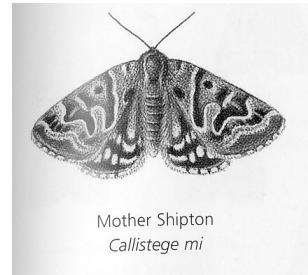


Common Blue and Mother Shipton

I am writing this on the 19th May and have just been for my regular short walk down to Mullock Bridge. The grass verge between Lower Mullock and the bridge is covered with flowers – red clover, bird’s foot trefoil and buttercups. As I was wondering to myself “When will I see the first common blue butterfly this year?” – there it was. A most delicious shade of dark forget-me-not blue, in perfect condition, perched on a bright yellow buttercup – a truly beautiful sight. I then saw four more – all males and all apparently freshly emerged. They have probably spent their whole lives so far on this grass verge – they would have hatched from eggs laid on bird’s foot trefoil in September or October, the small caterpillar would then have hibernated over the winter, carried on eating in the early spring, then passed into the chrysalis state in April or early May. The adults may well disperse now, but wherever there is a plentiful supply of their food plant there are always likely to be a few around.

Also fluttering around in the grass was a Mother Shipton moth – the first one I have ever seen, but immediately recognisable. It has a distinctive pattern on the wings, which is thought to resemble the face of a witch. Mother Shipton was a famous 16th century witch and prophetess from Yorkshire (Mother Shipton’s caves are a tourist attraction near Knaresborough) hence the name. The caterpillar feeds on various clovers and trefoils, so it also may have been born and bred on the same grass verge.



Rosemary Royle