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## 48 Gilsland Spa

**Theme:** Heritage and mining

### Location

48 Gilsland — Spa waters and Popping Stone. Park in the car park next to the hotel and walk down to the river [NY 636 678]. The Popping Stone is 600m upstream. [NY 63554 68166]

### Description

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, before going to the seaside became popular, people went to a spa for their health. Two springs, one sulphurous, the other iron, in the valley of the River Irthing near Gilsland, attracted locals and visitors alike.

Bath houses once stood beside the river but all that remains of that early tourist trade today is a re-built stone well edifice. It has a modern basin and pipe that dribbles clear water which smells strongly of rotten eggs and turns white when exposed to the air. 200 years ago people came to 'take these waters', drinking a glass or two a day and immersing themselves in it. According to Augustus Bozzi Granville, in his 1840 guide to the Spas of England, Gilsland's spring water was every bit as good as Harrogate's, (but he thought the facilities and qualities of the local population were very 'so-so'). He did, however, appreciate the natural beauty of the Irthing gorge, as did Sir Walter Scott. It was here, in 1797, at the Popping Stone, that Scott is reputed to have successfully proposed to Miss Charlotte Carpenter. Sadly, not everyone respects the natural and literary history of this place; in 2021 the Popping Stone(s) were bulldozed aside so trees could be felled. They have been returned, but the site is not the same.

The relevance of geology to these places of pilgrimage? The groundwater that feeds the two springs percolates through Carboniferous shales in the cliffs above. The shales contain the minerals iron sulphide and iron sulphate, the water dissolves these and brings them to the surface via a geological fault. The Popping Stones have an equally prosaic explanation; they are Carboniferous sandstones, rocks that are common in the cliffs nearby, but their rounded shapes may owe something to the hand of man, as well as river erosion.

### Photographs

(Photo 48-1) 48 The Popping Stone beside the River Irthing at Gilsland.

(Photo 48-2) 48 Gilsland Spa.





*(Photo 48-1) The Popping Stone beside the River Irthing at Gilsland.*



*(Photo 48-2) Gilsland Spa.*