

Selected Tales of Lancashire

retold by
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The White Dobbie

Bardsea (Old Lancashire)

Bardsea doesn't get much snow, but in 1789, it was a foot thick on the ground. Alice's sister, Mary, had come to stay with her greyhound, Prince, in the tiny cottage next to the church. It was a Friday night. Alice was in the back making pancakes for supper and Mary had let Prince out for a run.

After a few minutes, Mary opened the door and shouted, "Prince, here boy!" There was a howl. Mary screamed. Alice ran to the door and peered out, shivering in the icy air. There was nothing there. She looked at her sister.

"I heard the White Dobbie," Mary whispered, "I saw the white hare...it had eyes like hellfire and ragged ears. Then, I heard his footsteps crunching on the snow... and Prince howled and ran off on to the sands."

"Oh come on now Mary, that's just talk. I'll get you a brandy."

The next night, Alice was called to ring the passing bell at Bardsea church. It was a black night. There was no moon and no stars. She only had a tiny lantern. The flickering shadows made it hard to see the rope. She found it and pulled. Once. Twice. Something white sprang across the tower. It was a white hare.

Then she saw him: The White Dobbie, in a large hood and rough cloak, a gaunt figure with hungry eyes. She heard his thin whisper,

“Who for this time?”

There was a bang as someone pushed open the church door. Alice saw the scraggy white hare with its bloodshot eyes leap inside the man’s cape. Her lantern sputtered and went out.

“Are you okay? The bell stopped ringing.”

It was Mary. Alice didn’t answer. She could still see him, a pale glow in the corner. She watched as he drifted towards the door, passed Mary, and out into the graveyard, where he melted into the shadows.



Icy Fingers

Garstang

It happened near Garstang in 1852. His name was Humphrey Dobson.

He'd spent an evening at the Frances Arms, sharing ghost stories. When he mounted his horse to ride home his friend Jimmy shouted, "Watch out for that Boggart o'the Brook!"

The night was still and the moon was bright, but as he approached the bridge over the brook, a tunnel of trees plunged him into shadows. At the very moment his horse's hooves clipped the bridge stones, a high pitched shriek split the air. His horse leapt forward. He felt an icy arm glide around his waist and something cold lean into his back. He screamed. The arm around him tightened its grip.

His mare galloped on, her ears flat. With his last ounce of courage he put his hand down to try and loosen the creature's hold; and grasped a hand of bones. He tried to prise the fingers away but they were locked. There was a ripple of laughter by his left ear.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw a skull bleached by moonlight, shrouded in a billowing hood.

At the next corner, his mare stumbled. Humphrey was thrown sideways. He heard a crack, and then nothing.

When he came round, his head was throbbing. The sun was just coming up and his horse was grazing a few feet away. He lifted his hand to his temple and found his hair sticky with blood.

The next Friday he told Jimmy. Jimmy laughed and said it was the drink talking, but the man behind the bar caught Humphrey's eye,
"You're not the first to tell that story. A young woman was murdered down there a good few years ago. You're lucky your horse fell."



The Headless Woman

Longridge

It was late. Around the hearth in the White Bull at Longridge, Bill had insisted that his stories of ghosts and ghouls were true, but Gabriel was having none of it.

"You're mad, all of you. All talk. All talk. Too much talking. I'm off!"

He stood up and staggered to the door, stepped outside and took a deep, cold breath. The quickest way home was through the woods and over the moor, where the track would lead him down to Thornley.

He moved swiftly through the trees, his mind full of the flittin' boggart, Peg O'the Well's ghost and the black cockerel sent by the devil himself. He tried to focus on the path in front of him, but when a branch caught his coat sleeve, he jumped as though Peg herself had reached out and grabbed his arm.

Soon he found himself on open moorland. As he walked, he looked up at the sky and for a few moments his thoughts lost their grip. He saw only the milky way arching over the heavens, the thickly clustered stars hanging like lace against an indigo sky. Then he caught a flicker of movement below.

There was a dark figure shuffling and shifting from side to side about fifty yards ahead. Gabriel shivered, but as he looked he saw that it was only an old woman, swaddled in a thick shawl blanket and huge bonnet, carrying a large basket.

He ran to catch her up and shouted,

"It's okay, I'm from the village. My name's Gabriel. I'll carry your basket if you like?"

He grinned to himself. "No knowing what ghosts and goblins might be about, eh?"

She didn't answer, but held out the covered basket. He took it. A rasping voice said,

"Thank you. That's very kind."

But the odd thing was, the voice wasn't coming from the old lady. A screech of laughter made him turn. It seemed to be coming from the basket. He pulled off the cover. Inside was a human head, it's crinkled old face looking straight into his eyes. It grinned. Gabriel screamed and dropped the basket.

The head rolled out, matted hair and ghastly teeth chasing each other over and over. The old woman pushed past him and stooped to pick it up. Her bonnet was empty. She had no head.

Gabriel began to run. Something flew past him. She'd thrown the head. It landed a few feet in front of him but he couldn't stop himself. He jumped, but it bounced up, it's teeth snapping at his ankles. It missed and he carried on running, the head rolling and jumping along behind him. He could hear its gnashing teeth and shrieking laughter.

The track became steeper. Loose rocks forced him to slow down, but the boggart's head was bouncing higher and further. It passed him and changed course, curving back into his path. Gabriel closed his eyes and leapt as high as he could. He landed safely beyond the rocks and raced to the bottom where the stream ran along the valley floor.

His Grandma had once told him that ghosts and boggarts don't like water. With that thought, he didn't head for the bridge, but waded in. The water was so cold his feet and legs went numb. On the other side

he hobbled a few steps, looking back. The head was caught in the scrubby grass on the other side, it's eyes still looking straight at him. He heard a last cackle of laughter as he turned and picked up speed.

At home, damp and shaking, he collapsed into the chair by the fire and told his wife, Elizabeth, that he wouldn't be going out so much any more. She was curious, and prodded him to explain why. When he finally told her, she laughed.

"Well, stopping you from walking out over the moors at night is more than anyone with a head on their shoulders has ever been able to do!"



The Boggart's Hole

Blackley, Manchester

It was the farmer's son who encountered it first, and all he was doing was trying to pull on a pair of new boots. He had one hand on the bannister rail while he pushed his foot into one of the boots using a shoe horn. Then, so that he had his hands free to untie the laces on the other boot, he pushed the shoehorn into a small hole in the wooden panelling beneath the stairs. It shot straight back out and hit him on the head. He nearly toppled over and had to grab the bannister again. His mum and dad came out of the kitchen to see what was going on.

When he told them what had happened, his Dad laughed. He rolled up a piece of paper and pushed it into the hole. It jumped straight back out.

It was his mum who said quietly,

"I think it must be a boggart."

The father sneered and set to blocking up the hole but as soon as he had finished, whatever it was began banging and knocking. It didn't stop, not for a moment.

All night long the knocking didn't stop. It carried on all the next day. The next evening his Dad opened up the hole again hoping to get some sleep.

But that was only the start of it all. Over the next few months, as soon as they were all in bed, the boggart woke up. Pots, pans and cutlery

clattered around the kitchen, only to stop the instant the farmer went down and opened the door and start up again the second he got back into bed. Sometimes they woke up shivering to discover that their bedclothes had been pulled off and lay in a tumbled heap down the stairs.

This went on for over six months. The farmer and his family were exhausted. One morning, sitting bleary eyed over porridge, the farmer looked up at his wife.

"It's never going to stop you know. We're going to have to leave.'

Within a month it was all sorted. Their furniture was strapped to the biggest cart and the son loaded the milk churns onto the smaller one. Just as they had finished harnessing up the horses, a neighbour passed by and shouted,

"Are you flittin'?"

A small voice piped up from inside one of the milk churns. It said,

"Ay, we're flittin'!"

