downloadable guide. You can discover  
more about Turner's Yorkshire at [www.yorkshire.com/turner](http://www.yorkshire.com/turner).

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# Water in Turner's Yorkshire

Turner was usually found walking or riding along the banks of rivers and streams while searching for viewpoints to sketch from. Whether drawing castles, churches or historic houses, his vantage points are often looking along a nearby river towards his subject. Sometimes the water itself was his focus and rivers and waterfalls literally flow through many of Turner's Yorkshire sketches and paintings. He included them to link the different elements of the landscape together and take the viewer's eye from foreground to his subject in the background.

## Interesting Fact...

### Water, Water Everywhere

1816 was one of the wettest summers on record. Turner made one of his longer Yorkshire tours during this year of rains so his encounters with water were more than he bargained for. He had to fight downpours to sketch but this meant Yorkshire's swollen rivers and surging waterfalls were at their most spectacular.



*Gordale Scar*



*Mossdale Falls*

He approached one of his very first sketches in Yorkshire in exactly this way when he drew Rotherham Minster and Bridge from the River Don. Here water was periphery to the main subject yet essential to make the composition work by holding the different elements of the picture together in an aesthetic and pleasing way. If you'd like to find out more about how Turner included water in his sketches and paintings of castles, please see **Castles in Turner's Yorkshire**.



*Plumpton Rocks*



*Aysgarth Falls © Si Homfray*

But Turner also chose water as a Yorkshire subject in its own right from the coast between the Humber and Whitby, to the waterfalls of the Dales. Please download the **Turner's Coastal Yorkshire podcast** to listen to Turner expert David Hill and watercolour artist Ashley Jackson discuss Turner's work of the Yorkshire coast.

Here, we'll turn to Turner's studies of freshwater subjects. He was particularly fond of waterfalls and visited at least eleven in Yorkshire, including Aysgarth Falls, Colby Fall, Cotter Force, Gordale Scar, Hardraw Force, Janet's Foss, Mill Gill Force, Mossdale Falls, Thornton Force, West Burton Falls and Whitfield Gill Fall; some of them he even stopped at twice.



*High Mill*





*West Burton Falls*



*The view from the entrance of Dow Cave*

Turner would often clamber down the treacherous approaches to the falls to find the best viewpoints. At Aysgarth he worked his way down to the lowest and most impressive fall of the three while at Gordale he sketched at the foot of the fall that drops into the gorge. His watercolour of Hardraw looks up to the tallest waterfall in England from the bottom of the valley below, which was then almost devoid of trees. In Turner's watercolour of Mossdale Falls, one of the remotest spots he visited in Yorkshire, Mossdale Beck cascades over rocks in a series of falls that carve a path down the north flank of Widdale Fell.

Turner was also keenly interested in the rocks the waterfalls tumbled over. He closely observed the geology, then a new science that he shared an interest in with his friend and patron Walter Fawkes of Farnley Hall. He accurately depicted the limestone strata at Aysgarth, Thornton and West Burton waterfalls. At Thornton he picked out the vertical slates while at West Burton he drew the way the limestone was knitted together by wavy horizontal joints that made the water fan out in a transparent veil.

## Did you know?

### Ice Age Lake

Glaciers created Malham Tarn over 10,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age. A retreating glacier left a long mound of rocks and stones in its wake so creating a dam. The tarn filled up to form the highest glacial lake in England.



*Cotter Force*



*Malham Cove*



*Mossdale Falls © Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge*

Rivers appear again and again in Turner's sketches. He seems to have been particularly taken by three Yorkshire rivers, the Ure, Washburn and Wharfe, picking out particular features. He visited these rivers many times while staying with Fawkes at Farnley Hall in Wharfedale. The Ure is the river that flows through Aysgarth Falls and features in many of his other subjects such as Askrigg, Boroughbridge and Hackfall. The Washburn is the main focus of a watercolour with Dob Park Lodge on a hill in the distance. His subjects along the Wharfe range from the Strid, where the river narrows and the water rushes in great force, eroding softer rock to form a deep chasm, to High Mill at Addingham.

## Interesting Fact...

### Fishing for a View

Turner not only liked water to sketch, he was also a keen angler. As he was often as happy fishing as he was drawing, perhaps this was why he chose so many viewpoints by rivers.



Turner also appreciated the way York is built along the Ouse and sketched two views of Ouse Bridge, one with the Minster in the background and the other with St William's Chapel, which was demolished in 1809. You can also follow in Turner's footsteps along the Ouse and around York with a **podstroll self-guided trail** you can download and look at on an iPod or smartphone.

## Interesting Fact...

### England's Longest Waterfall

Hardraw Force is reputed to be the longest single drop waterfall in England. Water pours down in one continuous cascade over 100 foot or 30 metres high.



*Ouse Bridge*



*Hardraw Force*

Turner's remaining water subjects in Yorkshire are of a variety of places that inspired his imagination as he came across them during one of his many tours of the county. He visited Malham twice, first sketching the water-formed Malham Cove in 1808, then drawing Malham Tarn in 1816. On a guided trip underground into Dow Cave he made a series of animated sketches by candlelight to a backdrop of the underground streams. One of Turner's finest watercolours is a tranquil scene looking across Semer Water near Countersett.

Turner also found inspiration to sketch water subjects in two of Yorkshire's landscape gardens. In 1797, the 1st Earl of Harewood commissioned Turner to produce two large oil paintings of Plumpton Rocks near Knaresborough. Both show the rocks mirrored in the lake at their base with two men and a rowing boat.

Turner visited Hackfall in 1816 when it was one of the finest and largest wild gardens in Britain. Purchased by John Aislabie, famous for his landscaping work at nearby Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, whose son, William, used the River Ure to great effect to create a woodland garden in the 1750s full of springs, ponds and waterfalls. Turner characteristically found a viewpoint close to the river where he was able to look along the Ure to a folly called Mowbray Castle.

Turner's Hackfall watercolour typifies how he was inspired by water. The river runs into the distance to draw the eye into the picture and to the folly. The figure of a woman strolls beside the river towards the viewer. If one thing defines a Turner Yorkshire viewpoint, it is this presence of water.



*Hackfall*



*The Strid*



*Semer Water*



*Simmer Lake, near Askrigg*  
© The Trustees of the British Museum

## Did you know?

### Robin Hood's Fall

Kevin Costner appears at two Turner viewpoints in Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves. Robin's fight with Little John was filmed at Aysgarth Falls, while the waterfall where Maid Marian catches Robin bathing is Hardraw Force.



## Visiting Turner's Yorkshire Watery Places

Check the Turner Trails website for information on directions, opening hours and further details for each. You can click on the following links to go straight to the web page.

[Askrigg](#) (for Colby Fall, Mill Gill and Whitfield Gill) , [Aysgarth Falls](#), [Boroughbridge](#), [Cotter Force](#), [Dob Park Lodge](#), [Dow Cave](#), [Gordale Scar/Janet's Foss](#), [Hackfall](#), [Hardraw Force](#), [High Mill](#), [Malham Cove](#), [Malham Tarn](#), [Mossdale Falls](#), [Ouse Bridge](#), [Plumpton Rocks](#), [Semer Water](#), [The Strid](#), [Thornton Force](#) and [West Burton Falls](#).

You can find Turner Trails benches at the following watery places – Askrigg, Aysgarth Falls, Boroughbridge, Dob Park Lodge, Hackfall, Hardraw Force, High Mill, Mossdale Falls, Plumpton Rocks, Semer Water, The Strid, West Burton Falls.

There are panels giving more details of Turner's interest in watery places at or near Aysgarth Falls, Boroughbridge, Cotter Force, Dow Cave/Kettlewell, Plumpton Rocks, The Strid and Thornton Force.

## Interesting Fact...

### Devil's Throw

The legendary Carlow Stone at the north end of Semer Water appears in the foreground of Turner's watercolour of the lake. It supposedly landed here when the Devil tried to throw it from Addleborough to Crag End.



Boroughbridge



Askrigg



Dob Park Lodge



Malham Tarn