

LORE OF THE LAND

EXPLORING FOLKLORE AND THE SUPERNATURAL
ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS.



LORE OF THE LAND:

Exploring Folklore and the Supernatural across the Causeway Coast and Glens

Edited by Nicholas L. Wright

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*In memory of James (Jimmy) Stewart,
1936–2019.
Scholar, raconteur, gentleman.*

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FOREWORD

There has never been any doubt about the rich cultural heritage that is embedded in the landscape of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough area, nor has the need to preserve our oral history become more important now in our ever increasing age of digital progression and technological advances. Ironically though, the future is the key to preserving our past in a more efficient and less onerous fashion.

Lore of the Land is not just an exciting publication due to its very local flavour, but also because it echoes stories that are familiar – not just in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Area, but also throughout the island of Ireland and Scotland. The commonality between these lands is recognised not just in folklore but through its poetry and music too.

In many instances, the types of stories are familiar but the characters involved are memorable and specific to their respective townlands and parishes. With a range of stories that will fill us with fear, leave us crying with laughter, or leave us looking for more, there is something in this book for us all.

All too often, the importance of these stories has been left to an older generation to pass on to the next. We now have a comprehensive range of stories in print that will be preserved for generations to enjoy and re-read.

This project, supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), is part of the Peace IV Understanding our Area programme and would not have been possible otherwise, so to our funders, we extend our gratitude.

Furthermore, projects like this could never come to fruition without the tireless commitment, dedication, and vision of our Museum Services team, who have made this happen. Publications like these underline the hugely significant role that Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Services plays in bringing to life the stories of our local people and local heritage.

Finally, this book would not have been made possible without the contributors themselves, nor without the support of the Clanmill Housing Association. We thank-you for sharing your stories and memories that will live on that bit longer through this publication.

Cllr. Dermot Nicholl
Chairman of the Causeway Coast
and Glens Peace IV Partnership



*The fairy thorn at Slaghtaverty,
courtesy Nicholas Wright*



*Ulster kitchen, Sam Henry Collection,
Coleraine Museum*

LORE OF THE LAND
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Lore of the Land project engaged with older residents of the Causeway Coast and Glens area. The project stimulated reminiscence and discussion of local folklore, including participants' personal stories, in order to explore and share the cultural heritage of Causeway communities. We wanted to capture a sense of beliefs in and experiences of folklore, the supernatural and the unexplained in the twentieth and twenty-first century Causeway area before those memories were lost. As one of our participants put it: "you don't hear young ones talking about it now because television and everything else has done away with people sitting talking ... There's no telling what they're feeling, you know yourself, and that's what's wrong."¹

Over the course of several months in 2018, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Services met with residents from four Clanmil Housing Association schemes from

the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough: Abercorn Court and Mews, Portrush; Cramsie Court, Ballymoney; Glenshesk Court, Ballycastle; and Hezlet Court, Coleraine. Participants took part in four, loosely themed story-telling and reminiscence workshops, an art workshop, and folklore tours of four sites across the borough: Bonamargy Friary and Dunluce Castle in Co. Antrim, and Slaghtaverty and Dungiven Priory in Co. Londonderry.

The themes explored – and the experiences and stories recorded – during the course of the workshops and tours form the basis of this book. Further oral history material was sourced from recordings of reminiscence sessions and interviews from previous Museum Services programmes, especially Rites of Passage (2014-2015), and Big Houses (2016-2017). Throughout, we have aimed to provide 'smooth verbatim' transcriptions of the audio recordings,

1 Janet McCloskey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 25/06/18.

preserving the unique voice of each contributor.

There are three thematic sections in this book: The Gentry and Other Fairy Folk, Ghosts, and The Dark Arts and Devils. In some ways the divisions have become blurred – Maeve Roe McQuillan for example has been seen as both a ghost and a banshee, while the grogach and the Grey Man can be viewed as either fairy-folk or devils depending on the perspective of the speaker.

A NOTE ON OUR SOURCES

We did not embark on this project with the view of putting the stories through academic scrutiny, to prove them, or to disprove them. It will become evident in some of the accounts that a few of our contributors knew of occasions when individuals have played upon people's belief in supernatural forces to trick them. Other accounts provide very genuine personal experiences of

the unexplained. The stories, and indeed the topics covered, fall short of a comprehensive overview of the folklore of the Causeway Area, but our collection does preserve a sample of beliefs, experiences and popular stories.

A great deal of material for the early twentieth century has been drawn from the Museum Services' archives, particularly Coleraine Museum's Sam Henry Collection. Sam Henry, born in Coleraine in 1878, is perhaps best known for his 'Songs of the People' series that ran in the *Northern Constitution* newspaper between 1923 and 1938. For forty years (1898-1938), Sam worked as a Pensions and Excise Officer. While at first sight, his work might seem mismatched with an interest in folklore, he noted "In my contact with the old, who have all now passed away, I had the rare privilege of sharing their folk lore and their old songs."²

2 *The Romance of the Revenue*, 9th May 1938, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2017:583.

Sam was an avid folklorist and his archives are full of notes, cuttings, radio broadcasts and publications recounting the stories he heard throughout his life. He took on the role of a recorder of stories rather than a cynic or an advocate of their veracity. As he noted himself, "I know people of education and reasoned belief who have seen things they cannot account for."³

Sam's archive is full of his own research, but also includes other gems such as his notes from J.W. Foster's Commonplace Book. A Commonplace Book was a notebook filled with a collection of anecdotes, observations or reflective thoughts – an informal repository of knowledge. The period over which Foster composed his Commonplace Book is unclear, but Sam records that his own notes were taken from the book in April 1943, so we know that the notebook was compiled before then.

In addition, Jim Hunter generously provided the project with his own folklore collection. This was collated over the period 1961-1963 while he was a teacher at Limavady Secondary Intermediate School; a considerable amount of the material was collected from senior citizens in the area.

The remaining stories and references come from various publications as cited. Perhaps the most useful have been the anonymous compilation titled *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, originally published in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* in two parts in 1857 and 1858. The *Fairy Annals* captured the beliefs and folklore of Ulster in the earlier nineteenth century. Elizabeth Andrews' *Ulster Folk Tales*, published in 1913, did the same for the later nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth.

3 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.76.

Used together, the sources in this book, from the anonymous nineteenth century annalist, through Andrews, Henry, and Hunter, to our programme participants of 2018, provide an overview of folklore and the supernatural across the Causeway Coast and Glens over a period of more than two hundred years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Services would like to acknowledge the participation and involvement of the following people who all took part in the programme or contributed to the creation of this book in some way: Anna Irvine, Barbara Hall, Barbara McIntyre, Bobby Friel, Brian Adams, Bryonie Reid, Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, Conal Drain, Conor Roe, David Quinny-Mee, David Traill, Fiona Milnes, Frances Gage, Gail Bryan, Gemma Reid, Gillian Rea, Hazel Watson, Helen McCaughan,

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Nic Wright
Museum Services



The slopes of Binevenagh, courtesy Nicholas Wright

LORE OF THE LAND
THE GENTRY AND OTHER
FAIRY-FOLK

THE GENTRY AND OTHER FAIRY-FOLK

Fairies (Sídhe in Irish) or ‘the Gentry’, to give them their preferred name, have always been a part of Irish life, especially in the more rural or isolated parts of the country. Fairy-folk come in many different forms, each with their own appearance, personality and habits; the accounts given below only begin to outline the different varieties.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FAIRY-FOLK

There are several different origins given to the fairies of Ireland. According to the anonymous author of the newspaper column *In Fairyland Forlorn* in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, fairies were regarded as either “Fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved nor bad enough to be lost”, or “the gods of pagan Ireland who, when no longer worshipped and fed with offerings, dwindled away in popular imagination, then turned into fairies only a few spans high.”⁴

Sam Henry recorded the belief that fairy-folk were not the old gods of Ireland at all, but one of the ancient, pre-Gaelic people of the island, the Firbolgs (meaning the men of bags). The Firbolgs, “a little, swarthy, hardy race of people who emanated from Greece originally, and had the distinguishing physical feature of a prominent Adam’s Apple (still common in the West of Ireland) built for themselves stone lined hiding-holes for refuge, and the Danaan Race [another of the pre-Gaelic peoples], with blue eyes, keen with pride, like laughing candles, came from the Danube Valley and across the white-blossomed sea to invade Ireland, saw the little chaps disappear into the side of a hill, they thought they had gone into a magical underworld.”⁵

“Fallen angels who were not
good enough to be saved nor bad
enough to be lost”

4 Anonymous newspaper contributor’s column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668.

5 Script for the radio broadcast *Old Customs and Legends of Ireland*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:62.

Jim Stewart told a different version of the story, where the Gentry were not Firbolgs, but the Danaans themselves. "They're called the Tuatha Dé Danann, that's who you're talking about, the Sídh is the Tuatha Dé Danann, the people of the god Danu and they knew they were small people. Well originally they weren't small, but what happened was when the Picts came, the Pictish people invaded Ireland, they drove these wee people into caves. They hunted them and hunted them, and then as they lived in caves they got smaller and smaller and smaller till eventually they were living in burrows in the ground, living under stones, and they became wee people."⁶

A man referred to only as Mr H. reported to the author of *Fairy Annals of Ulster* that the Gentle people have been in Ireland from the earliest times. According to him, they also



Up the airy mountain,
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a' hunting
For fear of little men;
Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together;
Green jacket, red cap,
And white owl's feather!
Allingham

*Illustrated poem by William Allingham,
Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum*

originated across the sea, but came from the north rather than the east. "Fleets of them came over from Orkney and Norway, sailing in egg-shells; and it is a fashion still among the country-people to teach their children, after they have eaten an egg, to run their spoon through the end of the shell, to prevent the Gentle people using them again for boats to sail away from us."⁷

Another account recorded in the *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, stated "They were the only Ginty in the world at one time, but a bigger people took place, and things changed by degrees; they were put down, and they live underground ever since."⁸ For the compiler of the *Fairy Annals*, there was no doubting the existence of fairy-folk, nor of their purpose. "We have them in Ulster, in this nineteenth century, in all the 'pomp, pride, and circumstance' with which they are invested in the ancient

mythology of Ireland. They are with us (as is clearly demonstrated in these Annals) to improve our morals and our habits, to reward and punish, to delight and terrify, to torment and amuse, and even to combat in serried legions for our material interests; while, unlike some spirits of modern times, they come without 'rapping.'"⁹

There are said to be three great fairy festivals each year, on the nights when the fairy world and human world were closest: May Eve (corresponding with the pre-Christian Bealtaine, marking the start of summer), Midsummer Eve (the summer solstice) and Halloween (the pre-Christian Samhain marking the beginning of winter). On Midsummer Eve the fairies are believed to be more active than on any other night, and to be in gregariously fine form. At Halloween, although fairies can still be found dancing with pooka or ghosts, the

7 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

8 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

9 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

coming of winter means that their spirits are said to be at their lowest and their actions more unpredictable.

One Halloween, a hunchback from Myroe, Co. Londonderry, was passing the Nag's Lane when he heard the fairies singing and dancing in a nearby field. He listened with interest to their song which turned out to be the monotonous repetition of "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday ..." Perturbed by this, he thought to improve it and, waiting until just the right moment, added "and Thursday" to the theme. The fairy king was said to be delighted with the innovation and removed the hump from the hunchback's back.

A second hunchback, from neighbouring Crindle, heard about the incident and was determined to try his own luck. Waiting until the following Halloween, he arrived at the Nag's Lane towards nightfall. He too heard

the monotonous song of the fairy king: "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday ..." The Crindle hunchback tried his luck and called out "and Friday". Instead of showing delight, however, this time the fairy king was enraged and placed on him the hump he had removed from the Myroe man the previous Halloween.¹⁰

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann asked his grandfather if he knew of any stories about the Gentry from the Glens of Antrim. His response was "Kevin that is something we don't often talk about. They do their thing and we do ours, sometimes you hear them, often you see signs of them, but you never quite see them. Best left alone son!"¹¹



10 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.1-2.

11 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.



DESCRIPTIONS OF FAIRIES

Physically, fairies are usually diminutive. Elizabeth Andrews, exploring the belief in fairies during the early twentieth century, heard varying accounts of fairy heights, from that of a well grown boy or girl, down to the size of a toddler. When she asked one woman if they were ever as small as poultry, she was met with laughter, although it was not unheard of for fairies to become small enough to creep through keyholes.¹² Their small stature is a recurring feature in stories of most fairy-folk, and seems to be intrinsically linked with sites believed to be their dwelling places, below rocks, within earth mounds, in souterrains (stone built tunnels), and even sheltering below the leaves of certain plants. It also accounts for their ability to live among humans largely unseen.

As will be seen repeatedly in the following accounts, fairy-folk are commonly associated with the colour

red – either the wearing of red cloaks or jackets, or the sporting of red hair. In Co. Antrim, fairies are also sometimes clothed in green, although that fashion seems more common in Scotland than in the rest of Ireland. According to J.W. Foster, James Millar of Ture, Co. Donegal, was walking with a friend towards Carndonagh. Millar's dog, which was ranging out ahead of them, suddenly came rushing back towards them "in terror, cringing with fear". The two men looked up the road from where the dog had come and saw a little man with a red coat standing at the side of the road. He quickly ducked off up the mountainside and was never seen again.¹³ Sam Henry reports that "One lady, now past middle life, remembers with clear detail four fairies in scarlet coats carrying a log on their shoulders at the back of Somerset Wood", outside Coleraine on the west bank of the Bann.¹⁴

12 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.v.

13 Sam Henry's notes taken from J.W. Foster's Commonplace Book, 17th April 1943, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:604.

14 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.76.

Where Antrim fairies are described as wearing green, they usually retain the typical red hair. This close association between fairies and the colour red – especially red hair – had a very real impact on red-headed humans. In the nineteenth or early twentieth century it is recorded that red hair was a sign of communion with fairy-folk and treated with caution. Red-haired women especially caused great suspicion. According to the anonymous author of *In Fairyland Forlorn*, it was unlucky to meet a red-haired woman in the morning. For those unfortunate enough to do so, nothing would be right for the rest of the day and “Misfortune of some kind or another is sure to light upon you.”¹⁵

“red hair was a sign of communion with fairy folk and treated with caution. Red haired women especially caused great suspicion.”

THE NATURE OF FAIRIES

Sam Henry divided fairies into those that were sociable, including those he termed sheogues and merrows, and those that preferred a solitary existence, such as the leprechaun, the fear dearg (red man), the pooka and the banshee. With the exception of the banshee¹⁶ who played a very specific role, fairy-folk are famed for their changeable mood and impulsive mischief, “having every charm but conscience [and] consistency; beings so quickly offended that you must not speak much about them at all and never call them anything but ‘the Gentry,’ yet another time they will keep so easily pleased and do their best to keep misfortune away from you if you do but leave a little milk for them on the window-sill overnight.”¹⁷

Sam Henry once spoke with Mary McCann, an 83-year-old lady who lived at the foot of the mountain in Dunlade,

15 Anonymous newspaper contributor's column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668.

16 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.79.

17 Anonymous newspaper contributor's column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668.

Co. Londonderry. She lived on her old-age pension in a one-bedroom cottage, but told the story of her great-uncle Robert who had a much easier life. He was beloved of the fairies and each day they left him a tenpenny piece, always in the same place. He saved it and spent it as he wanted, and became the owner of a telescope, a fiddle and an armchair, and had £200 lying under his pillow.¹⁸

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann noted of the Gentry: "We do know that quite often they are close by but that they keep themselves to themselves and it is best to leave it like that. On the very rare occasion that they do need our human help, we should never ignore that request!"¹⁹

One stormy night, a group of fairies called in at a lonely house in rural Co. Londonderry. They asked the woman who lived there whether they might take shelter for the night and



Mary McCann,
Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum

18 *A tribute to Louis Walsh*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2015:642; also mentioned *Undiscovered Ulster: County Londonderry*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2017:8.

19 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.

she warmly invited them in. During their stay, however, they noticed the extreme poverty of the house – children going bare foot with shabby clothes, a lack of bed covers and a scarcity of other household utensils. Before taking their leave in the morning, the fairies told the kindly woman that they would assist her, but only if she promised not to reveal who her benefactors were.

Soon, the children were freshly booted and wearing fine clothing and her home was well stocked with expensive linens. The woman's neighbours became curious, and then suspicious, about her new-found prosperity. One night, several of them came to her home and accused her of being in touch with the Devil. The woman hotly denied the accusation and, in a panic, blurted out that it was the fairies who were supporting her. At once, the fine goods disappeared and the woman and her family were left back in their former poverty.²⁰

A story told by Mr and Mrs Morning, an elderly couple who lived at the Giant's Causeway in the mid-nineteenth century, is a perfect example of the generosity of those who treated the fairies well. They said that "There was a strange ould woman, low set, with a red cloak round her head" who came in to visit their grandmother Molly one day. The stranger asked Molly to lend her three quarts of meal. Although Molly had little to spare, she gave the wee woman what she asked for. The woman replied that while she could put no time limit on it, Molly would be repaid for her kindness. A while after that, there was a great shortage of grains and Molly began to think of the wee woman in red and her promise to repay the loan. "In kem the little ancient woman one ev'nin', and says she, 'I'm come to pay the meal you lint me.'" She claimed that she knew Molly was in need and handed over far more than ever she had taken, saying "I didn't intind you to want meal till the harvest, and mind, Molly, what I'm tellin' you, it's made of our top pickle,

20 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.46.

and it won't fail you." From that day on until well after the harvest, Molly's family needed neither to borrow, nor to buy grain because of the quantity she had been given. "People should give or lind when they have it; a stingy man or woman never thrives with what they keep, and nobody knows who they are refusin'." ²¹

Jim Hunter recorded a similar story from the area around Limavady. In the version he heard, when the wee folk called asking for meal, the old woman was so poor that all she could offer was the last handful she had at the bottom of the barrel. Although she could not really afford to give it away, she did regardless. The very next morning, the woman discovered, to her great surprise, that the meal barrel was full. The Gentry were obviously expressing their gratitude to the kindly woman who had given away her last scraps of food. From then onwards, no matter how much meal the woman used out of it, the barrel was always

replenished the next morning. ²²

An old woman from Co. Antrim told Elizabeth Andrews that when she was a girl, she had seen "a little old woman with a green cloak coming over the burn" one evening. She helped the old woman across the water and brought her home, where her mother, the girl, and her siblings prepared a comfortable bed in one of the outhouses having no room inside the cottage. The next morning, the girl went out early to check on the woman in green and found that she was already up and preparing to leave. The girl offered to help her back across the burn and asked her to wait while she fetched a bonnet. On her return, the girl found that the woman had vanished. When the mother heard of this she said "God bless you, child! Don't mind Grannie; she is very well



21 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

22 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.45.

able to take care of herself.” Which the girl understood to mean that the old woman had in fact been one of the fairy folk.²³

Brian Adams tells of his own encounter with a fairy's lost property. “One time when I was quite small, we were in school and we were talking about the fairies and the fairies’ rings and everything, and I came home again and I said to my mum, ‘Is there such a thing as fairies?’, you see and she said ‘Of course there is’ and I says ‘I wonder how would you ever see one?’ you see, and she let it drift anyway. I went out and played, came in, went to bed. Next morning was Saturday, got up and she says ‘Aye c’mere to you see this!’ And I says ‘What?’ She pointed out into the garden, you see, an’ in the flower bed there was like a group of marigold flowers you see, and she says ‘Do you see that very front flower? It looks as though it’s sort of hanging over onto the path.’ She says ‘I was out there this morning brushing the path’ – which she wasn’t – ‘in below,’ she says ‘I think the fairies were in the garden last

night.’ I says ‘I don’t believe you,’ ‘Well you see that flower that’s dipped over, go you about and just look. Look and see if you see anything different about the ground that has been disturbed or anything.’ So I went out and you’re automatically looking for a big pile of earth that’s been moved or a pile of stones, you see, not realising fairies were quite tiny. And she came out along with me like, and she says ‘Oh my goodness! I don’t believe it.’ And she had a wee trowel like, pretending to be putting plants in, and she lifted the leaf of the marigold and sitting in the soil right against the stem was the tiniest wee pair of white high heel shoes – and of course, I seen that, that was it. Fairies do exist you see.

“Now years later, after I was married and had children and all, and the children were talking about fairies one night you see and it was one of their birthdays was coming up and they wanted the fairies to come to their birthday. And my mum piped up, she says ‘Oh yes by the way, do you remember, did you tell the children the

23 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.25.

day you found the high heel shoes?' I says 'Aye I did, but I never ever knew where they come from like. Was it a just an ordinary working fairy that left it, was it a very important fairy left it?' She says 'Are you ready for a laugh?' I says 'Aye surely, what is it?' I thought she was going to say something about the fairies like, she says 'Do you see that wee tiny, tiny, pair of shoes you found?' I says 'Aye', she says 'Do you know where they actually came from? I says 'Where?' 'Off your sister's wee baby Barbie doll!'"²⁴

Two brothers from Kilmore, near Waterfoot, Co. Antrim, were returning late one night from a house at the foot of Lurigethan when they noticed "some diversion goin' on". "They saw a great blaze beside the pad they had to travel; sometimes they saw the blaze risin' up high, then it would get low, and they saw a space, black like, in the middle, with a party of Ginty sportin' on it, and dancing' all sorts." The men watched for a while until they

grew afraid and then went on with their journey, neither speaking of what they had seen. The next morning, one of the men went back in the same direction to check on a young mare they kept in the area. He found the horse standing on the top of a big rock in the middle of the field. "How she got up no mortal could tell; all the men in Cushendall couldn't have put her there nor brought her down, the fetters still on." The man turned and walked away again, saying to himself "them that put her there can bring her aff" and sure enough, the next day she was back down again. The brothers knew then, that they had done the right thing not to speak of their encounter with the fairy fire. If they had have, the horse might have suffered. As it was, the Gentry were merely punishing the brothers for staring at them."²⁵



24 Brian Adams, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 11/06/2018.

25 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).



Down by the Agivey River near Garvagh, Co. Londonderry, Bobby Friel used to come across the remains of fairy dances in the form of small burnt rings in the grass. "Early in the morning we'd go fishing, you know, and the brown ring, completely round, but burnt round, and they said that was the fairies out dancing at night ... it was never in the middle of the field, it was where the hedge would be, about three foot out from the hedge ... it was completely round, like that clock there, exactly the same as that clock would be and the brown mark would have been round it ... I've seen them, myself, not a lot you know but [always] early in the morning day."²⁶

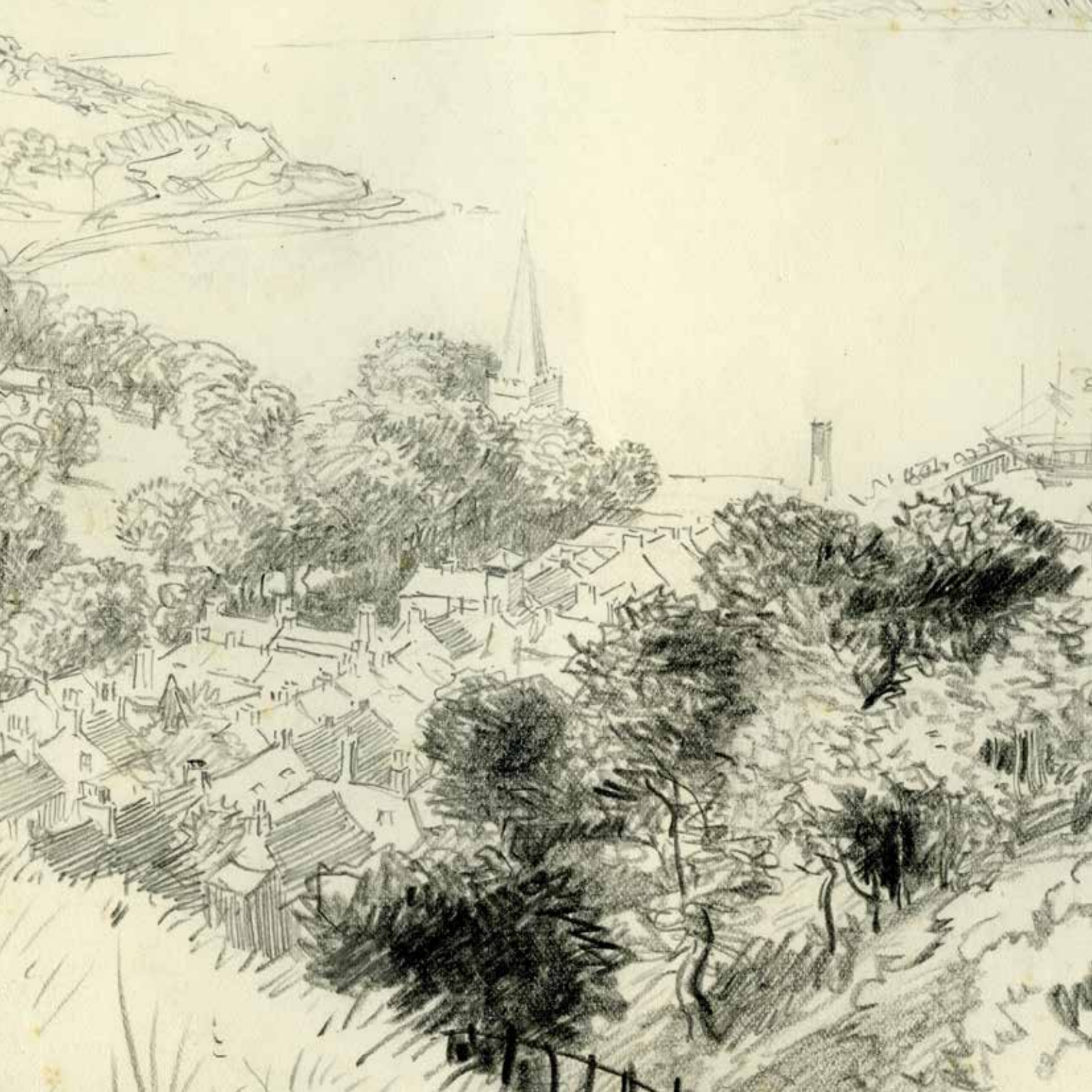
There was once a man from the Limavady area who was in the habit of taking a shortcut across the fields to his home in order to avoid the extra couple of miles that the walk along the road would have entailed.

One night, when he was coming along the road, he turned to cut across the



*The mouth of the Agivey,
Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum*

fields as usual. He climbed the gate and made for the corner of the field where he knew there was a stile. To his astonishment, however, he couldn't find it. After several minutes intense searching, the stile was still nowhere to be found. He began then to suspect that the fairies were behind the mystery and, knowing that he was no match for their trickery, made his way



'Glenarm', pencil sketch by Hugh Thomson for S Gwynne's Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim (1899), Coleraine Museum.

back across the field to the road again, resigned to walking the long way round.²⁷

Likewise, a Rathlin Islander remembered a trick played on his grandfather. "He came out to fodder the horses, and he went round the stable a dozen times, couldn't get the door. He was an hour out, and they went out to look for him, and they asked him what kept him. He said, 'Them wee buggers!' Made a fool of him! And he could hear them laughing up in the hill. He couldn't see them. That was some of the wee folk."²⁸

Over in Glenarm there was once a very famous midwife. One evening whilst she was getting ready for bed there came a knock to the door. With it being late at night she knew it must have been a matter of urgency so went to answer the door. There standing at the door was a small man, no larger

than three foot. The midwife wasn't taken aback by the sight of this man as she initially thought he was a dwarf. Asking the man what he wanted at such an hour, he replied saying that her services were required and that they must be quick and that he had a coach waiting. The midwife asked where they were headed but the man replied telling her not to worry about that and that she would be well paid for her services. Once the midwife got into the coach they departed and after travelling a short distance the horses stopped, the driver jumped down and informed the woman that he had to blindfold her. The woman thought that this was strange and, not knowing what to do, she agreed. In Gaelic society a midwife and a doctor were usually quite safe in their job. Taking her hand, the man then led her into what seemed to be a cavern. When eventually the blindfold was removed she found herself standing in front

27 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.44.

28 Linda-May Ballard, "Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai." *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, p.53.

of a castle that she had never seen before. There was an eerie silence around the place with the exception of one room, and it was to this room that they were led. Several hours later a baby boy was born, and the woman finally got the opportunity to take in her surroundings. At once she knew that something wasn't right. She had heard of such places. The tenants of the castle were the little people, the Gentry! Feeling scared, she at once wanted to go home so made for the door, only to find it blocked by two small doorkeepers. One of them rang a bell and the driver of the coach appeared once more. She explained that she wanted to go home, she had a house to run, cattle to feed and the hens to let out. The man replied they were all well looked after, and that she must stay until the queen was on her feet again.

The lady was scared to say no, but she explained that the food she would eat must come from her home. The

gentry agreed and served her the freshest of her produce. The people of the Glens know that anyone who eats the good people's food must be held forever, so it must therefore be refused at all costs.

It was coming to the end of two weeks and closing in on the midwife's time to go home. When she was bathing the baby she was given a special ointment for its head. The woman went to scratch her eye and managed to get some of this ointment in her eye. As if by magic, the woman then found herself back at her house in Glenarm. As she entered the house she went to the bedroom and found a large purse full of money. When she went to the byre there were two cows instead of one, and two goats instead of one. Next door in the henhouse, the number of chickens had increased as well. The woman thought it was a dream surely?

[*"... anyone who eats the good
people's food must be held
forever ..."*]

It was then that she met her next-door neighbours who enquired where she had been for the last fortnight, so this confirmed that it had been true and not just her imagination. She couldn't, however, work out why the ointment in her eye had ended her journey and why she was back in Glenarm. Not one to worry, and with more money to spend than she had seen in years, she took a trip into the village to treat herself to a new outfit. When she walked into the shop to make a few purchases she was surprised to see a couple of small people filling baskets and stuffing things into their jackets. The owner of the shop was in the kitchen and didn't seem to know anything of his busy customers. 'You surely aren't stealing those things?' asked the woman. At once one of the little people dropped the basket. 'Can you see us?' he asked.

'Certainly!' said the woman. 'With both eyes?' asked the man. After checking, the woman replied, 'No, only with one eye'. 'Lucky for you' said the wee man and hit her with such a blow that he blinded her in the eye. The woman never regained sight in that eye, and to make matters worse when she got home there was only one cow in the byre, one goat in the garden and the original number of hens in the hutch. On the kitchen table was a note, on it written 'When a blind eye sees again, your gold shall be found in Straidkilly' and sure enough all the gold had disappeared except for that which was in her pocket. It is now said that someday a person whose sight has been restored will find the Gentry gold in Straidkilly.²⁹

FAIRY DWELLINGS

In the mid-nineteenth century, a man referred to only as Mr H. believed that fairy-folk lived "Mostly in their underground habitations: but since

29 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18, derived from Jack McBride, *Traveller in the Glens*, Appletree Press, Belfast (1979), pp.48-52.

the gospel was preached in this country, it was too strong for them, and they are greatly dispersed; some say they have taken to the air, but God only knows."³⁰

An elderly woman, initially from Innishowen, but settled in the area of Bushmills, reported that in her time there were no fairies to be found around the Giant's Causeway, but that there were some that lived above Bushmills "up the Bush river, at the Ness Rocks and such like places." She continued that there were far more fairies in Innishowen because there were fewer churches there: "The Gintry don't like to live near churches, or ugly Meetin'-houses; they like scrogger, where there be heaps of gentle bushes, and to be about the walls of ould castles that was destroyed at the time of the disolation of Ireland."³¹ Mr

and Mrs Morning, interviewed in the mid-nineteenth century, agreed that fairies were plentiful, not especially around the Causeway, "but there's great haunts of them between this and Knocklayde, and Carrick-a-rede."³²



*'Ballycastle and the mouth of the Glenshesk River',
pencil sketch by Hugh Thomson for S Gwynne's
Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim
(1899), Coleraine Museum.*

30 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

31 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

32 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

It is unsurprising then, that the Glens of Antrim, with its dispersed population, windswept hills and wild glens are especially renowned as the home of the Gentry. The townland of Breen, at the top of Glenshesk, is thought to derive its name from Bruíon, the Irish for a fairy dwelling. Breen is the site of one of the few old oak woods remaining in Ireland, and it is said to have been out of fear and respect for the fairies that the wood has escaped deforestation.³³

Tiveragh Hill, between Glенаan and Glenballyeamon is believed to be one of the pre-eminent fairy dwellings in Ireland. The hill's name in Irish, Taobh an Rátha, means 'site of the fort'. "One side of the hill is good, green, arable ground and on the other is heathered brae with many skeog bushes [fairy thorns]. On many a night strange lights and sounds are heard coming from the hill. It is referred to as the entrance to Tir Na nOg, the land of eternal youth. It is here that the good people

head underground to live happily, and it was here that the two great races of our ancient people retreated when faced with the superior weaponry and technology of the incoming Celts.

"The two races or tribes were known as the Tuatha Dé Dannan and the Firbolg. These people were traditional enemies and could never agree, but a peace was brokered for the common good and they had to try to cohabit in Tir Na nOg. Occasionally however tensions would mount, and they would disagree. A battle would be arranged but never to take place underground. The rivals would come up above ground and some nights (even yet!) you hear the clash of fire and sword where they fight with great fury making their way through the Glens eventually finishing at Loughareema where, by this time, they would have worked up such a thirst that they drink the lake dry. That is the true story of how 'The Vanishing Lake' got its name."³⁴

33 Thomas McLaine, *A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim*, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Coleraine (2018), p.40.

34 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.

THE FAIRY HILL

Tiveragh is a fairy hill and near to Cushendall,
And nobody goes there at night, no nobody at all.
The hill is small, the sides are steep. And I have heard it said
That flickering lights go in and out while everyone's in bed.
And on the top two hawthorns grow, a white one and a red.

by John Irvine Desmond



Tiveragh, by Kevin McAuley

ON TIV-RA HILL

On Tiv-ra Hill near Cushendall,
I heard a commotion behind a wall,
I stopped and looked over, and boys-o-boys!
Now what do you think was making the noise?

'Twas a Hurley match- and may I choke-
It was two wee teams of the Fairy folk
That was rippling and tearin' and weltin' away
In the light of the moon as bright as day.

And their playing pitch was hardly as big
As my Uncle Barney's potato rig;
And me there watchin' them puck and clout-
At the back o' the wall with my eyes stuck out.

When all at once, like the squeal of a hare,
A wee voice shouted, "Who's that up there?"
And a bit off a thing about nine-inch tall
Came climbing up to the top of the wall.

And he stood there; he stood about pot-size
With his two wee fingers up at my eyes,
And it's God's own truth that I'm speakin' mind ye,
"Get out o' that," says he, "or I'll blind ye!"

Aye that's just what he said, "I'll blind ye," says he
And by Jing what he said was enough for me,
Did I run? Aye surely; I didn't miss-
And I haven't seen Tiv-ra from that to this.

by H. Browne



Sean T. Traynor remembers his father's stories about the Gentry, and the attempts made to allow his family to experience the fairies at the old motte at Knockahollet, Co. Antrim. "Growing up in England like we were, and my dad being a typical Ballycastle man, we were used to having fairy stories and stories about the wee men ... we used to stop at Armoy corner that my dad always used to say, 'If you listen carefully, you can hear the fairies.' So we used to pull into the roadside and wind down the windows of the car – now imagine our family coming across from England for the annual holiday, all crowded in one car you know – and we used to sit there and I used to hear my mum say 'Don't be telling the children tales like that Paddy' and things like this, and thinking why's she telling dad off?" The family would stop and listen to the sounds apparently being made by the fairies on Knockahollet, but "we used to hear the wind you know. It was just

that my dad knew where to park."³⁵

Of course, not all fairy dwellings are distant from human structures and, sometimes, human buildings have encroached on fairy spaces. "If they are molested in their habitations, and they warn you about it, take the warning or be sure it will be worse for you."³⁶ Margaret Huey remembers that people "Used to always say the fairies were in the foxgloves ... I remember whenever we were coming home from school they were growing wild then – you wouldn't see them now at all – an' some of them would put them on their fingers, they'd said 'You shouldn't do that you're squashing the fairies.'"³⁷

Jack McBurney lived at the foot of Knocklayde, Co. Antrim. He was sent word by a member of the Gentry to change the location of the door of his barn. It had faced south but the gentleman said that the "noise and stour [dust] perplexed him at times."

35 Sean T. Traynor, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 11/06/2018.

36 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

37 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 29/05/2018.

Jack changed the door to open to the north of his barn and “from that out, everything prospered with him, and there was no end to the prosperity he left when he died.”³⁸

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann knew of a man from the area of Carnlough in the Glens of Antrim, who once saw “the good people in a school house of all places! As he was walking past the school he saw the flicker of the fire and heard the sound of voices. Knowing that it was too late for the pupils to be there he thought it might be vandals. Up he went to move the group on but as he looked through the window he couldn’t believe his eyes. Sitting around the open fire were a dozen small men turning a chicken on a spit. In a state of disbelief, he stood and watched for a minute before knocking the window. At once chairs clattered, cries were heard, and the fire was extinguished. The man immediately felt threatened

and he took to his legs. After school the following day the pupils brought home stories about how the fire had been washed out with water.”³⁹

*“Sitting around the open fire
were a dozen small men turning
a chicken on a spit.”*

Sam Henry wrote about a builder from Benbradagh, Co. Londonderry, who “had his work frustrated by the wee ‘gentry’”. The house he was building was knocked down as soon as it was built. He suspected there might be a supernatural force at play and went out early one morning to catch the fairies in the act. “He saw a ‘wee, wee man’ and asked him what was his ends in knocking down the house. The fairy replied: ‘Do you know that by building that house, you have turned the water down my chimney?’” The builder changed the location of the house and suffered no further problems with his building.⁴⁰ Sam also

38 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

39 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.

40 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.76.

knew of a similar report from North Antrim, although here it was a wee fairy woman who appeared at the kitchen door, complaining of slurry from the byre running down her chimney. When the byre was moved, luck was said to follow the family.⁴¹

Jim Hunter collected a story about an old man, who lived in a house in the mountains around Limavady. He was roused from his sleep every night by the fairies who persisted in tickling his feet. One night they eventually told him that he'd have to leave the house, because it actually belonged to them. The old man immediately rose, put on his clothes and fled across the fields. When he reached his neighbour's house, he told them what had happened and swore never to return to his home again.⁴²

DAMAGING FAIRY DWELLINGS

It has always been considered very bad luck to interfere in any way with fairy dwellings. People who failed to heed warnings and continued to impede on the places lived in, or frequented by, the Gentry are generally known to have suffered for their recklessness. Land known to be inhabited by fairy-folk should not be ploughed and fairy thorns should never be cut.⁴³ "The blinking of cattle (where they become lethargic and do not produce a lot of milk) was one of the biggest fears of cow wives and tenant farmers across the island. Farmers went out of their way to accommodate and facilitate anyone or anything that would bring bad fortune to their farm and holdings and blinking was probably the most



41 Script for the radio broadcast *Old Customs and Legends of Ireland*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:621.

42 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.19.

43 Script for the radio broadcast *Old Customs and Legends of Ireland*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:621.

THE FAIRY THORN

Andy McAlister's nearly astray,
Nothin' is goin' the way that it should;
His ducks and his hens are layin' away,
And his pigs are doin' no good:
The milk is cruds, there's blight on the spuds,
And the cattle refusin' their food.

He would cut down the Fairy Thorn
In the fairy month, in the month o' May;
Ses I to Andy, "As sure as you're born,
You'll live to rue the day,"
But he only laughed as he gripped the haft,
And "Get," ses he, "out o' my way."

And there where all the Wee Folk meet,
And where their Fairy Queen was crowned,
He tramped the bluebells under his feet,
The hawthorn littered the ground;
On field and hill the birds were still,
The axe was the only sound.

Andy McAlister's lost his luck,
Rookery Farm is goin' to the wall;
He laughed at fairies and such-like truck,
For he didn't believe in the like at all;
But his farm has a blink and there's them that think
The trouble came with the Thorn-tree's fall.⁴⁴

by John O' the North

extreme fear ... In order for the farmer to have this feat of misfortune on him he must have in some way annoyed the Gentry. Possibly by cutting the skeog bush [fairy thorn], the traditional home to the little people, or maybe by unknowingly or unwittingly disturbing their fun and frolics."⁴⁵

Elizabeth Andrews was told about the attempt to remove a fairy ring, described as "an old fort with fairy bushes", from the path of the railway in the townland of Lenagh, Co. Antrim, around 1848. Most of the men working on the line were "unwilling to meddle with either fort or bushes." However, one of them, either braver or less wise than his colleagues, began to cut down one of the thorns, when he "met with an accident". This strengthened the resolve of the others, and no one else would come forward to complete the job. In the end, the railway officials brought in specialists to blow up the fort in order to remove it. "Underneath it a very

fine spearhead and other implements were found."⁴⁶

Barbara McIntyre recalled the fate of Flowerfield House in Portstewart when its fairy ring was damaged. "It [Flowerfield] lay empty for a long time and then a girl Lynch came home, her and her husband." Meta Lynch and Davy Campbell had been in New Zealand for some time when they returned to Portstewart where they owned a farm and land off the Cromore Road. Moving into Flowerfield, they made a lot of changes to the building, did it up and put a new kitchen into it. There was a fairy ring in the gardens of the house, in what is now Diversity Park. "It was all done with stones and it was all grew over." However, Davy decided to remove it as part of his landscaping changes. "He thought this was an eyesore so he decided he would start to move it. And the old people used to tell him 'Don't be touching that now.' That's a lot of old nonsense that!"

45 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.

46 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.97.

and he dug away at it, and the house went on fire and was burnt. The new kitchen went up in flames. I always remember that bit now."⁴⁷

Margaret Huey once overheard her father talking about a fairy hill on the Kirk Road, between Ballymoney and Stranocum. "There's a big farmhouse down the lane and it sits to the right hand side going down and the farmer started to clear it away, and all the beasts started tae die, the cattle ... they wanted it all flat for grazing but they had to leave it."⁴⁸ "But to this day you can see the bit where they dug out. It's grew over wi' grass but it's naw smooth this side next to the road."⁴⁹

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann knew of a farmer from the Glens who had "wanted to clear his ground and make a mountain path but in the middle of it stood the fairy thorn. After not

returning home for tea the wife sent out for him, he was found lying at the foot of the tree with his arm clamped immovable around the saw. He suffered pain in his right hand for the rest of his days."⁵⁰

Sam Henry was warned about "hungry grass", an area of grass, usually on a lonely mountainside, which would cause the death of anyone who lay down on it to rest.⁵¹ In the late eighteenth century, in the townland of Kilmore, near Waterfoot, Co. Antrim, a thirteen year old girl called Mary crept under some bucky-briars in the corner of her garden to escape the heat on a particularly sunny summer day. When she awoke, she had lost her senses. Although both the priest and doctor were called for, "the whole town couldn't command her." She lived that way for two years before suffering a stroke and becoming paralysed. After

47 Barbara McIntyre, participating in the Big Houses project, 13/01/2017.

48 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

49 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 11/06/2018.

50 Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.

51 Letter from Sam Henry to Dr J.D. Rolleston, 28th May 1942, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:759.

another five years, Mary died. "She intruded that day on 'the Quality's' ground to sleep; the bushes was gentle bushes that she got under to be out of the sun; and may the holy saints keep us from harm, that's what cum of doing what she did."⁵²

In the nineteenth century, there was a woman who lived in Ballynarrig, Co. Londonderry. One night, sitting by her fireside with her baby on her knee, a very small woman walked into her room and asked her not to throw water out her back door. The Ballynarrig woman refused to do as she was asked, as she couldn't understand how her actions could have any impact on anyone. Immediately afterwards, things started to mysteriously go wrong around the house, but still she refused to stop throwing dirty water from her own doorway. Then, in a very cruel blow, the woman's baby became crippled and the woman realised that she

had to make an effort to appease the wee fairy woman who had issued her with the request. She had her back door built up so that it could not be used. Jim Hunter records that people he spoke to still knew of the blocked doorway and reported that the ground directly behind it sounds hollow. "Undoubtedly the fairies lived in this lowly abode."⁵³

At Slaghtaverty, near Garvagh in Co. Londonderry, there is a well-known hawthorn growing through a Neolithic cairn or cromlech. Although sometimes referred to locally as the Giant's Grave, the name Slaghtaverty (from the Irish *Sleacht Aibheartaigh*, meaning the memorial of the dwarf) relates the tale of Abhartach, the vampiric dwarf, who is said to have once plagued Glenullin.



52 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

53 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.38-9.

In the late nineteenth century, Patrick Joyce recorded that “This dwarf was a magician, and a dreadful tyrant, and after having perpetrated great cruelties on the people he was at last vanquished and slain by a neighbouring chieftain; some say by Fionn Mac Cumhail. He was buried in a standing posture, but the very next day he appeared in his old haunts, more cruel and vigorous than ever. And the chief slew him a second time and buried him as before, but again he escaped from the grave, and spread terror through the whole country. The chief then consulted a druid, and according to his directions, he slew the dwarf a third time, and buried him in the same place, with his head downwards; which subdued his magical power, so that he never again appeared on earth. The laght [monument] raised over the dwarf is still there, and you may hear the legend with much detail from the natives of the place, one of whom

told it to me.”⁵⁴ Other accounts set the tale in the Early Medieval period, replacing the druid with a saint and naming the dwarf-slayer Cathrain, the ancestor of the O’Cahans. This version of the tale may suggest that the story of Abhartach exhibits trace memories of medieval tribal migrations and was used to justify the replacement of earlier chieftains by the O’Cahans.

Rosemary McBride spoke about an attempt to cut back the thorn tree which rises through the pre-historic grave in 1997. The landowner and two other men were involved. The new chainsaw they were using kept stopping; three times they went to cut the thorn and three times the chainsaw malfunctioned. Then, when attempting to lift the largest stone from the cairn, the chain snapped, badly injuring the hand of one of the men. One of the other men soon fell terribly ill and was bedridden for some time, while a child of the third

54 Patrick Joyce, *The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places*, McGlashan & Gill, Dublin (1870), pp.319-20.





man was tragically killed in a farming accident shortly afterwards. "There are a couple of other incidents that befell two others: one had a bad fall down the stairs just after he had been there. The other person told me of his wife's sudden death from an aneurysm just weeks after his visit to the stone. He had been to the stone [and] sat on it; he'd dismissed the story as rubbish."⁵⁵

CHILD ABDUCTIONS AND CHANGELINGS

Perhaps the most sinister aspect of fairy-folk is their ability, and willingness, to abduct human children – or to exchange good healthy human babies with sickly, ill-tempered changelings.

A tailor from the Glens of Antrim was making a suit of clothes for a neighbour, and heard from the neighbour's wife of the difficulties she

was having with her child. The child had once been quiet and content, but all of a sudden its temperament had changed. Now it was irritable and cried all the time, "it wint on whingin' night and day, till her heart was broke with it." She went out of the room, leaving the tailor working on his board, and the child in its cradle. The child then spoke out, asking the tailor "if the ould hag" had gone. The tailor replied, politely, that she had, and the creature in the cradle fistled around in the straw lining, pulled out some little uilleann pipes and started to play. While it was still playing, the mother returned, realised what was afoot and told the creature "Now I know what you are, and I'll have my revenge." The creature told her to go ahead and "take your remedy". She lifted it and ran down to the river, intending to drown it. But instead, she went into the water and was drowned herself; the creature ran away, laughing.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Rosemary McBride, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 25/10/18.

⁵⁶ *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).



According to J.W. Foster, if a child was suspected of being a changeling, the best approach was to hold it in the smoke of the fire. A real changeling would fly up the chimney to escape.⁵⁷ Jim Stewart noted that the fairy-folk seemingly had a preference for healthy boys. "They steely away wee boy[s]. That's why they dressed wee boys as girls ... For a long time naw, they did, oh aye. They always dressed them as girls up until they were about five."⁵⁸

At the turn of the century, a girl from Slaughtmanus, Co. Londonderry, went out to the byre to collect milk. "While milking the cows, a number of fairies gathered around her and carried her away." The girl's family made an extensive search of the countryside but couldn't find any trace of her. The police were called to join the search, but they too were unsuccessful.

Eventually they gave up hope that she would ever be found. Then, one night, exactly a year later, she came home from the byre with a pail of milk in her hand, "unaware and unwilling to believe that she had ever been away from home."⁵⁹

Katie Glass of Rathlin told Sam Henry about a "wee lad of five or six he was" who was taken away by the fairies. A week went by and, no matter how hard they searched, his parents could discover nothing of him. Then, in what Sam Henry refers to as "a remarkable instance of an animal medium linking this world to fairyland", a large sheep brought the boy back to their door and left him home "without a bleat out of her".⁶⁰

In another Rathlin story of child abduction, a young boy had been out gathering blackberries when he disappeared. Although his family

57 Sam Henry's notes taken from J.W. Foster's *Commonplace Book*, 17th April 1943, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:604.

58 Jim Stewart, participating in the *Lore of the Land* project, 11/06/2018.

59 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.19-20.

60 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.22.

searched for him high and low, in bogs and down wells, they couldn't find any trace and began to believe that he had fallen from one of the island's cliffs. Then, on the third day after his disappearance, "he turned up at the door spic and span, he was as clean as a new pin." When they asked him what had happened, and where he had been these last few days, he explained that he'd been over the mountain for a walk and, in a wee valley he'd seen "a lot of small children playing and he went down to them and they took him in through ... this hill and it wasn't children at all but it was the fairies you see."

The fairies took the boy in and decided they wanted to keep him. To do that, though, they had to remove all traces of the human world from his body. They took all his clothes and scrubbed him down before giving him new things to wear. They wanted to keep him, and were able to hold

him for three days but then found that their magic to keep him in their world had not fully worked. Despite having all traces of the human world washed away and replaced, the boy still wanted to return home and had to be released. After telling his story, he mentioned that his hand was very sore; "When I was gathering blackberries" he said, "I got a jag

"... even into her adult life Eliza never grew over four foot and couldn't see over the half door of the house."

under me finger nail." "Well the Lord be praised" exclaimed his mother, "that you got that under your finger nail ... only for that ... the fairies would have been able to keep you." The blackberry thorn had remained hidden under the lad's fingernail and was the only part of this world that the fairies had not removed, meaning that the boy could still return and was not lost to the fairy world forever.⁶¹

61 Linda-May Ballard, "Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai." *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, pp.56-7.

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann knew the story of a Glens girl who was taken by the fairies. “Over in Glenariff, there is the story of Eliza who disappeared for nearly three weeks. Eliza was from a local family and like every little girl she was keen to explore. It was assumed that on one of her explorations Eliza fell into the river that flows through the valley before meeting the sea in Red Bay. Both the river and the bay were searched but there was no sign of the young girl.

“Three weeks later Eliza turned up with her dress still immaculate and not a scratch on her at all. She had in her pocket a little ball of rushes folded in an ornamental fashion and told everyone that the good people had made it for her as this allowed her to speak with them. Why Eliza was allowed home again we will never know, but it was said even into her adult life Eliza never grew

over four foot and couldn’t see over the half door of the house. The local community had a bit of a fear of Eliza with some of the young children being told to stay well clear of her in the event that she was a changeling.”⁶²



Fairies by S. Stirling, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum

WARRING FAIRIES AND BIG WINDS

The following stories were told to the compiler of the *Fairy Annals of Ulster* and recount the common belief that every seven years, the fairies of Ulster and the fairies of Scotland go to war for control of the markets – the Scottish fairies trying to drive prices up, while the Irish fairies try to keep prices low.

There was once a Protestant blacksmith living in the Glens, a devout Covenanter, “and that’s the sort of people that keeps the Sabbath



rightly.” He was sitting, reading, at his door one Sunday evening when a gentleman dressed in green and riding a fine-looking grey horse arrived and asked for

his horse to be shod. The blacksmith explained there was no one living who could make him break his Sabbath rest. The gentleman insisted he needed his horse shod, no matter what the cost. The blacksmith told him that he would not work on the Sabbath regardless of what money was offered. “I must be in Scotland this night before twelve o’clock ... on business that consarns you more than myself” said the man in green, and asked once more to have his horse shod. The blacksmith slowly realised that this was more than an ordinary request, and shod the horse. The gentleman mounted his horse and promised payment on his return. To this, the blacksmith replied that the arrangement suited him as he could take no money for Sunday work.

Seven weeks later, the gentleman returned to the blacksmith’s door. “I have done the job I had in han’, and now for seven years to come, there will be no scarcity in this country.” He presented the blacksmith with

a generous payment, although the latter was hesitant to accept so large an amount. The gentleman in green was insistent and added that, in the coming years, he was going to be in need of more horses. He instructed the blacksmith to purchase any grey horses he could find, "Fetch them to the Mouth of Kilrea", and that he would be reimbursed by the gentleman there.

The blacksmith did as he was instructed, and so did the gentleman, paying a fair price for each horse brought to Kilrea. At last the gentleman invited the blacksmith to come and see what use he had for all these grey horses. "The smith followed the gentleman into an open in the side of the hills of Kilrea, and he saw regiment on the top of regiment of the warriors of the Gentry, lying sound asleep with all their accoutrements beside them, and their grey horses lying fornenst them, saddled and bridled, ready for action, but all sleeping, the same as the Gentry."

The gentleman warned him to touch neither fairy nor horse, but to turn and go "for it wouldn't be aisy to put them in the same way again" However, as he left, the blacksmith reached out and touched one of the fairy soldiers by the arm. He woke immediately, followed by his comrades who all jumped to their feet, grabbed their horses and shouted to be directed to battle. The gentleman whirled on the blacksmith, exasperated, and warned him "You can be of no service to me in settlin' this commotion so be aff, while the life's left in you ... and niver do the like again." The smith took off home while the gentleman struggled to calm his soldiers. He did not look behind him till he reached his forge and, once there, he laid a red-hot iron bar across the threshold to protect himself and his forge from any ill that might come from the fairy army.

The night the smith had first met the gentleman in green, he had been leading them to war in Scotland. It seems that Scottish fairies mean to

Red Bay below Lurigethan, courtesy Nicholas Wright



invade Ireland, and dominate here, but every seven years there is a battle to decide the business and “glory be to God – we bate them in general, and they find us too many for them”. Sometimes the Scottish fairies cross to Ireland to fight the Gentry on their own ground, but the Irish fairies have beaten them each time.⁶³

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Scottish fairy fleet was

spotted from the old castle on the hill above Red Bay, “silin’ in the air, and some on the sea with sails set, and thousands of the Gentry, visible at times, then disappearing on the decks and about the masts and riggin’.” The ships came nearer until they passed Galbally Point and then, in a descending mist, went up the Glenariff River. “May the saints be good to us if there wasn’t fightin’ in Glenarriff and through Glen Dun that night – the scrog in places was all levelled, trees broke and left without a branch on them, the ground in some places ploughed up like with artillery, and the sward tramped till there wasn’t a green blade to be seen.”⁶⁴

A third account, from Ballymegan, near Buncrana, Co. Donegal, is the story of Alex Kinney. Along with 19 other men, Alex was out cutting corn with a hook when he looked up and saw armies of fairies in the sky. He commented on the strange vision,

63 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

64 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

but none of the other men could see what he was talking about. It was only when he called them over to where he was working that they were able to see the militant Gentry as well. As they watched, a woman called Biddy Hegarty came, barefoot, down Dunlyard Hill carrying two cans of milk. She passed, unknowingly, through the fairy armies and immediately "a tenderness came to her feet and from that on she never could go barefooted."⁶⁵

Another Donegal story gives the account of an Innishowen man with a sore leg. He consulted with the doctors many times, although nothing they could do improved his condition, and he found he had to sell one of his cows to pay for his treatment. It was high summer, the times were bad, prices at the market were high, the days were hot, and he couldn't sit or lie comfortably, so he took his crutch and went out for a walk along

the dusty road. As he hobbled along, a strange noise caused him to stop and turn around. There, he saw "a little Gintleman, dressed in green, with beautiful top-boots, ridin' on somethin', and bating the dust off his boots with an elegant cuttin' whip he had in his hand."

"God save your Honour" said the man to the gentleman. The wee gentleman saw that the man looked poorly and asked him whatever the problem was. The man explained that his leg was causing him great pain and discomfort and the gentleman responded that he should "work no more with the doctors these times when money's scarce and markets high, but make a salve of herbs, after my direction, and you'll do." The gentleman told the man where to find the herbs and also reached into his pocket, presenting the man with a handful of silver.

The little man in green then explained

that he was "the Commander of the small Ginty of Ireland ... goin to war with the officers of the little Ginty of Scotland, on account of them raisin' the markets in that country till meal is seven thirteens a score." He told the farmer to go up to the nearby fort and to sit down under the "Gintle bush" growing beside it the following evening. If he listened carefully to the ground, he would hear music – "loud and bould" if the Irish Ginty were losing, but "sweet and gentle" if they were winning.

Sure enough, the next evening as the man sat below the fairy thorn beside the fort, he listened and heard "music, loud and impident like, for a long time, and his heart failed, for he knew our side was a batin'; but after a while he hears the sweet low music beginnin', and it put the other out entirely." Shortly after, the hold of the Scottish fairies broken, the markets fell and meal came down to three thirteenth the score.⁶⁶

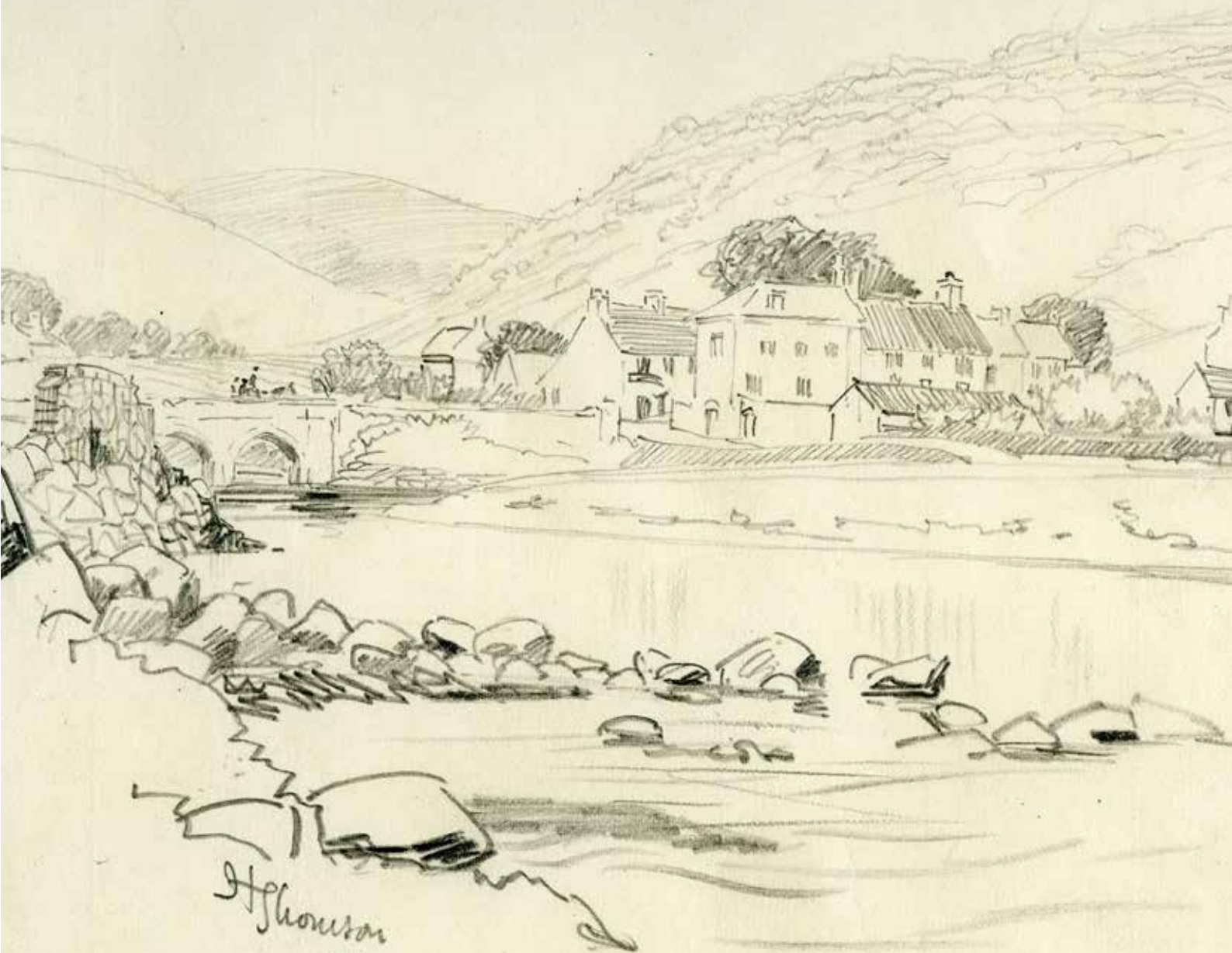
Humans are sometimes said to experience these battles as strong winds – historically, people seeing straw or leaves lifted up by wind knew it was the fairies, removed their hats, and blessed the Ginty. Jim Stewart once experienced a fairy wind at Knocknacraw – referred to by Jim in the Irish Cnoc ná Gcó, meaning hill of

"... And suddenly I was lifted up into the air and there was a swirl and a swirl and swirl all round me ..."

the hazelnuts – above Cushendun, in the Glens of Antrim. "I used to live in Cushendun. And quite often I would walk along the hillside and, before I left, always brought a glass of whiskey with me and, just in Cnoc ná Gcó there's the ruins of an old house, and I always went there and I drank half the glass, and I poured the other half on the ground for the sídhe.

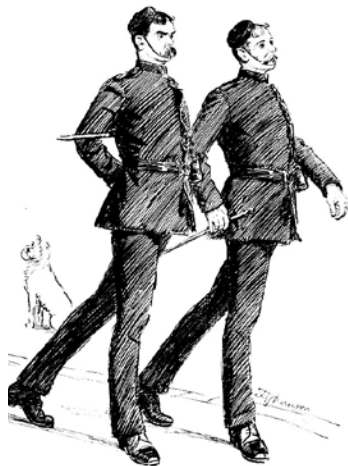
"Right so, I also had a wee business called Ivy Crafts and I made ivy shapes for flower arrangers, and this

66 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).



H. G. Houson
98.

particular day I was out over Cnoc ná Gcó where I could loop down and see all the ivy trees ... and I used to go down cut the ivy off the fallen tree and make shapes for flower arrangers, right, of the ivy. And this particular time I parked my car on the Ballycastle line there. There's a wee layby where the road workers leave sand and salt for it to be spread in winter time, and usually in the summer time it's clear so you can park your car in the wee layby. And then I would walk up around the hill. And this particular day



I was walking along heading towards the ruins of the old house. And suddenly I was lifted up into the air and there was a swirl and

a swirl and swirl all round me, and I was carried. I could see my car and I was trying to get down to the car and I couldn't move, and I was carried right up the pathway to the ruins of the old house and set down where I usually sit. Now the problem was this: I sat and thought about it, what had happened?

"I had either walked into a mór siúil, now you know what a mór siúil is? It's a great parade, a mór siúil, a big walk, a big parade, and there was the lane way down, so either I had walked into a mór siúil – and they lifted me out of the road to let the mór siúil pass, or I'd walked into a torraidh – a torraidh which is a funeral possession, the torraidh. I could have walked into that but they lifted me gently and just carried me and set me down in the ruins of the old house and then just disappeared. Now I didn't see, cos we were moving so fast that you can't see them, but you can feel them, lifting."⁶⁷

Many Limavady locals explained to Jim

Hunter that the present day relative scarcity of fairies was due to the fairy war between Ireland and Scotland. Before departing for their last battle, the wee folk proclaimed that if they were beaten, they would never return. Since then, they said, nothing has been heard of the fairies.⁶⁸

Elizabeth Andrews and Sam Henry both reported a common belief that most fairy-folk actually left Ireland after their last great gathering on the Feast of Ceara, January 6th, 1839. That was the night of the infamous Big Wind (known as the Oíche na Gaoithe Móire in Irish), a ferocious storm which was believed to have been brewed up by the fairies as a farewell and to punish humans for their poor behaviour.⁶⁹ The storm, which battered the entire island of Ireland, is estimated to have had winds over 115 miles per hour, and sank 42 ships. Up

to 300 people may have died, mostly from falling buildings.

However, as will be apparent throughout this section, it is generally accepted that not all fairy-folk departed Ireland at that time. Indeed, Paddy Doogan, from Rocktown Co. Londonderry, told Sam Henry that he had once seen two thousand fairies at one time. They had taken possession of the second hill from Paddy's house, marching "ten a breast, every wan wi' a blue light in front o' him, and headed aff for Knockloughrim." Paddy first took them to be the Gulladuff police out on patrol, "but divil a man was out o' the barracks that night, and besides if it had been the police the dogs would ha' 'nosed' them." Paddy watched them for a while, but didn't follow for fear "he might niver come back, or come back with his head to wan side."⁷⁰

68 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.46.

69 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.1; Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.76.

70 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.79; also reported in *Undiscovered Ulster: County Londonderry*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2017:8.



TYPES OF FAIRY-FOLK

BANSHEES

The banshee, or bean-sídhe is a female fairy, normally associated with a specific family. Her principle role was to warn the family of the coming death of one of its members. Although the Irish word can be literally translated as 'woman of the sídhe', or 'fairy woman', by no means all fairy women are banshees. Like most fairy-folk, banshees are usually said to have red hair and, where they are named, commonly have the epithet 'Roe' or 'Ruah' to reflect this attribute.

One of the most famous banshees was Gráinne Roe. She was the banshee of the O'Cahans, the most powerful family in what would later become County Londonderry. In the fourteenth century, Dermot O'Cahan, the chief of the sept, had many sons, but only one daughter. She was called Fionnuala, or Finvola, and was so beautiful that she was known as

the Gem of the Roe. Dermot often took Fionnuala with him when visiting other courts and during one visit to Scotland, his ship was damaged in a storm and the O'Cahans were rescued by Angus McDonald, the son of the Lord of the Isles. Angus and Fionnuala fell in love, and the O'Cahans weren't long back in their own lands before Angus followed them and begged for Fionnuala's hand in marriage. Dermot agreed, but only on the condition that her body be returned, when she should die, to be buried in Dungiven.

It was many years before Fionnuala died but, when she did, her grieving husband didn't want to be parted from her and kept her body on the island of Islay. However, the O'Cahans knew that something was wrong because Gráinne Roe could be heard keening and wailing mournfully around Benbradagh and up the Roe Valley. With all other family members accounted for, the O'Cahans realised

that the banshee's cry must be for Fionnuala, and they went to retrieve her body. It was only when Fionnuala's family finally buried her with her forefathers that Gráinne Roe ceased her cries.⁷¹

Peggy, a "poor but respectable-looking old woman" from Cushendall, described the O'Neill banshee for the annalist of the *Fairy Annals of Ulster*: "like an aged woman, short in stature, with a mournful cry always when it is heard ... the one at Shanes Castle is called Nein Roe, her hair is red – the hair of all the Banshees is of that colour." Peggy had worked for the O'Neills at Shane's Castle and was well acquainted with Nein Roe. One Lord O'Neill was even visited by the banshee while travelling in England – although he made every attempt to get back to Shane's Castle quickly, he died on the journey home. Another Lord O'Neill attempted to have a

state bed installed for guests in the room of Shane's Castle favoured by Nein Roe – the room caught fire that night and the castle was "in ashes by mornin'." Peggy continued "The housemaid, when I lived there, was more careful about Nein Roe's room than any she had charge of; it would have been well for Lord O'Neill if he hadn't disregarded the banshee, and meddled with her room the way he did."⁷²



Postcard of Shane's Castle by Valentine and Sons Ltd, Coleraine Museum

71 Script for the radio broadcast *Old Customs and Legends of Ireland*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:621.

72 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

Peggy claimed that, when she was a child in the townland of Kilmore, near Waterfoot, Co. Antrim, she had discovered a book belonging to Nein Roe. "I was playin', away a good piece from the school one Saturday, whin we got lave early, among the ould walls of an ancient building in the grave-yard, that was there before the ouldst in the town was born, and I spies a book lyin' on the sill of the place where there had been a window at one time." Peggy lifted the book and took it to scholars in Glenariff to see if they could make sense of it as "the letters was red, and a different shape from ours, and there was like bits of gold on the outside." Without getting any answers in Glenariff, Peggy brought the book before her school master who told her to put it back where she had found it. In the company of one of her fellow students, Peggy returned the book to the window sill and moved off to a spot they could sit to watch if anybody

came to take it. When they turned around, however, the book had already gone. "It was Nein Roe's book; she had been seen frequentin' the walls in my day, and before I was born, and she's there yet. She haunts all the ould castles and ruins in Antrim, and is heard about many a house lamentin' and moanin' before a death takes place."⁷³

The belief in banshees has, historically, been so pervasive that it is said to have impacted on domestic architecture. Bobby Friel explained that when people were "building old stone houses years and years ago, they left a stone so far outside the gable wall so as the banshee could sit on it." That is to say, there was a stone left jutting out of the gable to provide a perch "half ways up the stone wall, maybe two thirds of it up, you know ... it was all built into the gable wall, left out so a banshee could sit on it."⁷⁴

73 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

74 Bobby Friel, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

Helen McCaughan recalled seeing – and hearing – a banshee on the night one of her neighbours, died. “When she died the Banshee climbed up the pole ... it was white, no face or nothing, it was just like a sheet and she wrapped it round, and I looked and I thought to myself, ‘Am I seeing things?’ and she wailed. You know, she went on wailing and wailing, and the next thing I heard, Annie Horner had died. That was right outside her door. I saw it as plain as day. I never forgot that.”⁷⁵

“A great number of years ago” an old woman from Limavady used to pretend to be a banshee. “As soon as she had finished her work every night she would go out to the present site of the Killilane [Killane] Road, dress up and start screaming and moaning. People became very frightened and refused to venture near this area around nightfall.” Then, one evening a stranger approached the town from

this direction and, on arriving at his friend’s house, reported that he’d “found an old woman dressing up in a peculiar costume behind a hedge.” The men collected together a number of other townsfolk who caught the woman and drove her out of the district.⁷⁶

“The men collected together a number of other townsfolk who caught the woman and drove her out of the district.”

Brian Adams and his mother once saw a banshee foretelling the death of a neighbour, in Millburn, Coleraine. “Years and years ago, when I was younger, it was a summer evening, everybody was in bed and I wakened up about three



⁷⁵ Helen McCaughan, participating in the Rites of Passage project, 08/07/2015.

⁷⁶ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.20-1.

o'clock in the morning, couldn't sleep, got up and opened the window, leaned out the window for a wee while, and it was daylight, you know, and the next thing the bedroom door opened and my mum came in and she said 'What you're doing out of your bed boy?' 'Awh' I said 'I can't sleep.' 'Ah well' she said, 'c'mon an' we'll open the window have a bit of a gabble here for a minute or two until you get tired.' And directly across the road on the other side of the street, you know the lady on the Quality Street tins of chocolate, with the bonnet and the big purple dress? A girl similar to her came through a front door across the street, the door didn't open, she just came through it, went along the front of the house, and in the back door into the yard and no doors opened. A few seconds later she came out the back door along the front of the house and in through the front door again and I said to my mum 'What was that?' and she says 'Do you know what

you have just seen and I have seen it too? A banshee. Now that means either somebody in that actual house will die or somebody in the street will die.' An' we sat talking about it 'till way near six o'clock in the morning and just shortly after six, the old black Maria police van came down, and a few constables went into the house. Then a doctor came down, our doctor in fact, Dr Clark, an' he went in and then a wee while after it, the mortuary van came down and the old lady, old Mrs Sinclair was taken out ..."⁷⁷

Of course, banshees are also to be encountered in more rural settings as Margaret Huey remembered: "We'd a banshee in Stranocum you know, before they made the new road this was, when I was I suppose twelve, fourteen, I don't know ... there was a clipping on each side of this road and ... we called that The Hedges, no' the Dark Hedges but it was The Hedges ... and if you were coming down that

even in daylight, you would have been a bit scared for they always said that the banshee in the daytime took the form of a bird, and you would have heard this weird cry you know, especially if you were by yourself, that's if you heard it."⁷⁸

Jim Hunter records two stories he was told of banshees in rural Co. Londonderry. Two men were walking along the road in the Limavady area late one night when they heard a woman sobbing in the distance. They went in search of her, and as they approached, she asked them if they would be kind enough to accompany her to her father's house and wait there while she visited him as he was very ill. They agreed and, on reaching the house, sat down inside to await her return. "While sitting they heard what they thought to be a cat crying outside. The crying became so mournful that the men

thought something had happened to it and came outdoors to investigate." Although they searched all around the house, there was no sign of any cat. "Suddenly one of the men caught sight of a little lady about two feet tall jumping off the chimney." The men had seen the family banshee and, the next day, the old man had died.⁷⁹ Banshee cries that sound like the mournful calls of a cat or dog were also recorded on Rathlin, at the burial of Mrs McFarlane. Her family members could all hear the calls at the cemetery, but those unrelated to the deceased could not.⁸⁰

The second story recorded by Jim Hunter took place near Largy. One evening, towards dusk, a few brothers were out with their dogs to go hunting. The dogs, as usual, were on their leads, waiting until the brothers caught sight of a rabbit or a hare. "All of a sudden the stillness of

78 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

79 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.31-2.

80 Linda-May Ballard, "Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai." *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, p.59.



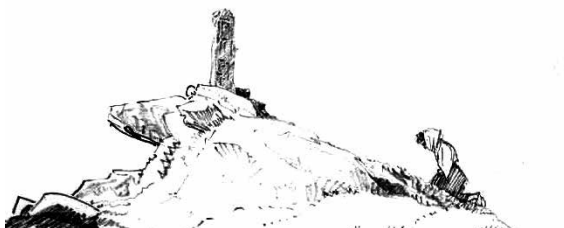
the night was disrupted by a series of low moans in the distance." The dogs slipped, or snapped, their leads and raced home, growling, whining, and then battering at the door to be let indoors. "But no one opened the door to allow them in as the brothers' father had died while they were out hunting."⁸¹

On Rathlin, a banshee was seen and heard on the evening they took Mr McMenemy to the chapel for his burial. "Just in the cliffs above the house, a grey form, like somebody dressed up in a grey robe, and this merciful cry just drifting along the edge of the cliffs, you know, they'd be about thirty or forty feet high. Just drifting along the cliffs."⁸²

According to Nan Patrick, a single banshee might foretell the death of people from multiple families. However, in such cases "It went by the initial you see, on your surname, who

was next. That's the way they told it up our way anyhow ... It was always somebody's initial. Come, say it was H and then the next one you know, there was always somebody's initial and you ran about if that was your initial ... So that's what they told up round Ballymena now."⁸³

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann has had personal experience of the banshee's wail in North Antrim. "When my neighbours' father was ill there was wailing heard on the farm. The family believed it might have been one of their cats that had been attacked by a badger and so went out to search but to no avail. The mother of the house knew all too well and said that the



81 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.32-3.

82 Linda-May Ballard, "Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai." *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, p.59.

83 Nan Patrick, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 25/06/2018.



banshee wails for your father. It wasn't long after this that the father passed away. This was the 1990s." More recently he has heard it said that the banshee was heard wailing on Rathlin Island ahead of a funeral in 2018.

"After the passing of a person in Ireland there comes the Dullahan, or the death coach - a spectacle that no one wants to see!"

"Traditionally when a person is close to death or has just passed, the banshee would let the family know. I know this to be true even in America, where some of the family have emigrated. It is often said the families with the surnames beginning 'Mac' and the 'O's has a banshee. After the passing of a person in Ireland there comes the Dullahan, or the death coach - a spectacle that no one wants to see! Back to my youth, in Donegal again, when another of my grandmother's brothers passed away: my granny got the sign in the middle

of the night. But it wasn't a banshee though, it was the falling of a large picture in the living room up here in Co. Antrim. The picture had hung for years. Coincidence? I think not!

"In Gaelic culture we have what is known as a wake where the family sit with the body for two nights with the burial taking place on the third day. It is traditional to sit right through the night with the body so as the death coach can't come and retrieve the soul. The wheels of the cart approaching, and the breathing of the horses is often heard but once the door is opened there is nothing to see. Thankfully my people have never encountered the Dullahan or his coach, his whip is supposedly made up of human spines!"⁸⁴

THE BANSHEE

A voice came crying to me window
In the wind and rain,
Like the voice of an old, old woman
Who was crying in pain:
And I knew that Michael (God rest him!)
Would never spake again.

I knew, but I didn't let on I knew,
For fear the childhern had heard:
I had it ready on me tongue to say,
It was only a bird—
But the voice cried mighty loud and close,
An not one of the childhern stirred.

Not one of the childhern moved in dheir sleep
—But the red fire shone;
And out dhere in the wet blue of the night
The voice went on—
It was sad with the sorrows that are to come
And the griefs that are gone.

For the heart of the creature was full of love
She was longing to spake.
God knows how far she had come in the dark,
And all for my sake—
But her tongue (God help her!) was a heathen
thing,
Like the cry of a kittiwake.

..... I knew she had passed by the ship
As it rose and fell;
And looked at me Michael walking the deck,
And him alive and well;
And seen the body of him sewn in a sail
And sunk in the swell:
Ant the creature (Gode help her!)
Was sorry, and trying to tell.

The trouble she must have seen!
It was all in her cry:
The pain of the unborn lives
And the lives gone by:
And she keened for me Michael; and not one
of his fatherless childhern
As much as opened an eye.⁸⁵

by M.Little

GROGACHS

Grogachs, grogas, groghas or grogans (the name derives from the Irish *gruagach*, meaning hairy or ugly) are described as stout built, broad shouldered little men, standing only about two feet high. Despite their stature, they are said to have the strength of twelve men. Although seemingly solitary in nature, a grogach can be of tremendous help to humans, if he so chooses. However, it must always be an act of generosity. Any attempt to thank a grogach, or give him any form of payment or reward always seem to end the relationship. Although they are known to live in Scotland, all accounts of Irish grogachs seem to connect them with the northeast corner of Antrim, restricted to the region of Rathlin Island and the Glens.

Mr and Mrs Morning, of the Causeway, reported that "One of them

gev great help to my grandfather, time after time, at the harvest, and would have left a rood of oats cut and stoked neater than any man livin' could do. But the Grogan gev the most help in the winter at the thrashin'; many a sack of oats he thrashed for my grandfather, leavin' the straw bottled, and the corn neatly sorted up in the corner of the barn; he always took the flail away with him, not wishin' any one to handle it after him." However, there was plentiful meat one winter and the Mornings' grandfather decided to share the bounty with the grogach. He left a share in the barn one night, and was never helped by the grogach from that night on. Indeed, he "forsook the place intirely, takin' affront because my grandfather thought he wanted meat, or would work for the like. They are no ways rivingeful; but it is best not to cross them, but let them take their own way in every respect, and to offer them nothin'."⁸⁶

86 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

The Mornings said that it was easy to know when a grogach was at work by the great noise he made during the night.⁸⁷ According to Zeak Gage who grew up partly in the Manor House on Rathlin Island, the grogach “used to wander around coughing and spitting and ridding his throat. I can remember that precisely, which everybody always talked about, but you didn’t actually see anybody.”⁸⁸

The Rathlin Manor grogach is described as “a wee man dressed in green ... Tradition was that you all would have wore red slippers, or red shoes, and then you weren’t bothered. We all did that, the young.”⁸⁹ Frances Gage, who first came to Rathlin as a young woman continued, “I don’t think he was malign, I think he was mischievous. I mean, I never doubted. I’ve never said, ‘oh yes, that’s true’, or never said ‘no, that’s not’, but one of your [Zeak’s] cousins who lives

in Dublin absolutely will swear that he saw him on the end of his bed. And he’s not the sort of person that would make that up. But the grogach has always been a part of it [the Manor House], and I think, probably a lot of the islanders, are not keen on it and perhaps wouldn’t want to stay there, even now.”⁹⁰

After a ceilidh on Rathlin one night, a group of islanders were returning down to Church Bay past the back of the Manor House. They decided to get up to some mischief, and once at the manor, planned to “maybe throw stones on the roof or get up to some roguery.” One of the young men was digging a stone out



87 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

88 Zeak Gage, participating in the Big Houses project, 22/03/2017.

89 Zeak Gage, participating in the Big Houses project, 22/03/2017.

90 Frances Gage, participating in the Big Houses project, 22/03/2017.



quietly to the man next to him but getting no response. He continued to talk, and turned to hand the stone to the figure next to him to throw “and he turned round and sees here this wee man sitting, here the gruagach was sitting beside him. So they didn’t stay too long around the house.”⁹¹

In the townland of Carey, east of Ballycastle, the local hurling team played on the stories of the grogach with a prank they carried out on an elderly farmer who lived alone. One night, during the hay making season, they got together and stacked the hay which the farmer had cut the previous day, but not yet put into stacks. The hurlers are said to have worked hard for several hours through the night and, when the farmer awoke in the morning, he found the work completed. In his delight, the work was credited to a grogach, and no one

ever had the heart to tell him the real story.⁹²

Elizabeth Andrews was told about one Ballycastle man who had a good relationship with a grogach. He “always laid out at night the bundles of corn he expected the Grogach to thresh, and each morning the appointed task was accomplished. One night he forgot to lay the corn on the floor of the barn, and threw his flail on the top of the stack. The poor Grogach imagined that he was to thresh the whole, and set to work manfully; but the task was beyond his strength, and in the morning he was found dead. The farmer and his wife buried him, and mourned deeply the loss of their small friend.”⁹³

Mary Campbell was told another story revealing the loyalty exhibited by a grogach to his favoured human

91 Linda-May Ballard, “Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai.” *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, p.78.

92 Thomas McErlaine, *A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim*, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Coleraine (2018), p.37.

93 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.50.

family – this time back on Rathlin. “The Grogach? The wee fairy-man that guarded the Master’s family through all the years? There was ones heerd him sobbin’ his heart out in the Big House when the last o’ th’ ould Master’s family quit [died].”⁹⁴

Although generally respected as a form of hobgoblin or house fairy, some accounts consider the grogach to be a manifestation of the Devil. One Rathlin islander told Linda-May Ballard that the grogach “is supposed to have left the marks of his fingers around the window case, where he was going out through the window ... He was exorcised by a priest, I suppose it was the closest opening available to him.”⁹⁵ Another islander related the story of the old watch house built on Rathlin to prevent smuggling activities along the coast. The house used by the watchmen to change over the watch – one man coming down from the

watch post, while another prepared to go up – was owned by the grandfather of Linda-May’s informant. One night, the man preparing for his watch asked the man coming off duty whether he’d left the fire lit. The man coming off duty responded that he had indeed, “and I left the wee man sitting beside it.”

Now, on Rathlin, everybody referred to the island’s grogach as the ‘wee man’, “Another name for Old Nick”, and the watchman going up to his post passed the other’s comments as a joke. However, when he reached the watch post “he opened the door and went in there was a fire, a roaring fire on, and the stool beside their fire, here wasn’t the wee man sitting on it. So the boy beat a hasty retreat and there was never a watch kept in the hut after it, they closed the place down.”⁹⁶

94 Mary Campbell, *Sea Wrack, or Long-ago Tales of Rathlin Island*, J.S. Scarlett and Son, Ballycastle (1951), p.31.

95 Linda-May Ballard, “Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai.” *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, p.77.

96 Linda-May Ballard, “Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachrai.” *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, p.78.

LEPRECHAUNS

A leprechaun is a solitary fairy, usually described as withered and old, wearing a red jacket decorated with seven rows of seven buttons and, in Ulster, often wearing a cocked hat.⁹⁷ Leprechauns are said to be low-born fairies, the sons of evil spirits and degenerate fairy women.⁹⁸ Despite that – or perhaps because of it – they are more industrious than other fairy-folk and commonly work as cobblers. Their continuous work and solitary nature enable them to accumulate great treasures which are stored in crocks, or pots.

The solitary nature of leprechauns is apparently intentional. Either their persistent resistance to the efforts of “scheming fairy mammas to marry him to young and beautiful fairies” leave them ostracised by fairy society, or they have “learned the hollowness of fairy friendship and the



Leprechaun by Gillian Rea

deceitfulness of fairy femininity, and left the society of his own disgust at its lack of sincerity.”⁹⁹

97 Anonymous newspaper contributor's column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668.

98 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), p. 140.

99 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), p. 145.

Nevertheless, the anonymous author of *In Fairyland Forlorn* describes them as mischievous and great practical jokers, "... when he is up to anything mischievous [he] leaps on a wall and spins, balancing himself on the point of his hat with his heels in the air."¹⁰⁰ D.R. McAnally describes the leprechaun as the "thrickest little divil that iver wore a brogue!"¹⁰¹

Apparently, one of the most marked peculiarities of the leprechaun is their intense hatred of schools and teachers, owing to the ridicule they receive from teachers who "affect to disbelieve in the existence of the Leprechawn and thus insult him ... He does not even like to remain in the neighbourhood where a national

school has been established, and as such schools are now numerous in Ireland, the Leprechawns are becoming scarce."¹⁰²

Accounts vary, but according to the Commonplace Book compiled by J.W. Foster in 1943, leprechauns are only heard of in the south of Ireland,¹⁰³ while D.R. McAnally states that they do exist in the northern counties of Ireland, where they are known as the logheryman.¹⁰⁴ Paddy Doogan told Sam Henry that his aunt, Catherine, once saw a "wee shoe-maker among the fairies and she was a quare fool not to catch him by the scruff o' the neck, for he would ha' filled her lap wi' gold."¹⁰⁵

100 Anonymous newspaper contributor's column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668. A similar account is provided by D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), p. 141.

101 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), pp. 145-6.

102 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), pp. 143-4.

103 Sam Henry's notes taken from J.W. Foster's Commonplace Book, 17th April 1943, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:604.

104 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), p. 141.

105 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.76.

THE LEPRECHAUN

'Twas early on the churnin' day
I rose from out my bed,
Before the strayin' shadows
Had from the garden fled.

I swithered would I need to rise
Or risk another nap
When by my widow sill I heard
A gentle tap, tap, tap.

I rose and pulled the curtains back
To see if in the yard
A stormcock chose to eat a snail
An' crack his shell so hard.

But there upon the window sill
(His back was turned to me)
A leprechaun was sittin'
An' och, he was so wee.

An' in his hand he held a shoe
He cobbled with great speed,
An' tiny was his hammer,
His awl a sharpened reed.

He grumbled underneath his breath
"Oh for my pleasant dun,
My mountain dew and' oatcake
A curse upon the shoon.

"An wi' their dancin' half the night
The sole's near worn away,
An och their foolish revellin'
Has turned my hair quite grey.

"It's near the day already
I'm tired I feel so cold,
An' should a mortal catch me
He'll take away my gold.

"I hae the pains wi' this cold sill
I'm soakin' wi' the dew,
I'm for my home, I'm for my bed
The sheugh can hae the shoes."

He leppit from the window sill
He took his awl an' last
An' that wee pair o' fairy shoes
Into the dyke he cast.

An' then across the yard he went
I did not see him more,
But I'll not doubt he had his feast
From off his fairy store.

An' often I myself was tired
That burnin' summer day,
At churnin; o' the butter
Or makin' o' the hay.

Then thought I o' the leprechaun
An' his wee feathered cap,
An o' his long an' weary sigh,
His patient tap, tap, tap.

For if we livin' mortals tire
O' thing's we hae to do,
We need not think ourselves ill-off
When fairies weary too.¹⁰⁶

by Jessie Audrey Matchette



Dunluce Castle G. Rea

MERMAIDS

Mermaids, or merrows (derived from the Irish *murúch*, meaning sea singer, or *moruadh*, meaning sea maid) are an aquatic type of fairy that used to be common all along the Irish north coast and around the Scottish Hebrides. Sam Henry wrote that a mermaid was accidentally shot on the island of Benbecula in 1815, having been mistaken for a seal – she was given a funeral at public expense on the island.¹⁰⁷

Mermaids take the form of a beautiful woman from the torso up, but with a scaled fish tail in place of legs. As will be seen, the tail could be removed when the mermaid was ashore, and legs would appear in its place. Sam Henry provides a detailed description of a mermaid: “It has the features and complexion of a European; eyes of a fine, light blue; its nose small and handsome; its mouth small; its lips thin and the edges of them round

like those of a codfish; its teeth small, regular and white; its neck full; its ears like those of an eel but placed like those of the human species, and behind them are gills for respiration which appear like curls. Its chief ornament is a beautiful membrane or fin, rising from the temples and gradually diminishing till it ends pyramidically, forming a foretop like that of a lady’s head-dress. Its breasts are fair and full but without nipples; its arms and hands are well-proportioned but without nails on the fingers; its belly is round and swelling but without a navel. It is said to have an enchanting voice which it never exerts except before a storm.”¹⁰⁸ Merrows, specifically, are said to have green hair, and exhibit webbing between their fingers.

According to Sam Henry, Dunluce Castle gets its name from “Dun-Lib-she (Dunlibshe) the fort of the fairy Lib”, where Lib itself means dripping

107 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.78; see also *The Mermaid*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2018:701.13.

108 Sam Henry, *Dunluce and the Giant’s Causeway*, Baird, Belfast (1945), p.37; see also *The Mermaid*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2018:701.13.

wet. The story goes that Liban (a diminutive for Lib) was a mermaid who lived originally lived at the bottom of Lough Neagh and “has haunted our coasts since time emerged from the Ice Age.” In the sixth century she was caught in a net by St Beoan off Larne and, on hearing a bell rung by St Davoc, assumed human form, was converted to Christianity, and later became a saint herself under the name Muirigen – a name which means ‘born from the sea’. Sam Henry contends that anyone who has visited the cave below Dunluce, known as the Mermaid’s Cave, “will realise how perfect a sea-palace it would make for a mermaid.”¹⁰⁹

Although capable of forming affections with humans, and even intermarrying, mermaids on land always long to return to the water. Jim Hunter collected the story of a mermaid from Lough Foyle. It all started on one of the roughest nights of the year. All night long, the storm

had whipped up the surface of the water and the waves battered an isolated cottage on the edge of the lough. Throughout the night, the man who lived alone in the cottage remained awake, pale with fear. At dawn, the storm settled down, and he was able to venture outside to see the damage it had caused.

As he walked along the lough shore



*The Mermaid's Cave below Dunluce,
courtesy Nicholas Wright*

he noticed a strange creature that had been washed up by the storm. On closer inspection, he realised it was a mermaid. Being a lonely man, he decided to take the mermaid home. There, he managed to pull her tail off, and watched as legs magically appeared in its place. Afraid lest she should ever return to the sea, the man took the tail and hid it far from the cottage.

Eventually, the man and the mermaid were married and she bore him a fine family. One day, while their children were playing in the fields around the cottage, they discovered the curious tail and brought it home to their mother to see if she could tell them what it was or where it had come from. As soon as the mermaid caught sight of the tail, she grabbed it, dashed to the water, slipped it on and was gone before anyone could catch her, never to be seen again.¹¹⁰ Thomas Cecil, from Rathlin Island,

recalled something similar he was told by his grand-uncle. He knew of a fisherman on the north side of the island who had married a mermaid, and “even in the present day, the descendants of this man can be pointed out.” The man didn’t own a boat and used to fish from the rocks. Then one evening, while fishing, he saw a mermaid up on one of the rocks. “He watched her for a good few evenings, and he decides you know, how he would catch her.”

The man went and spoke to an old woman on the island who was supposed to know everything. “And he went to her and he just mentioned that this mermaid had passed him and he was wondering, and you know by the way, this man was single, and he was looking for a wife as well. So he was talking to this old woman and he said to her, you know, ‘Did anyone ever catch a mermaid?’” The old woman responded that they had,



but warned the man that “when you take them home with you, you must take the tail off them ... you must hide it and they must never get it again, because if they do, they’ll go back, to the sea again, you won’t get them.”

So the man took note of the rock the mermaid used to sit on; “she was coming in with the high tide and she was staying there when the tide fell.” He “waited ‘til the tide fell and he got out behind the rock and caught her and took her home with him. And he done what this old woman said you see, he took her tail, and he hung it up, you know hid it in the barn, in the roof of the barn you see.”

The fisherman and the mermaid lived happily together for a number of years and had a girl and a boy together. One day, when the children were aged five and four, the man went off to the mainland and left them playing in the barn. After a while, they ran back to their home to find their

mother whom they told to “come and see this funny thing they’d found, you know, it was her tail.” Of course she took her tail and slipped away back to the water.

When the man arrived home that evening he was very upset and “they sat that night, the children, he couldn’t work with the children the same as the mother could, and he’d terrible trouble getting them settled at night, but they say after he went to bed she returned to the house to look after the children and to clean up, but the fisherman never seen his wife after it.”¹¹¹

The same tale was told to Sam Henry by Katie Glass, with a few variations. In Katie’s version, the mermaid “used to comb her hair on the rocks on sunny days, and to whose charms a Rathlin man succumbed.” The Rathlin man was smitten by the mermaid and, through conversation, convinced her to marry him. She then told him about

her tail, to take it and hide it where she would never find it again. He “decaudalised her, and beneath the tail she had feet and legs like another woman.” Sam’s fisherman had four children with the mermaid, and it was the oldest boy at the age of twelve who discovered the tail in the rafters of the barn. “When the merrow-maid saw it [the tail] she slipped down into the sea and never came back again.”¹¹²

A third version of Rathlin’s mermaid tale, was told to Mary Campbell by “a very old woman, many years ago”. “Once a bewtiful mermaid wud come an’ sit on them rocks down there an’ be combin’ out her hair ... She had a coverin’ (a coghil o’ fish), that she’d whip over her an’ knot round her middle when she’d be goin’ intil the water, (an’ without it she could not go).” In this version of the story, it is this covering that allowed her to escape back to the sea. A fisherman caught hold of it,

“When the merrow-maid saw it she slipped down into the sea and never came back again.”

took it from her, and hid it in the hay-loft so the mermaid would stay. As in the other stories, the mermaid eventually discovered the hiding place and returned to the water, but as in Thomas Cecil’s, she returned at night to care for her children.¹¹³ The use of a special covering by the mermaid of Campbell’s story ties in with the Orkadian, Shetland and Faroese traditions of selkies – aquatic seal-fairies who can shed their skins to appear on land in human form, but must put their seal-skins back on again to return to the sea.

Mary Campbell’s informant added that “another man there got a mermaid intil his fishnet; but the scraighin’s an’ yowls beat all, he said, an’ he be to let her go when he seen the tears on her bewtiful face.”¹¹⁴

112 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), pp.78-9; see also Sam Henry, *Dunluce and the Giant’s Causeway*, Baird, Belfast (1945), p.38.

113 Mary Campbell, *Sea Wrack, or Long-ago Tales of Rathlin Island*, J.S. Scarlett and Son, Ballycastle (1951), p.28.

114 Mary Campbell, *Sea Wrack, or Long-ago Tales of Rathlin Island*, J.S. Scarlett and Son, Ballycastle (1951), p.28.

PECHTS AND DANES

Another diminutive race of fairy-folk were the pechts, also referred to, rather confusingly, as Picts. While the Picts were a historical people who once inhabited large parts of modern

Scotland and may have had a limited impact in northern Ulster, pechts “are spoken of as low, stout people, who built some of the ‘coves’ in the forts.” Elizabeth Andrews writes that “An old man, living in the townland of



Pecht by Barbara Hall



Drumcrow, Co. Antrim, showed me the entrance to one of these artificial caves, and gave me a vivid description of its builders. 'The Pechts' he said, 'were low-set, heavy-made people, broad in the feet so broad' he added, with an expressive gesture, 'that in rain they could lie down and shelter themselves under their feet.' He spoke of them as clad in skins, while an old woman at Armoy said they were dressed in grey. I have seldom heard of the Pechts beyond the confines of Antrim, although an old man in Donegal spoke of them as short people with large, unwieldy feet."¹¹⁵ Sam Henry notes that the mound at Mountsandel was said to be another "royal dun [fort] of the Pictish race."¹¹⁶

One tale concerning pechts, existing in slightly different forms in the Causeway area and in Scotland, is the story of the loss of heather beer. Robert Louis Stevenson published the Scottish version in poetic form

in the late nineteenth century. In that version, the "Pictish" people (described as "dwarfish and swarthy") know the secret recipe to make ale from heather. A king comes to reign over Scotland who persecutes the Picts and drives them to extinction. In the end, only two Picts remain, a father and his son. The king captures the men and demands they give up their secret recipe.

Across this side of the water, in North Antrim, the king and his men are replaced by the Firbolg, one of the ancient races said to have existed in Ireland before the coming of the Gaels. As Jim Stewart takes up the story, the last two pechts have been caught among the rocks by the edge of a cliff: "Aye so they knew there was someone in under the rocks, so they tipped up the rocks and it caught the old man and his son. And the old man said to them – they wanted to know you see, [whether] the old

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.27.

¹¹⁶ *Undiscovered Ulster: County Londonderry*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2017:8.

man [and] the son had the secret of heather beer, how you make beer beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beer from heather." The old pecht/Pict says to his Firbolg captors "'Kill my son, bind my son's two feet, bind his hands behind his back throw him over the cliffs into the sea because if I tell youse he'd beat me up. He'd beat me up if I tell you the secret of heather beer.' So they did that. They tied the son up, threw him into the sea and the old man started to laugh. He says 'Nae you'll never know it, cos my son was a coward. He would have told you! My son was a coward he would have told you but I won't tell youse, do what may!' So the secret of heather beer died with him. He wouldn't tell so that's what happened that's how they lost the secret of heather beer. Don't have heather beer anymore – the most beautifullest beer ever."¹¹⁷

Along with the pechts/Picts, are the Danes, another group who have both historical and folkloric traditions

which have blurred over the years. "The traditions regarding the Danes vary; sometimes they are spoken of as a tall race, sometimes as a short race. There is little doubt that the tall race were the medieval Danes, while in the short men we have probably a reminiscence of an earlier race." According to Elizabeth Andrews, it was the Danes, not the pechts, who built the stone forts and souterrains across Ireland, and who knew the secret of heather beer.¹¹⁸

"... the Danes who built it were short, stout people, and as they had no wheelbarrows they carried the earth in their leather aprons."

Elizabeth Andrews wrote about the local belief that Ballycairn Fort, north of Coleraine above the west bank of the Bann, was built by the Danes. "The entire height is about twenty-six feet; at perhaps twelve feet from the ground a flat platform is reached, and at one end of this the upper part

¹¹⁷ Jim Stewart, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 11/06/18.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), pp.28-31, 41.

of the fort rises in a circular form for about fourteen or fifteen feet. I was told the Danes who built it were short, stout people, and as they had no wheelbarrows they carried the earth in their leather aprons. Here we seem to come in contact with a very primitive people, probably wearing the skins of wild animals, and who are said, like the fairies, to have sandy or red hair.

“As far as is known no souterrain exists in Ballycairn Fort, although I was shown a stone at the side which my guide said might be the entrance to a cove; it appeared to me to be simply a piece of rock appearing above the sod, or possibly a boulder. There is a tradition of fairies living in this fort, as it is said that in long ago times the farmers used to threaten their boys if they were not doing right, that the fairies would come out of the fort and carry them away.”¹¹⁹

She also “heard from an elderly man of Danes having encamped on his

grandmother’s farm. Smoke was seen rising from an unfrequented spot, and when an uncle went to investigate the matter he found small huts with no doors, only a bundle of sticks laid across the entrance. In one of the huts he saw a pot boiling on the fire, and going forward he began to stir the contents. Immediately a red-haired man and woman rushed in; they appeared angry at the intrusion, and when he went out threw a plate after him.”¹²⁰



*Mountsandel, Sam Henry Collection,
Coleraine Museum*

119 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), pp.38-9.

120 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.9.



POOKAS

The shape-shifting pooka is another solitary fairy, said to live on lonely mountains and among old ruins. The anonymous author of *In Fairyland Forlorn*, borrowing heavily on W.B. Yeats, suggests the name may derive from the Irish poc or billy goat.¹²¹

D.R. McAnally's informant described the pooka as "an avil sper't that does be always in mischief, but sure it niver does sarious harrum axceptin' to thim that deserves it, or thim that shpakes av id disrespectful."¹²²

A pooka is said to be able to take many forms including a goat, a horse, a bull or an eagle. D.R. McAnally says it "looks like the finest black horse that iver wore shoes. But it isn't a horse at all at all, for no horse'ud have eyes av fire, or be breathin' flames av blue wid a shmell o' sulfur..."¹²³

Yeats described the pooka as a sleek, terrible steed who speaks with the tongue of a man. He (and the pooka is always a male) is always black in colour and, almost without exception, malign in intention. However, if consulted during the festival of Halloween/Samhain, a pooka will speak intelligently, without malice, and would tell the listener of everything due to befall them in the coming year.¹²⁴

*"an avil sper't that does be always
in mischief, but sure it niver does
sarious harrum axceptin' to thim that
deserves it, or thim that shpakes av
id disrespectful."*

121 Anonymous newspaper contributor's column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668.

122 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), p.18.

123 D.R. McAnally Jr, *Irish Wonders*, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, New York (1888), p.18.

124 W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, Walter Scott Publishing Company, London (1888), p.94.



WATER HORSES

Like mermaids, the water horse, or sea horse, was a spirited aquatic creature which could survive on land, but always longed to return to the

sea. Water horses are associated with various places in Ireland and in Scotland – perhaps the most famous was the one encountered by Saint Columcille in the River Ness.¹²⁵

Jim Hunter was told the story of a man from the lowlands of Myroe. He was walking along the shore of Lough Foyle one morning after a storm when he came across a water horse lying exhausted on the foreshore. He was so impressed by the creature that he decided to bring it back to his farm and nurse it back to full health.

After a few days, the water horse regained its full strength, and the farmer began to fear that it might try to return to the water. He moved it to pastures as far from the salty air of the lough as he could and, for more than a year, he managed to keep it away from the sea. Then, absent-mindedly, the farmer told his servant to take the horse down to the shore to collect a load of seaweed. No sooner had the water horse caught "the sting of the salt air on his nostrils" than he wrecked the cart and returned to the sea, leaving the farmer in great distress.¹²⁶

Another farmer, living near the Limavady Junction, bought a thoroughbred American racing mare which he kept isolated in a field along the shore of Lough Foyle while he searched for a suitable stallion to mate with her. After searching unsuccessfully for some time, he had to reconcile himself to the fact that there were no suitable stallions and he would have no foal from her during that year. Then, much to his astonishment, he discovered that she was in foal despite having no contact with other horses. "A few days after this the farmer found the answer to the mystery when he spied a sea horse from the lough sporting with his mare. The foal when it was born was immediately bought by a racing enthusiast who raced it in America where it was never known to have lost a race."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.4-5.

¹²⁷ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.12-3.



*Apparition by J. Spence,
Sam Henry Collection,
Coleraine Museum*

LORE OF THE LAND
GHOSTS

GHOSTS

Sam Henry provides a fairly common observation that “The ghost was an emanation of the subconscious mind,” but then goes on to admit that he knows “people of education and reasoned belief who have seen things they cannot account for.”¹²⁸ Ghosts are believed to be the spirits of the dead, trapped between this world and the next by some longing, sense of unfulfilled duty, or an unbridled anger against the living. As with all supernatural beings, ghosts are experienced in a variety of ways, most commonly as apparitions who are seen but not heard, or as poltergeists who, while unseen, make their presence known by making sounds and causing objects to physically move across surfaces or through the air.

PUBLIC APPARITIONS

May Graham, from Portrush, spoke of her own experience “walking from

my uncle’s home to the Whiterocks, on a winter’s night, country road. And you came down a hill, into a hollow, and you came up a hill, and at the top of the hill were two entrances to farms on both sides ... And we were chatting as we walked along. Quite a dark night. And all of a sudden I felt my mother stiffen and she went

“Dressed completely in white, with a whiter-than-white band across here and arms folded like that. Never moved.”

very quiet, and I looked at her. She was looking to her right, and I looked and I saw – and I can picture it yet – a small person. And my mother was small but smaller than mummy. Someone about that height. Dressed completely in white, with a whiter-than-white band across here and arms folded like that. Never moved. And my mother, she practically started to run, never spoke. Father

lost his temper and he's asking what's wrong and we were so terrified that we couldn't answer him. And we eventually got home and he, poor man, didn't know what had happened, put on the light. My mother looked at me, first thing she said to me, 'What did you see?' And I told her as I have explained to you. She said 'I saw exactly the same.' My father said, he looked at both of us, he said 'I looked at the direction where May was looking,' he says, 'I saw nothing. Emma, I thought you'd gone daft or something.' Now the three of us looked, mother saw it first, I saw it and I was about 10 or 11, and my father didn't see it."¹²⁹

One day, Bobby Friel was driving along the coast road when he saw a young cyclist riding towards him, dressed like he was from the 1940s. "There was a young boy came down on the bike round the corner and he'd a herringbone long coat on him, and a peak cap and he was riding a woman's

bike. And I thought – he came up to the car – and what's going to happen here?" Bobby had no chance to stop or swerve, and the cyclist made no attempt to move out of the way. "And he went, he just passed through the car."¹³⁰ Bobby says he has often wondered about that boy, but has never managed to find out who he was, or what might have happened to him.

While May and Bobby found themselves face to face with apparitions they did not know and could not explain, Rosemary McBride knew a story involving a recognisable face. "There's one I know from away Garvagh area, someone I know personally; he was on his way home one day and he met a neighbour, spoke to the neighbour and went on. And when he got home he discovered the neighbour had died that morning..."¹³¹

129 May Graham, participating in the Rites of Passage project, 10/07/2015.

130 Bobby Friel, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 25/06/2018.

131 Rosemary McBride participating in the Lore of the Land project, 25/06/2018.

Aaron Westall was a doctor living and working in North Antrim in the late nineteenth century. He was well liked and had plenty of patients. He was a hearty eater and drinker and particularly keen on golf. One afternoon, he was playing a round – probably on the course at Portrush – with two friends named McGruer and Watson. There was a half-sovereign stake on each hole and Dr Westall was performing well, having won £8 by the thirteenth hole. Suddenly, a boy appeared on the course, panting, having been sent with an urgent message for Dr Westall. A patient of his, living a mile distant on the Bushmills Road, was very ill and needed him. The doctor was unwilling to leave his game at first, but eventually agreed, and



told his friends he would be back to make more money out of them. They paused their play, and awaited his return.

But Dr Westall did not return. On his way back, he was whipping his horse to a gallop when some hens appeared in the road. He swerved to avoid them and overturned his gig in a ditch. He was thrown from his seat and killed instantly; the game of golf was never finished. However, the next time his friends, McGruer and Watson, played golf together they heard something very strange at the fourteenth hole. They had taken their shots and were walking on when they heard a voice calling “Fore!” from behind them, and “the unmistakeable thwack of an iron striking the ball”. Startled, they hastily moved to get out of the way, and turned to look for the player who had appeared so suddenly behind them. They saw no one but both were sure that the voice had belonged to Dr Westall.¹³²

Loughareema, or the Vanishing Lake, in the Glens of Antrim, is filled by underground springs whose waters appear and disappear. A source of amazement to locals and travellers in earlier times, it is sometimes referred to as the Fairy Lough. In the nineteenth century, a road was constructed over the lake bed and at least two tragic events on that road have led to ghost sightings in the area.

According to the *Coleraine Chronicle* (8th October 1898), Colonel John Magee McNeill had been visiting family in Cushendun. Intending to catch a train from Ballycastle back to Ballymoney, he had his coachman David McNeill, attempt to travel the road across the lake as the waters were rising. A witness recalled how the horses were successfully coaxed forward until the water was above the level of their bellies. They then began to panic as they half walked and half swam. Colonel McNeill managed to get out of the carriage and attempted to swim to shore but was hampered

by his thick winter coat. After a few minutes of struggle, all that could be seen was a floating hat, a coat and the leg of one of the horses protruding from the surface. Both men and horses drowned. Their ghosts are still said to haunt the lough.¹³³

James Murphy shared a different story about Loughareema which was supported by Lillian McCullough: “The vanishing lake: if you want to disappear go there for a day. There was a guy told not to cross that, hey. That was the winter – I don’t know who it was – but it was snowing and he was never got again ... he was a breadman so he was ... He said he had to go and deliver the bread and stuff the people needed hey. He was told not to go but he went on anyhow so he did, and being a good martyr as he was hey. Never was seen again. Never.” Never seen alive anyway, Lillian McCullough confirmed that his ghost can still be seen on certain occasions at the site.¹³⁴

133 Thomas McErlaine, *A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim*, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Coleraine (2018), p.42.

134 James Murphy and Lillian McCullough, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/18.



Orreen Yates and her husband built a house on land that used to be part of the Flowerfield estate, Portstewart, beside the old cemetery and opposite Flowerfield House itself. She recalls what she saw in what is now Diversity Park, between Flowerfield House and the Coleraine Road. "... one bright early autumn morning, a friend and I were sitting in the lounge having a cup of coffee and catching up on a bit of chat. She suddenly turned ashen and pointing to the grassy field in front of Flowerfield house, she uttered the words 'What on earth is that?'

"I looked to where she was referring. In the field in front of the house there is a pile of stones and folklore has it that some goings on in Flowerfield resulted in two small children being murdered and buried in the spot marked by the stones. Over the years workmen were warned never to touch or remove the stones or ill fate would befall them so for many years the stones were left untouched. It was

just at these stones and there, plain to be seen, without any shred of doubt, were two figures.

"They were small in stature, not just like children but not quite like adults. I have always described them as being like the characters on a tin of Quality Street. They wore long cloaks and bonnet type hats. They were walking with their backs to us going towards the boundary of Flowerfield estate with the cemetery. We watched their somewhat slow, plodding progress, and as they reached the hedge we expected them to turn right onto the Agherton Road or left back towards Flowerfield House. But, instead, hard as it may be to believe, before our very eyes they just seemed to disappear, almost vaporise into the shrubbery.

"We were stunned to say the very least and I was so glad someone else was there with me to witness the incident because I felt no one would ever

believe me, it sounded so incredible. When my husband came home for lunch I was excitedly recounting the story and he scathingly asked 'Were you putting a drop of Bushmills in the coffee, maybe?' I knew people would find the story hard to believe but I and my friend witnessed it and neither of us will ever forget it."¹³⁵

"I was so glad someone else was there with me to witness the incident because I felt no one would ever believe me, it sounded so incredible."

On another occasion, "An elderly lady who used to work and live on the Flowerfield estate called with me one day and said she just wanted to have a look round the place where she had spent many years of her young life. She talked excitedly about times gone by and I only wish I had paid more attention to her. She talked about the ghost of the White Lady crossing the road between the two graveyards

and apparently she was seen on a number of occasions by local people and a postman on his early morning round."¹³⁶

GHOSTLY NUNS AND GREY LADIES

A great many sightings of apparitions are said to involve ghostly ladies or nuns – usually figures in black or grey. Perhaps the most famous nun of the Causeway area is Sheelah Dubh, or Black Julia, McQuillan - the Black Nun of Bonamargy Friary. Located just outside of Ballycastle, Bonamargy was originally founded for the Franciscan order by Rory McQuillan in the early sixteenth century. Sometime in the early to mid-seventeenth century, the reclusive prophetess Julia McQuillan sought shelter in the (by then) defunct friary where she spent her time in the "constant exercise of the most austere devotions."¹³⁷ She was said to be a great prophetess, and many of her prophecies were said to have come true such as human flight,

¹³⁵ Orreen Yates, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 05/04/19.

¹³⁶ Orreen Yates, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 05/04/19.

¹³⁷ Mr and Mrs S.C. Hall, *Ireland, Its Scenery and Character* vol. 3, Jeramiah How, London (1843), p.139.



Bonamargy Friary, courtesy Nicholas Wright

automobiles, and the drowning of a red-haired priest at the Devil's Churn just on the coast by Bonamargy.¹³⁸

The story goes that her sister, after committing some "frailty", was thrown out by her family and, in poor health, sought refuge and penitence with Julia at Bonamargy. However, rather than share the same roof with a sinner,

Julia left the friary and continued her usual devotions outside, despite a raging storm and deaf to her sister's pleas. After a while, she looked back towards the buildings to see a blazing light shining from the room where her sister was staying that was far brighter than any candle or fire. She returned just in time to hear her sister's last words of repentance before she died.

138 Philip Dixon Hardy, *The Northern Tourist, or Stranger's Guide to the North and North-West of Ireland*, William Curry Jnr and Company, Dublin (1830), p286; see also Matt Scally's interview with Ulster Television (1962), available through the Northern Ireland Screen's Digital Film Archive.



She took the bright light to be a sign that her sister had received God's forgiveness and that she too should be more forgiving and merciful.¹³⁹ It was later said that in her new-found humility, Julia had asked to be buried below the entrance to the church at Bonamargy so that anyone entering the holy ground would walk over her corpse.

She either tripped on the thirteenth step of the stairway leading up to the domestic areas of the friary and died from the fall – or else was murdered in the same spot. It is said that bad luck will come to anyone who puts a foot on the step. According to the legend, if you walk seven times around the grave in a clockwise direction, then seven times anti-clockwise, and then place a hand through the hole in her unusual grave slab, that you can summon her ghost. There have been numerous stories of sightings around the friary of a nun or a black

robed woman, and they are especially prevalent in the hallway below the stairs, and on the stairs themselves.



*The stairs at Bonamargy Friary,
courtesy Nicholas Wright*

139 Mr and Mrs S.C. Hall, *Ireland, Its Scenery and Character* vol. 3, Jeramiah How, London (1843), p.139.

Brian Willis, writing for BBC's *Your Place and Mine*, described his own experience when visiting the site to research for his article. While on site, taking a photo of Julia McQuillan's supposed grave, he heard a low thud and immediately saw a family moving at high speed away from the domestic range of the friary. "Did you hear that noise?" they asked me. 'A stone fell out of the wall right in front of us.' We all trooped back to investigate and true enough a stone some two feet across had fallen from quite high up in the thick wall and split into several pieces at their feet ... Once the fright was over we went to the local Police Station and reported the fall, because, who knows, the whole passage might be about to collapse. They were quick to respond and we heard later that, as a result of our report, the police had temporarily sealed off the passage, then informed the Heritage Department who had sealed it off permanently ... Speaking to a member of the Environment and Heritage staff the next day we discussed the strange

rock fall and the fact that it had not come from the roof as one would have expected, but had apparently popped out of the thick wall. 'Yes' he said, and here I quote the man verbatim... 'Almost as if it had been pushed from behind.'"¹⁴⁰

Margaret Huey told the story – perhaps related to Julia McQuillan – of the Black Nun of the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle. "You know when I was young I worked in the Marine. I was in the kitchen and then I done waiting staff. And we used to sit and tell each other stories after we had our tea at night, and we scared ourselves. The night porter then had to come up the back stairs with us where we slept, up in the rooms up there. They always said that there was a nun there and they called her the Black Nun. She'd slipped and fell and broke her neck and she appeared then at 12 o'clock and our hearts were scared you know, and we'd have to get the porter to walk up the stairs with us.""¹⁴¹

140 Brian Willis, "Ballycastle's Black Nun", *Your Place and Mine* (16/10/14), archived <https://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/yourplaceandmine/antrim/A789285.shtml>.

141 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/18.



The staff of the Marine Hotel; Margaret Huey stands on the far left, courtesy Margaret Huey

A grey figure of a nun was said to be encountered in Rathain House, Coleraine, when it functioned as a hospital. She was thought to have been, perhaps, one of the patients who died and was then buried in the hospital grounds. The Grey Lady, as she was known, was usually encountered in the corridor where the nurses had their lockers. "But I never saw her," admitted Kay Malcolm. "I

never went up to there [in the dark] – I always made sure I'd the lights on!"¹⁴²

O'Hara Castle in Portstewart – now the Dominican College – had its own Grey Nun. Brian Adams tells the story he was told when he was only nine or ten. "Along the wee road, along the coast, a wee pathway round the castle to the beach at the other side - Burnside Beach - and there's a

¹⁴² Kay Malcolm, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

doorway had been built in the wall at one time, in the perimeter wall, but it's now blocked up and there's supposed to be this figure of a nun comes out. She just glides out as if she was on ice, across the wee path, the path's about three feet wide and then you've the wee kerb at the edge of the rock side, and then there's so many hundred feet drop. But she comes out and stands right on the very precipice of this cliff and she stands there for ages until somebody spots her.

"And you see her like, and she knows you can see her. And then she'll just sort of smile at you and then just fall straight over and you just 'Ah oh my God!' So you jump in to save her and, when you jump in and sink and come back up to the surface again, you hear somebody whistling and you look around and she's back up on the cliffs again. You are now in the water and can't get out. Where she jumps in it's like a hole in the sea bed and when you get out in there, boats or any rescue can't come in because of the

jagged rocks so it makes sure that you don't get rescued.

"But then I was told a while back that that actual door, the purpose of that door, it was a famine door during the famine season where the owner, the lady of the house, came out and she offered the poor people, because of the famine, she offered them fresh food. But she wasn't going to give it away free, you could do wee odd jobs like, you could do the dishes and I could maybe fix a table or a chair and she would pay you in kind then you know. But other than that I don't know any more than that."¹⁴³

The Ballylough estate near Bushmills, Co. Antrim, has its own grey lady, known as May Rae, who is sporadically seen around the grounds. Back in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the McDonnells were becoming the lords of North Antrim, they pushed the McQuillan chieftains out of the stronghold of Dunluce, back to Ballylough Castle. David Traill gives

***“Who is that blonde woman
that just ran across the path
behind you?”***

his account of the story: “During that next hundred years they were raiding each other and a bit of banter was going on I suppose. And the story goes that the McQuillans were raiding the McDonnells one day and they took cattle, other livestock, arms, and slaves.

“When they returned back to Ballylough actually, they found that one of those slaves turned out to be highborn, being a chieftain’s daughter from the McDonnell clan. She’s kept for ransom and, during that period, she gets a wee touch of Stockholm syndrome and falls in love with one of her captors. He reciprocates and the two of them decide to get married. A truce is called between the two clans and here at Ballylough a wedding is set up.

“And the story goes that during

the wedding feast, as such, the McDonnells rose as one and slew everybody. Unfortunately they slew her as well. And she is reputed to be the little grey lady who walks up and down from the castle towards the house at intermittent periods. Now, we find it strange and hard to believe, but only a year ago [Roman], one of our work-aways, while working on cutting a path down to the crannog out on the old lake, turned ‘round to me as I walked towards him and said ‘Who is that blonde woman that just ran across the path behind you?’

“I said, ‘Well that’d be flipping difficult because there’s two big sheughs on either side and I don’t know how she’d have run across either of those.’ To this day, we do not know whether there is an element of truth in the story ... The story my father used to tell was



that it was a premonition of death. So the only people who actually saw her were already dead ... not a banshee, this is supposedly not terrifying, but just the fact that those who've seen her were supposed to have died shortly afterwards ...

"What Roman [the work-away] saw last year would then question that at the back of it. Because very definitely, what he saw – and he is adamant, [a] very straight guy you know, not known for his day dreaming capability, let's put it that way – he is adamant that this girl ran across the path behind me. Blonde hair, and ran from Peter's Wood in towards the woods behind the house, and there were no blonde women in the house at that time that I'm aware of, bar my wife, and she wouldn't have run across that sheugh anyway. For definite. 'Cause she would have thumped me on the way past. But there you go."¹⁴⁴

The remains of Dunluce castle too,

perched on the cliffs overlooking the North Atlantic, have several ghosts associated with them. It is sometimes said that the ghost of Richard de Burgh, the fourteenth century Earl of Antrim, can be seen walking the castle grounds on stormy nights. Although there does not seem to be any associated story to explain why his ghost is trapped at Dunluce.¹⁴⁵

"Although Reginald's body washed ashore the following day, Maeve Roe was never found. It is said that Maeve's ghost can still be seen sweeping the floor of her prison in the northeast tower."

The more famous Dunluce ghost is Maeve Roe McQuillan, the only daughter of the McQuillan chief. She was betrothed to her cousin Rory Og McQuillan, but fell in love with Reginald O'Cahan, the son of the O'Cahan chief who was then being held prisoner in Dunluce. Refusing to marry Rory Og, Maeve was locked away in the northeast tower of

¹⁴⁴ David Traill, contributing to the Lore of the land project, 09/10/18.

¹⁴⁵ J. Aeneas Corcoran, *Irish Ghosts*, Geddes and Grosset, New Lanark (2001), p.87.

Dunluce until Reginald managed to rescue her on a particularly stormy night. The two managed to slip out of the castle and launched a boat through the Mermaids Cave below but were dashed against cliffs and drowned.

Although Reginald's body washed ashore the following day, Maeve Roe was never found. It is said that Maeve's ghost can still be seen sweeping the floor of her prison in the northeast tower. In 1844, Charles Arlincourt visited the northeast tower at Dunluce and wrote: "I was desired remark how carefully it was swept. 'Who undertakes this office?' I asked. 'No living being,' was the answer. 'Every night this prison-like chamber is cleaned like a ball-room, and yet no one enters it.' 'Who then keeps it in order?' 'Maeva, the sweeper of Dunluce, and the banshee of the McQuillans.'"¹⁴⁶ Here we find a fairly ubiquitous inherent blurring between human ghosts and fairy banshees.

Sam Henry reported that Willie Adams, a pilot from Portrush, had written something similar, that Maeve Roe should be seen as a banshee rather than a ghost.¹⁴⁷

Another commonly told story recounts the time that the castle kitchens and storerooms fell into the sea during a particularly bad storm in 1639, drowning many servants and crushing others. Sarah Carson was always told that "there was one wee boy left in the corner, covered in flour."¹⁴⁸ According to Madeline McCully, the sole survivor was an itinerant cobbler who reported the wild wailing of a banshee with the face of a beautiful young girl.¹⁴⁹

Presumably this banshee is intended to be Maeve Roe McQuillan, although by then the castle had passed from the McQuillans into the hands of the McDonnells.

Afterwards, visitors to the castle reported hearing cries and wails,

146 Cited by Madeline McCully, *Haunted Antrim*, The History Press Ireland: Dublin (2017).

147 Sam Henry, *Dunluce and the Giant's Causeway*, Baird, Belfast (1945), pp.23-4.

148 Sarah Carson, contributing to the Lore of the land project, 08/10/18.

149 Madeline McCully, *Haunted Antrim*, The History Press Ireland: Dublin (2017).

coming from beyond the cliff edge as it was then. Some explained these as the effects of the wind, but they have also been heard on windless days.¹⁵⁰ Sadly the details of the story, at least, are demonstrably false – the kitchens were never located along the part of the building which collapsed, and illustrations from the nineteenth century show the parts of the building which did fall into the sea were still standing two centuries after they were supposed to have fallen.¹⁵¹

DOMESTIC HAUNTINGS

Sam Henry recorded the story of a young man from North Antrim who set out to look for labouring work. When night approached, he stopped at the house of a well-to-do farmer to ask if he could stay the night. The farmer struck a bargain with him; he was to sleep the night in an old castle nearby and if he survived, he could have £10 and marry the farmer's daughter. "He was shown to the castle room and at a good fire, armed with

a blunderbuss and a prayer-book, he waited for the worst but was not afraid for, he said he had a 'middling good conscience.'"

At midnight, he heard heavy footsteps on the floor above, and a voice calling out, "'I'll fall, I'll fall'. Through a trap-door came the legs of a man; later the body followed, and lastly the arms and shoulders; a second ghost similarly assembled himself, and a third. Then the ghosts played football, the young man taking sides with the first who had entered his room." Enjoying the young man's company, the three ghosts soon told their story. The first ghost was the farmer's father, the second his grand-father and the third his great-grandfather. They had each lived their lives for profit, and "had reaped where they had not sown." They were now doomed, they said, to play football throughout the afterlife.

The young man could help them, they said, by joining with the farmer

150 J. Aeneas Corcoran, *Irish Ghosts*, Geddes and Grosset, New Lanark (2001), p.87.

151 Colin Breen, *Dunluce Castle: History and Archaeology*, Four Courts Press, Dublin (2012).

to repay everyone they had extorted money from. They showed him a secret stash of gold to use for this purpose. "The young man organised this redress and was rewarded with wealth and the daughter of his host. When all was made right, he visited the old castle and saw three white birds fly up to heaven therefrom."¹⁵²

Orreen Yates recalled stories of ghost sightings in the area of Flowerfield House, Portstewart. "An elderly cousin of my mother's who lived on Larkhill called with us regularly and regaled us of the history of the people in and around the area and of the Flowerfield estate. Just up the road from us, on the upper side of the graveyard, was the Cashlandoo House. It used to be the Church of Ireland rectory and was later inhabited by two families and then later sold to the Herald family who opened a restaurant there. It was reputed to be haunted by a ghost and a newspaper article covered this in great detail. It was later demolished

and is now the site of Portstewart Baptist Church, so I am quite sure all the so-called existing ghosts have been exorcised by now."¹⁵³

Pamela Hutchinson remembers her mother taking advantage of ghost stories to keep young lads out of the grounds of the old rectory in Macosquin. "We had a wee bit of ground and she would have set potatoes and carrots and all and done a wee bit of gardening ... and then the young ones would have come in with their football, thrown their football in so they would, an' then they would have tramped over the potatoes. So then one night, it was just getting dark, just this sort of time of the year, and they were coming in and it was just sort of getting



152 Script for the radio broadcast *Old Customs and Legends of Ireland*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:621.

153 Orreen Yates, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 05/04/19.

dusk and she – you see, there was always talk of a rectory ghost – so she says ‘I’ll show them and we’ll see what they say in the shop in the morning’. So she put a big sheet over her head and went like this and they ran so they did. And they said the next day, ‘Guess what! We seen the rectory ghost last night’ and the other one says ‘No, there’s no rectory ghost.’ ‘I mean, we did see it and it were all white. It was the rectory ghost!’”¹⁵⁴

Of course, not all stories of hauntings have such banal explanations. Fiona Milnes gave an account of unnerving and unexplained events at her daughter Catherine’s house in Portrush, Co. Antrim. “I don’t know, something about the bungalow. I always got a very bad feeling about it, and it was always cold no matter how much heat or anything you’d on, it was always cold. And whenever you walked down the hallway there was like this mirror, you know, at the end of the hallway. And for whatever reason every time I walked down that hallway,

I couldn’t look in that mirror, ‘cause I just had this awful feeling ... On three separate occasions Catherine woke up in the middle of the night and her TV in the living room was on. [She] had it switched off, and it just came on but really, really loud, so it had.”

“And there was my granddaughter, [who] was only three at the time, and they had a birthday party for her and,



Ghostly mirror, by Gillian Rea

154 Pamela Hutchinson, participating in the Big Houses project, 23/03/2016.



Birthday balloons, by Gillian Rea

you know the way you have balloons and all that there? Well the next morning after the birthday party, all her balloons were in her bedroom and that particular bedroom was freezing cold like – I would never babysit inside that house, always said ‘no I’m going to take them to my house’ – and when they went in the next morning every single balloon was burst and Catherine said to her, you know ‘Why did you burst all your balloons?’ and she said ‘I didn’t.’ She said ‘That man did’ ... We found out

afterwards that the man that owned the house [before Catherine] died in it, and he died in that bedroom where the weans slept ... there’s people that said he wasn’t a very nice man, but I always got a really bad feeling, I would never stay in it on my own ‘cause I just have this, I just have a feeling there was something there, it was really weird.”¹⁵⁵

Jim Hunter recorded the story of a Dungiven man who was a skilled card player and could never be beaten;

he died and left his belongings to his twenty year old son. When he was going through his father's belongings, the young man found his deck of cards and immediately "felt himself impelled to gamble. His father's luck seemed to follow him for every night he played he won a great sum of money."

One night, seated around an open fire with a number of other gamblers, an old man appeared out of the shadows and advanced towards them. "Slowly



he walked towards the young man who instantly recognised him as his deceased father. Angrily he snapped the deck of cards from his son and reprimanded him for gambling. The

son had such a fright that he never played cards again."¹⁵⁶

In the 1970s, Jim Stewart obtained the lease to the old converted coach house, hay loft and barn behind Cushendun House. Although the building had three bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, stables, a walled garden and an acre of land – Jim couldn't see any flaws with the property at all – the lease was surprisingly cheap. His wife, however, was a city woman at heart and refused to move out to Cushendun, so Jim lived there alone.

Early one Sunday morning, Jim was woken from sleep by a huge storm and loud, strange noises in the house that he just couldn't explain. Speaking with friends from the village, they revealed that none of the locals would walk past that house at night; they were too scared of the place. From that point on, the strange sounds and feelings in the house continued and the cheap lease began to make sense.

"So, every night there was somebody shouting into my ear ... Somebody would shout into my ear 'Jimmmyyy!' I'd waken up, you know; no sign of anyone. And then 'Mmmmmmmmmmm', [like a] hum. I would get up, open the back door, step out; dead silence. Walk into the hall: 'Mmmmmmmmmmm', like this. I closed the door and said, well, I can't do nothin' about this and went back to bed again.

"So this went on for about a month and there would have been [the feeling of] people walking past, touching me face. And when I was in bed at night, I could hear people singing in the living room, like a party. And one man used to sing 'Rock of Angels wait for me...' you see. And I would lie there. And there was a young girl sang but I couldn't really make out what she was singing, but her voice was lovely. I used to lie there and listen to this. And a couple of times I got up, have a look around; no one there. It was silence once you

opened the living room door. Silence. So I went back into bed.

"I was beginning to get a wee bit concerned about it ... my son wanted to come, my eldest son, and he wanted to bring a friend of his wife. But this particular weekend, because they were going, my wife wanted to go. So they brought my wife down. Along with the friend, and his wife see. During the night – luckily enough my wife was there, I'm lying with the wife – and this screaming started.

"From that point on, the strange sounds and feelings in the house continued and the cheap lease began to make sense."

"So the wife [said]: 'Get up, get up!' So I get up. 'There's something wrong!' I go down, and there's my son and his wife standing in the hall outside their bedroom and his wife's friend, standing screaming: 'Ahhh, somebody come in and was stroking my face!' And they were looking at me! I said 'Wasn't me!' Lucky enough my wife

was there you see. I said, 'My wife there?' 'No no no, somebody was there.' I said 'Look, calm down, go bloody-well back into bed.' 'Oh no,' [they] says, 'We're going.' I says 'Go in the morning.' No [they] said, 'We're packing our bags and we're going right this minute.' And they did that.

"Things were getting bad. You'd be sitting and somebody would stroke your head or walk past or drop things, you know, falling noise. Now it wasn't poltergeists, you know it wasn't throwing things, nothing like that. But all these noises and wakening me up during the night and shouting into my ear.

"I woke up one day, I was having these chest infections you know, my mouth was always dry. I looked up; this man was pressing down on me ... His eyes were closed. I was looking at him, his face was there, pressing down. When he opened his eyes and he saw me, just disappeared. I said to myself, I'm going to have to find out more about

this bloody house.

"I was reading in bed, I wasn't sleeping, I was sitting and I was reading. And I looked at the bottom of the bed, and there was a woman standing. And she was looking at me. A very pale dress on her, pale blue. And then she just leaned forward on the bed and her face was closer than you and me. I was trying to get her to say something. She never spoke. But I knew, by the look on her face – I was nipping myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming, I wasn't asleep – this woman wants me to do something, but I don't know what it is. But then, she just stood up straight, and walked out through the door ..."157

Shortly after that, two women called to the door collecting money for missionaries. One of them spoke to Jim about his experiences in the house and confided that she used to live there herself. After her own unusual encounters she had spoken to her brother who was a priest, Fr

Gildae, who had come and exorcised the house. "She said when he was blessing it, exorcising it, something shot up right through the roof and away up into the sky, and I said 'well obviously it didn't go high enough, because it's back down again.'"

One of the women wanted to bless the house then and there and, while Jim was willing to accept any form of blessing, he insisted it happen outside the house, not inside. To his mind, the spirits that inhabited the place were there before him, and he had no right to have them removed. After that, the hauntings seemed to settle down, almost as if they had reached an understanding with Jim. Certainly, any form of negative interactions ceased.

Everything was quiet and going well "until one night, they screamed into my ear, 'Your mother needs you!'" Jim's mother lived in Belfast, and when he reached her home he found that she'd fallen and hurt her hip in the night. He was able to take her

to the hospital and spend time with her before she was taken in for an unnecessary operation during which she sadly died. "Now those people, in that house, told me, get back to Belfast."¹⁵⁸



Jimmy Stewart, courtesy of the Stewart family

158 Jim Stewart, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 11/06/2018; the same story was also told by Jim as part of the Big Houses project, 23/11/2016.

Jim thought that the male apparition who had pressed down on his chest might have been Geoffrey Moss, a son-in-law of Ronald McNeill, Lord Cushendun (1861-1934). "I know who the lady was" he said with much more certainty. "There was a big charcoal sketch of Lady Cushendun [Elizabeth Maud Bolitho] and it hung above the mantelpiece, and it was her, standing at the bottom of the bed."¹⁵⁹

"I got into bed and the next thing I seen was this old lady coming gliding out frae the side of the wardrobe."

Stories of ghostly apparitions in bedrooms have been paralleled by other participants as well. Margaret Huey relates: "I remember – this is no folklore, to me it was very real – that shortly after we got married and that was an old cottage, you know, the roof came down with slant like that there, and I went on up to bed and my husband was downstairs. And I got into bed and the next thing I seen

was this old lady coming gliding out frae the side of the wardrobe. And I remember that to this day as plain, and she was dressed in brown and wee pintucks down her dress and a high neck and wee pearly buttons on it, and her hair was back in a bun and it was frizzy hair at the side, and a wee white cap on her head. And I just opened my mouth and squealed and she just disappeared in at the head of my bed. And aye, that's as clear to me this day it is. And then Eddie, he said I was dreaming but [I said] that I wasn't in bed long enough to dream and I never saw it again ... When I think about it I see it as plain yet whether it was a vision or whether I was dreaming or what I don't know but I dinnae think I was in bed long enough to be sleeping to dream you know, that kind of a way."¹⁶⁰

Kay Malcolm remembers a story about her grandmother: "I remember one of my aunts telling me that my granny was very ill and, before she died, she

¹⁵⁹ Jim Stewart, participating in the Big Houses project, 23/11/2016.

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

was in bed one night and a black lady – dressed completely in black – appeared at the bottom of the bed and then just disappeared as quickly as she appeared.”¹⁶¹ Kay wasn’t sure whether her granny thought of the figure in black as a banshee foretelling her death, or a ghostly apparition, but as we have seen elsewhere, the lines between banshees and ghosts can sometimes be very blurred.

Jim Hunter recorded the story of a woman who moved to live in a house outside of Eglinton, Co. Londonderry. Soon after moving in, she was visited by a ghost. The next day she told a man she knew about the experience but he failed to believe her. She eventually persuaded him to sit with her into the night in case the ghost returned. “At the stroke of midnight appeared a ghost so terrible in appearance that both people fled from the dwelling. As they were running down the lane leading to the main road the man glanced back to

see the house going up in flames.” It would seem that the reason for the ghost’s visits then became apparent – it was warning them that the house was not safe for them to stay in.¹⁶²

It seems that it is not just older houses where ghosts can be found. Fiona Milnes and her family experienced repeated hauntings in a new-build in Antrim. “It was a whole brand-new development and we always swore – me and my kids always swore – that there was something else in that house with us because nearly every night, the kitchen floor was all tiled, and nearly every night when we were all in bed all you could hear was the kitchen chairs bein’ trailed across the kitchen floor. My girls, their bedroom was above the kitchen, and they used to come into me ‘Mummy



161 Kay Malcolm, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

162 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.27.

that noise is there again,' and I would have been able to stand in their bedroom and that was all you could hear was the kitchen chairs.

"My girls still talk about it. That bloody house was haunted and it was a brand-new house. We heard that, and there was one night actually me and my two boys were in my bed, and we could hear this knocking, like on the wall. And I thought it was one of my girls you know playing a joke, it was about 7 o'clock on a Saturday morning. And I said to one of the boys 'Go into the bedroom next door in case it's one of the girls you know messing around.' But he came back into me and he goes 'There's nobody there.' And I got [up] and went into the girl's room and they were lying out cold but we could still hear this like knocking on the wall. So, don't know to this day whether there was anything there or not, but definitely the kitchen chairs were being trailed across the floor if you like."¹⁶³

Caoimhin Mac Gabhann remembers his grandmother telling him that "on the night her brother Patrick passed away, her sister Rosie got the knock on the window, with someone or something saying, 'are you not going to let me in Maurice [referring to Rosie's husband]?' It was the voice of her brother who had just passed away 40 odd miles away."¹⁶⁴

For some people, seeing or feeling the presence of a deceased loved one is a great comfort as Margaret Huey explained. "I can remember after my husband died I never would have dreamed about him. And I used to always think to myself, why am I not dreaming? Why do I not dream at night something about him, you know? And I'm sure it must have been coming on two years after it, I wakened up one morning and there was Eddie sitting at the side of the bed in a chair. And he says to me 'Well how are you, are you doing alright?' And you know after that then I was quite

¹⁶³ Fiona Milnes, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

¹⁶⁴ Caoimhin Mac Gabhann, contributing to the Lore of the Land project, 16/09/18.

content and I would have dreamt now
and again about him and even to this
day I would dream something."¹⁶⁵

Bobby Friel noted that "Sometimes
they say about butterfly, a wee white

butterfly, comes in through the house
and that's just somebody visiting you
... to let you know that everything's
alright. They're happy, you know what
I mean?"¹⁶⁶



165 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 25/06/2018.

166 Bobby Friel, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 25/06/2018.



*Grey Man's Path, Sam Henry Collection,
Coleraine Museum*

LORE OF THE LAND
THE DARK ARTS AND DEVILS

THE DARK ARTS AND DEVILS

WITCHES

A belief in witches and their use of malign magic to achieve their own, anti-social, ends was widespread from ancient times. In 1586 the Irish Parliament passed the Witchcraft Act (only repealed in 1821) which made witchcraft a secular, as well as a religious, offence. However, despite the far-reaching witch trials which occurred in Britain, Europe and the Americas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, there were relatively few formal trials in Ireland. The relative lack of accusations may be directly linked to the fairy-folk. In fairies, the Irish population had a ready mechanism to explain the unexplainable. Uncanny misfortune was laid at the door of the mischievous Gentry rather than human witches.

On 7th May, 1703, John Craig and his daughter Betty were brought before the Presbyterian congregation of Aghadowey, Co. Londonderry, on the

charge of witchcraft. Betty confessed that she was guilty of charming, and of spells, but that her father was innocent. She was “rebuked thoroughly and dismissed.”¹⁶⁷

“Other members of the household reported hearing whistling and scratching noises and smelling sulphur.”

The last official trial for witchcraft in Ireland occurred in Carrickfergus in 1711 and involved eight Presbyterian women from Islandmagee who were accused of tormenting Mary Dunbar, a young woman aged around 18. The anonymous contributor of *In Fairyland Forlorn* provides a summary of the case. After one of Mary’s aprons had been missing for several days, it strangely turned up one morning in the middle of her parlour floor, its strings tied with five unusual knots. Mary untied the knots and the next day “she was seized with violent pains and afterwards fits and ravings”. On one occasion Mary was compelled to

167 Aghadowey Session Book 1702-1761.

vomit “feathers, cotton yarns, pins and buttons, and had to be restrained in her fits by 3 strong men.”

Other members of the household reported hearing whistling and scratching noises and smelling sulphur. They said that stones and turfs were lifted and thrown about the house by unseen hands, that quilts were mysteriously pulled from beds and bundled into the shapes of corpses. On one occasion, a bolster dressed in a nightgown walked into the kitchen of its own accord.

When Mary recovered enough to talk, she claimed to have been visited and tormented by several women whom she described in detail. The eight women she described were brought to trial, although, by this time, Mary had become mute and could not give any evidence directly. “In spite of its having been proved that the accused were sober, industrious women who

knew the Lord’s Prayer, and were known to pray both in public and in private, they received a sentence of 12 months’ imprisonment and to stand four times on the pillory of Carrickfergus. Tradition says that the people were much exasperated against these unfortunate persons who were severely pelted in the pillory with boiled cabbage stalks and the like, by which one of them had an eye put out.”¹⁶⁸

Sam Henry recorded the belief that “in 1811 an old woman of that island [Islay] had put spells on the fishing [of North Antrim] and had to be paid £2:2:0 [two pounds and two shillings] to release the ban.”¹⁶⁹

Jim Hunter knew a man from Myroe who was willing to testify to



168 Anonymous newspaper contributor’s column, *In Fairyland Forlorn*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:668.

169 *Undiscovered Ulster: County Antrim*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:830.

having “witnessed the destruction brought about by black magic.” The story involved an old woman known as Mrs Gray who lived in Upperlands, Magilligan. She was proficient in the dark arts and, after a nasty row with her neighbours, cast a spell on their house. “Immediately she had finished this the cups began to dance on the dresser, the plates to fly through the house and the chains to rock backwards and forwards unaided. Stones as large as a man’s head, which had paved the pathway in front of the cottage, came crashing through the windows.” The neighbours were stricken with terror and pleaded with her to break the spell. Eventually Mrs Gray relented but, to all of their horror, she was unable to stop the magic. The priest was sent for and it was only after hours of prayer that peace was restored to the household again.¹⁷⁰

“... the cups began to dance on the dresser, the plates to fly through the house and the chains to rock backwards and forwards...”

SHAPESHIFTERS AND BUTTER-WITCHES

Irish witches are said to have the ability to take the shape of different animals, most commonly a hare, but sometimes a cat or a wolf. Yeats recorded a twelfth century story of Irish shape-shifters who could take the form of wolves. “Before Giraldus Cambrensis came to Ireland, a monk wandering in a forest at night came upon two wolves, one of whom was dying. The other entreated him to give the dying wolf the last sacrament. He said the mass, and paused when he came to the viaticum. The other, on seeing this, tore the skin from the breast of the dying wolf, laying bare the form of an old woman. Thereon the monk gave the sacrament. Years afterwards he confessed the matter, and when Giraldus visited the country [1185], was being tried by the synod of the bishops. To give the sacrament to an animal was a great sin. Was it a human being or an animal? On the advice of Giraldus they sent the monk, with papers describing the matter, to

¹⁷⁰ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.8-9.

the Pope for his decision. The result is not stated."¹⁷¹

Another account of shape-shifting was given to Yeats by Mr and Mrs C.S. Hall. "I was out thracking hares meeself, and I seen a fine puss of a thing hopping, hopping in the moonlight, and whacking her ears about, now up, now down, and winking her great eyes, and – 'Here goes,' says I, and the thing was so close to me that she turned round and looked at me, and then bounced back, as well as to say, do your worst! So I had the least grain in life of blessed powder left, and I put it in the gun – and bang at her! My jewel, the scritch she gave would frighten a riment, and a mist, like, came betwixt me and her, and I seen her no more; but when the mist wint off I saw blood on the spot where she had been, and I followed its track, and at last it led me – whist, whisper – right up to Katey MacShane's door; and when I was at the thrashold, I heard a murnin' within, a great murnin', and a groanin', and I opened

the door, and there she was herself, sittin' quite content in the shape of a woman, and the black cat that was sittin' by her rose up its back and spit at me; but I went on never heedin', and asked the ould – how she was and what ailed her. 'Nothing,' sis she. 'What's that on the floor?' sis I. 'Oh,' she says, 'I was cuttin' a billet of wood,' she says, 'wid the reaping hook,' she says, 'an' I've wounded meself in the leg,' she says, 'and that's drops of my precious blood,' she says."¹⁷²



171 W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, Walter Scott Publishing Company, London (1888), p.148.

172 W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, Walter Scott Publishing Company, London (1888), p.154-5.



Jock Smylie, from the townland of Limavallaghan on the Cloughwater, Co. Antrim, told Sam Henry about a local witch known as Peggy W. who could turn herself into a hare at will by using the following charm:

*I sall gang intill a hare,
Wi sorrow, sigh and suckle care;
And I sall gang in the devil's name,
And in a while come back again.*

*Hare, hare, God sent thee care;
I am in a hare's likeness now;
But I sall be ane woman e'en new:
Hare, hare, God sent thee care.*¹⁷³

When Peggy was in hare-form, it was said that only a black greyhound bitch had the speed to catch her. "In that shape she was quite invulnerable to all missiles except a crooked sixpence shot from a gun, mixed of course with hail shot."¹⁷⁴ Jock told the story of one occasion when a hare was being chased by just such a dog and a hail of

shot (made with a silver sixpence) was fired at it. "Jock proceeded, and it was a true story for his grandfather had told him all about it – the hare went in the end hole of a byre and when they went searching for it, they found the witch back in human form, sittin', pickin' the hail shot out o' her ankles wi' a darnin' needle."¹⁷⁵ Peggy was a hardy old woman according to Sam Henry, who "always went barefooted and was so hard in the heels that she could walk on a trimmed hedge and never feel it!"¹⁷⁶

Margaret Huey recalled "the way I heard it was they'd shot the hare right enough, they knew it was lame but the hare was supposed to run up the side of the hedge – they were out in the middle of the field – just up the side of the hedge, and they got that shot. And then the next day somebody met this old lady in black and she was lame, she had a sore leg."¹⁷⁷

173 *Undiscovered Ulster: County Antrim*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:830.

174 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.48.

175 *Undiscovered Ulster: County Antrim*, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:830.

176 Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), p.48.

177 Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 29/05/18.

Jim Hunter recorded a version of the story set on a snowy winter's day. A man out hunting fired at a white hare but only wounded it in the leg. As it fled, it left bright red bloodstains in the snow. "The man followed the tracks until they ended at a little hut. Curious he looked in the window and discovered that the hare had turned into an old woman who was sitting bathing her wounds."¹⁷⁸

J.W. Foster noted in his *Commonplace Book* that Sally Logan of Creevagh, Co. Donegal, was also said to have been a witch who could turn into a hare – Catholics were said to have prayed whenever they crossed her path. According to the local stories, she was shot and killed while in the form of a hare. The only person who ever saw her corpse in the coffin was a Miss Hall, but she never revealed to anyone what she had seen.¹⁷⁹

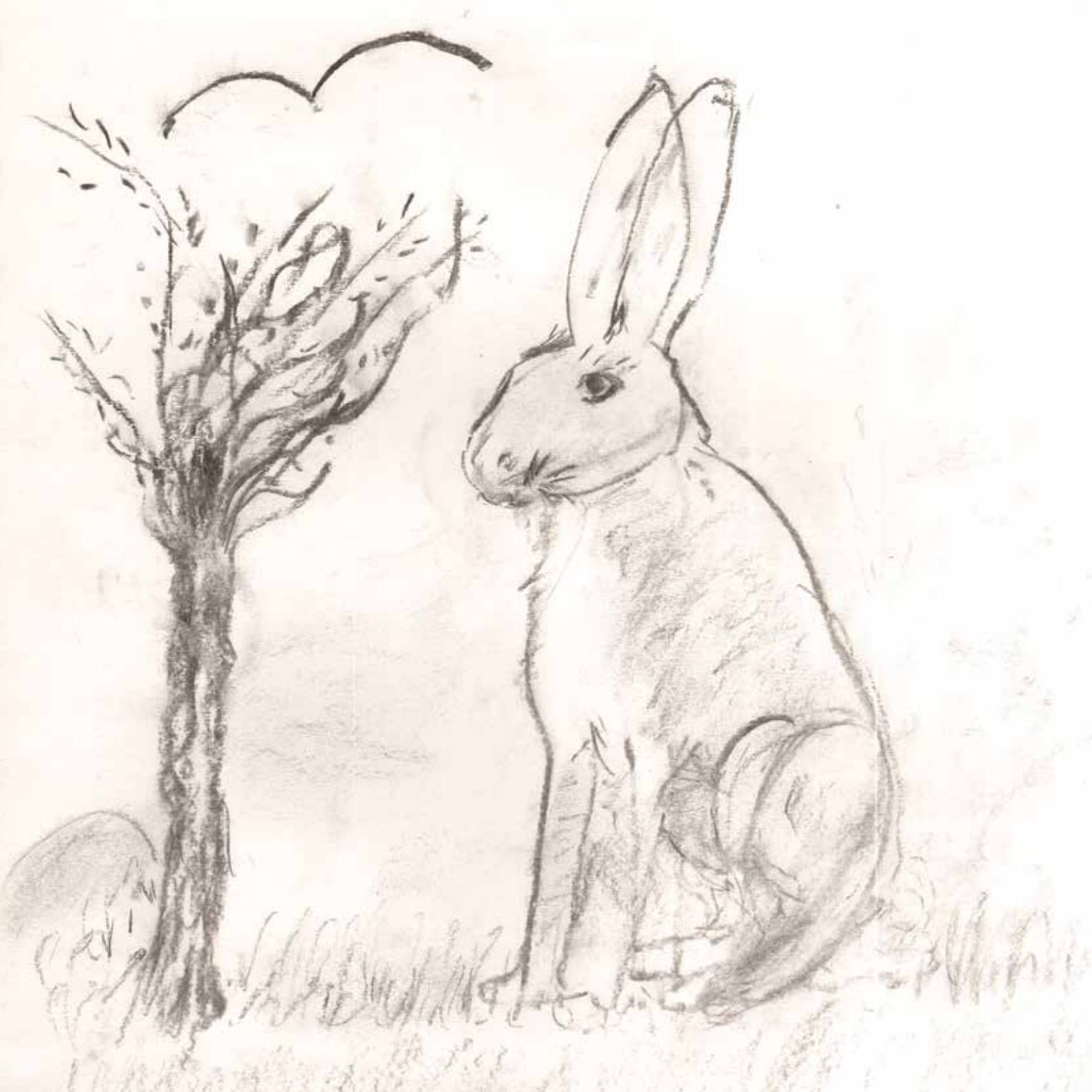
Another old woman, this time from the neighbourhood of Bushmills, could turn herself into a hare but always did so under the bed of her neighbour, Matty M. "You may wonder why Matty adopted her but hold! Matty slipped her pet hare out when the Route Hunt was out that way. Many a five bob they reached her for being the lucky one that put them on the track of a good day's sport, and always Puss came back to the warmth of her adopted home and rumour has it that there was always a drop of sweet milk in the saucer for her."¹⁸⁰

Most commonly, witches taking the form of hares were believed to be butter-witches who transformed into hares to steal milk or butter from farmers' dairy cows, or transfer the fertility of a neighbour's land or livestock across to their own.

¹⁷⁸ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.18-9.

¹⁷⁹ Sam Henry's notes taken from J.W. Foster's *Commonplace Book*, 17th April 1943, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:604.

¹⁸⁰ Sam Henry, *A Hank of Yarns*, The Coleraine Chronicle Company, Coleraine (1940), pp.48-9.



A farmer from the Magilligan area owned a great milk cow which supplied twice as much milk as any other cow in the district. One day an old woman came to the farm and asked the farmer for some milk. Not wanting to disappoint his regular customers, the farmer refused. Next day, he was surprised to find his prize cow was completely dry. Suspecting foul play, he determined to keep an eye on the cow over the following night. "After midnight a large hare came into the byre approached the cow and sucked it dry. So surprised was the farmer that he sat stupefied unable to move.

"Next night he decided to bring his gun and shoot the hare as it was drinking the milk. Afraid lest he would shoot the cow he had to aim low and consequently he only hit one of the hare's legs and it was able to limp away to safety.

"Angry with himself the farmer took up position beside the cow on the



Witch-hare by Gillian Rea

following night. After midnight a hare came limping into the byre, sat down below the cow and started to drink milk. Quickly the farmer made a grab for it and as its disablement slowed

it down appreciably he was able to capture it. Wishing to show it to his wife in the morning he locked it in his pantry. Next morning when they came to inspect the hare they could find no trace of it. On closer inspection however they discovered the old woman now limping and trying to hide herself behind a churn.”¹⁸¹

On Rathlin, Mary Campbell was told of “witch weemen” who would blink cattle “in the shape o’ a cat or a hare ... an’ if ye could shoot her with a silver coin, ye’d be hearin’ tell next day that she was [found] lyin’ . But kill her ye never could!”¹⁸²

“There is hardly a village in Ireland where the milk is not thus believed to have been stolen times upon times. There are many counter-charms. Sometimes the coulter of a plough will be heated red-hot, and the witch will rush in, crying out that she is burning.

A new horse-shoe or donkey-shoe, heated and put under the churn, with three straws, if possible, stolen at midnight from over the witches’ door, is quite infallible.”¹⁸³

Fairy darts or elfshot – prehistoric flint arrowheads – were also once seen as powerful magical talismans. “These shots were supposedly used by witches to plague cattle ... Paradoxically if one wore an ‘elfshot’ on one’s person then it was a powerful amulet against the evil eye.”¹⁸⁴ This tradition must be very old as flint arrowheads have been found entirely out of their historical context by archaeologists excavating medieval (and later) settlement sites.

Jim Hunter heard that the people living around Binevenagh had the power to blink cows, drying or souring their milk supplies. “The only way to prevent this from occurring to one’s

181 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.9-11.

182 Mary Campbell, *Sea Wrack, or Long-ago Tales of Rathlin Island*, J.S. Scarlett and Son, Ballycastle (1951), p.31.

183 W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, Walter Scott Publishing Company, London (1888), p.150.

184 Sheila StClair, *Folklore of the Ulster People*, The Mercier Press, Cork (1971), pp.70-1; see also Mary Campbell, *Sea Wrack, or Long-ago Tales of Rathlin Island*, J.S. Scarlett and Son, Ballycastle (1951), p.13.

herd was to have a person possessed with such powers wish you luck with your herd. Providing this was done the herd was safe."¹⁸⁵

A farmer near Faughanvale, Co. Londonderry, owned a herd of cows whose milk supply was unsurpassed. It was to his great surprise one day that he discovered their milk supply had dried up. Assuming it was unsavoury grass which had caused the change, he moved them to different pastures, but to no effect. "The cows were becoming mere shadows of themselves when the farmer came to the conclusion that perhaps someone was blinking his herd. So he decided to watch them throughout the night. Nothing happened until near dawn when he saw an old lady, whom he had once a few words with, brushing the dew off the grass with a rope and making it unpalatable to the cattle."¹⁸⁶

AGRICULTURAL MAGIC

Of course even when selfishly used, not all magical arts were used at the expense of others. Margaret Huey heard stories about a labourer named John Taggert, "an old man that lived next door to us. He worked for this farmer, [Mr] Richmonds, and he was supposed to have the black art. They could have been in one field ... [working with] shovels and spades and things like that, and whenever they were moving frae one field to the other, they would have been gathering up their tools to go up to – you know, if it was digging potatoes or whatever they were doing – but he would have said 'no leave them', and they left them and when they got up, they [the tools] were sitting all at the gate into the next field."¹⁸⁷

A Dungiven farmer was said to be short of labourers one harvest and decided to hire a tramp to help cut the corn. The tramp joined with the

¹⁸⁵ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.15.

¹⁸⁶ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.17.

¹⁸⁷ Margaret Huey, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/18.



Ulster farm, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum

usual men in the field who were waiting for the hooks or scythes to begin the cutting. When the farmer arrived and handed out the tools, the tramp refused to take one and instead produced his own from the bag over his shoulder. The local men, imagining themselves superior to any outsider, decided to show up the tramp, but no matter how hard they worked, he cut as much corn as the rest of them put together.

At midday the tramp decided to take a nap and put his hook down on the ground at his side. "The people therefore decided to examine this curious hook. After carefully examining it they could discover nothing peculiar about it until someone unscrewed the end and a field clock fell out. When the tramp awoke and started to cut the grain his pace was reduced to that of the others in the field. Once the clock had departed so had the life of his hook."¹⁸⁸

188 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.6-7.

In Co. Donegal, there was once a servant “who practiced the art of the Devil (black magic) and was able to perform great feats.” Wanting to go to the fair at Letterkenny, the man was told by his master that he couldn’t go until the corn stacked in the barn was threshed. The master set off alone to the fair but who should he meet when he arrived, but his servant. “Very angry, he swore that he would dismiss him as soon as they arrived home. However the servant assured him that this wouldn’t be necessary as the work was being performed at double the normal speed. And sure enough when they returned home the farmer found two flails without human aid threshing the grain just as the servant had left them.”¹⁸⁹

THE DEVIL

The Devil, sometimes called the fear dubh (black man),¹⁹⁰ is a fairly regular character in some of the older folklore of the area. It is sometimes difficult to know, through the medium of oral history, whether he – and it is always

a male – should be seen strictly as The Devil of the Christian tradition, or rather a devil, some form of malign fairy or nature spirit. His appearance is generally ominous and, when he speaks, he often does so to strike bargains or make conditional offers to help people out of desperate situations.

Jim Hunter records the story of a Co. Londonderry woman who was so poor that neither she, nor her children, had a place to sleep. One bitterly cold winter’s night she was wandering along a lonely road when she found a brightly lit building off in the distance. She cautiously approached the building to find that it was a large castle in mid banquet. Hungry and desperate, the woman approached the door and begged for shelter and food.

Much to her surprise, the man who answered the door ushered her and her children into a large room where they were able to warm themselves

¹⁸⁹ Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.5-6.

¹⁹⁰ Jim Stewart, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 11/06/2018.

by a blazing fire. The man asked what they were doing out of doors on such a night, and the woman told him of their poverty and their need to beg for food. "Immediately he produced a horn from his pocket and told her that when she required food all she would have to do was to show the horn and the beholder would be compelled to give generously." He did, however, impose two conditions: "she was never to mention his name, and secondly she was never to tell anyone how she had gained possession of the horn."

The man departed and the woman and her children fell asleep by the warm fire. When they woke in the morning, they found that they were lying behind a ditch and the castle was gone. The woman thought that the whole affair must have been little more than a dream, but when she got up, she found that the horn given to her by the man was lying on the ground by her feet.

For weeks afterwards, the woman wandered the countryside, showing people the horn and being given free food. One day, though, she recognised the man from the castle riding down a lane on a fine horse. Unthinking, she called out his name in greeting. The man was furious and reprimanded her immediately. She pleaded forgiveness but "dourly he told her to look through the horn and find out what was there. She looked through and saw the devil." As she stared, stupefied with terror, the man took the horn and blew it, producing a shrill blast "which blew the two eyes out of her head". Jim Hunter noted that in the 1960s, the woman from the story was believed to have become a banshee.¹⁹¹



CARDS WITH THE DEVIL

Stories featuring the Devil are often associated with the nocturnal activities of young men participating in errant or otherwise improper behaviour – especially gambling and playing cards. Jim Hunter recorded several stories on this theme that he heard in the early 1960s.

“Although he increased his pace the noise became louder and he saw a black shape following him.”

The first concerns a man from the hills above Ballykelly who foolishly wasted most of his money playing cards. Coming home from playing cards late one night, the man was about to cross a stile near home when “a man’s arm reached out and would not allow him to pass. In despair he tried to evade the clutching hand but no matter where he went the hand followed. He had given up all hope of escaping when suddenly the church clock struck twelve and the hand vanished” allowing him to pass on home without further incident. In the morning, after

describing the event to his parents, the man’s father and mother went out to the field where the incident had occurred and “found numerous hoof tracks in the vicinity of the stile. On reporting their findings, the son immediately knew it had been the devil and abandoned his evil ways.”¹⁹²

A Myroe man named Peter was said to prefer to gamble away his money at cards rather than give it to his needy wife and children. His habit started out with just one or two games a night, but evolved so that he would stay up with friends gambling until three or four o’clock in the morning. Coming home one night, he came across a stranger who asked where he’d been. As they got to talking, the stranger invited Peter to sit down for a game. “Despite Peter’s effort, the stranger won every game. But instead of becoming more confident he became more restless with the approaching dawn. At last he decided he would have to depart and as he rose Peter noticed his cloven feet.

¹⁹² Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.24-5.

Knowing he had been recognised the devil disappeared into the air in a ball of fire." That encounter was enough for Peter who immediately disposed of his cards and gave up gambling at once.¹⁹³

Another man, this time living outside Limavady, was persuaded to play cards with a friend whose house he was visiting. "However one game led to another and when they had finished it was very late. On his journey home with all his winnings he heard chains rattling behind him. Although he increased his pace the noise became louder and he saw a black shape following him." The man obviously knew of the association between gambling at cards and the Devil. "All kinds of thoughts raced through his mind and he came to the conclusion it was the devil. Thinking that it was the money in his pocket that had attracted the devil he threw it away but the noise of rattling chains still followed. Luckily he had now reached his garden gate and he

hurried into his cottage as quickly as possible. When he regained his courage he peeped out of the window and to his relief he discovered an old black cow with a chain around its neck grazing peacefully in the garden."¹⁹⁴

Brian Adams gave another account of a card game with the Devil. "You remember Cromore Station, Portstewart? Well as you approach that from the Coleraine direction there's like a woods, on the other side of the road and in the woods there's an old house [Cromore House] that eventually went empty and the young blokes used to come in there at night with their drink and play cards and carry on. And one wet and windy night they were playing away, big fire and all on the open fireplace, and the next thing they heard this knock knock knock at the winda'. And the fellow turned around, and this



193 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, p.30.

194 Jim Hunter, unpublished folklore collection, pp.25-6.

shadowy figure at the winda' in the rain, like a Humphrey Bogart raincoat on him and the collar up and the trilby hat thing, and you could never ever see his face, it was always dark. And they invited him in out of the rain and he says 'Can I join you at the cards?' and the boy says 'Aye' and he sat up at the far end of the table and played a few games and the fellow at this end, it was his turn to shuffle the cards and as he shuffled the cards he banged them on the table they fell out of his hand and fell on the floor. And he got down to pick them up and he glanced under the table as you do and he glanced up where this man was sittin' and all he saw was the bottom of the raincoat and then this cloven hoof you see.

"So he didn't say anything he got back and he done a few more games and so he says to his friend 'When it's your turn to shuffle the cards drop them on the floor when you get down to lift them, look up and don't say what you see. OK, don't say a thing', and the

fellow done that, he come back up again and his mate says 'What did you see?' He says 'It looked like a cloven hoof.' Says he, 'Well that's the same thing I saw.'

"So then a few nights later they were playing again and the boy appeared at the winda' again and they brought him in, and they thought right when he comes in, four boys will jump on him, catch him, take the hat off his head to we see who it is, it could be somebody dressed up to scare the blazes out of us you don't know. And as the door opened and he came in, three or four jumped on him, pulled him down to the ground and somebody in the background shouts, 'Take his hat off, take his hat off to we see who it is!' And as they took the hat off and pulled the coat off there was nothing there. The floor was empty. But when the coat was there you could actually feel the body in the coat, but once they pulled the coat and hat off there was actually nothing there at all, and he never came back again you know.

I'm telling you I never got over it anymore, that's why I sleep at night with the lights on..."¹⁹⁵

A group of young Rathlin men wanted to play cards one evening and decided to meet in one of the outbuildings of the Gage Manor House in Church Bay. They set themselves up with a candle, some tea chests to sit on, bolted the door and started playing. "And this man walked in and sat down, and was playing cards with them. Now this was the wintertime you see, and nearly any of the boats that come to the island always lands 'round the area of harbour here. And the weather was bad it was winter time and they knew there was no boats. And of course like everyone on the island knows if there's any strangers on the island and they knew this man didn't arrive by boat. And in them days, there was no other way to come you see. So he sat down and put his couple of pence on the table along with everyone else, so they'd no option but to deal him

a hand of cards along with everyone else and anyway the game was in progress and all of a sudden, the candle went out.

"So by this time they began to get nervous, and somebody struck a match and lit the candle, and when they lit the candle again the hand of cards that this stranger had was lying on top of the tea chest and they were burned, and the door had been bolted from the inside you see, whenever the fellows went in, they bolted the door on the inside so as nobody else could come in. And this was the strange thing. The door opened, and it had been bolted on the inside, and when they lit the candle again, there was no sign of the stranger, his hand of cards was lying on the tea chest and they were burned, and the door was still bolted on the inside. So I'm sure these boys that was in there, they made a very hasty retreat outside ... this was supposed to be Old Nick himself."¹⁹⁶

195 Brian Adams, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

196 Linda-May Ballard, "Fairies and the Supernatural on Reachraí." *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (1991), Garland Publishing: London, pp.76-7.



THE DEVIL OF COORAGHY BAY

Thomas Cecil told Linda-May Ballard two other stories linking the Devil with Rathlin Island, both set in Cooraghy Bay at the island's west end. The first concerned a Donegal fishing boat which sought shelter in Cooraghy during a particularly bad storm. There was no built harbour there, and the three or four fishermen from Donegal were struggling to pull the vessel up onto land with the help of a couple of islanders. They were making no headway at all and realised they needed more manpower.

Some of the men went off to see if they could find more islanders to lend a hand, while the Donegal fishermen stayed down with the boat. One of them, just a boy, told the rest to seek shelter and try and dry off for a while, and he would stay with the boat. "And away they went, and the next half an hour, or maybe an hour after that, they came back and there the boat was, your man sitting there and

the boat was high and dry up on the grass."

The others asked the boy what had happened and he explained: "it come very bad , and a big swell started to come in ... I knew we were going to lose the boat, and there were a man come down out of the cave there and he says did I want a hand up for her, and I says I did." The man from the cave asked if the boy would pay him for his help and the Donegal lad answered that yes, he'd pay whatever was asked. The man indicated that the boy should go round to the other side of the boat from where he stood and they would pull the boat up together. "And as true as I'm standing here, I never put a bit of strength on her he just pulled her up himself and he went away up the pad there." The Donegal lad and the Rathlin light keepers swapped descriptions of the man and likely islanders, but couldn't agree on a match to help identify who he might be.

The islanders invited the Donegal fishermen back to their homes to dry off and take a meal, content with the knowledge that their fishing boat was safe on dry land. As they ascended the path up from the bay though, the Donegal lad kept falling behind, complaining that he was tiring. After reaching the top they continued on, but before long, the other men noticed that he was not with them. They turned back and discovered him lying on the roadside. They lifted him up and asked what was wrong, and he told them "That man caught up with me again and he has took now what he wants." With that, the boy died on the spot.

The fishermen sent for a priest and asked him to do what he could and to read the lad the Last Rites. The priest responded "Well, there's nothing that I can do for him now, because I've come too late ... the Last Rites will be no good to him." He asked the men whether they knew who had helped

"The fishermen sent for a priest and asked him to do what he could and to read the lad the Last Rites."

the boy haul up the boat. When they responded that they didn't, he informed them "that was the Devil himself, and what he wanted was that man's soul, and there's nothing I can do for him."¹⁹⁷

Thomas Cecil's second story also concerned the cave at Cooraghy, but is more ambiguous about its occupant. "Fishermen used to come and stay in this cave. Well, there was three island men in it one night and they had lines out, it was during the war time, they had lines out and they would set them, when it was getting near to dusk, it was the summertime, and they would, you know, lift them when it was getting clear. And nobody had ever stayed in this cave for a number of years, so they decided for handiness to save themselves walking from home in the morning, the good

weather, nice warm weather and the summer time and it wasn't dark for long that they would stay in the cave you see?"

So the three men settled down for the night and set about brewing some tea. There was a large flat-topped rock in the cave which they used as a table, and all three mugs were set down ready for the water to boil. The only light in the cave came from the fire that they had lit at the entrance. When the time came, one of the men was "pouring out the tea into the three mugs and all of a sudden they heard the clump of another mug on the stove and they seen the hand, they couldn't see anybody, but they seen the hand and they seen the mug. So there was nothing for them but to fill the other mug as well, they filled the other mug and it disappeared ... they took their tea and that was all, they didn't stay the night in it you know."¹⁹⁸

THE GREY MAN

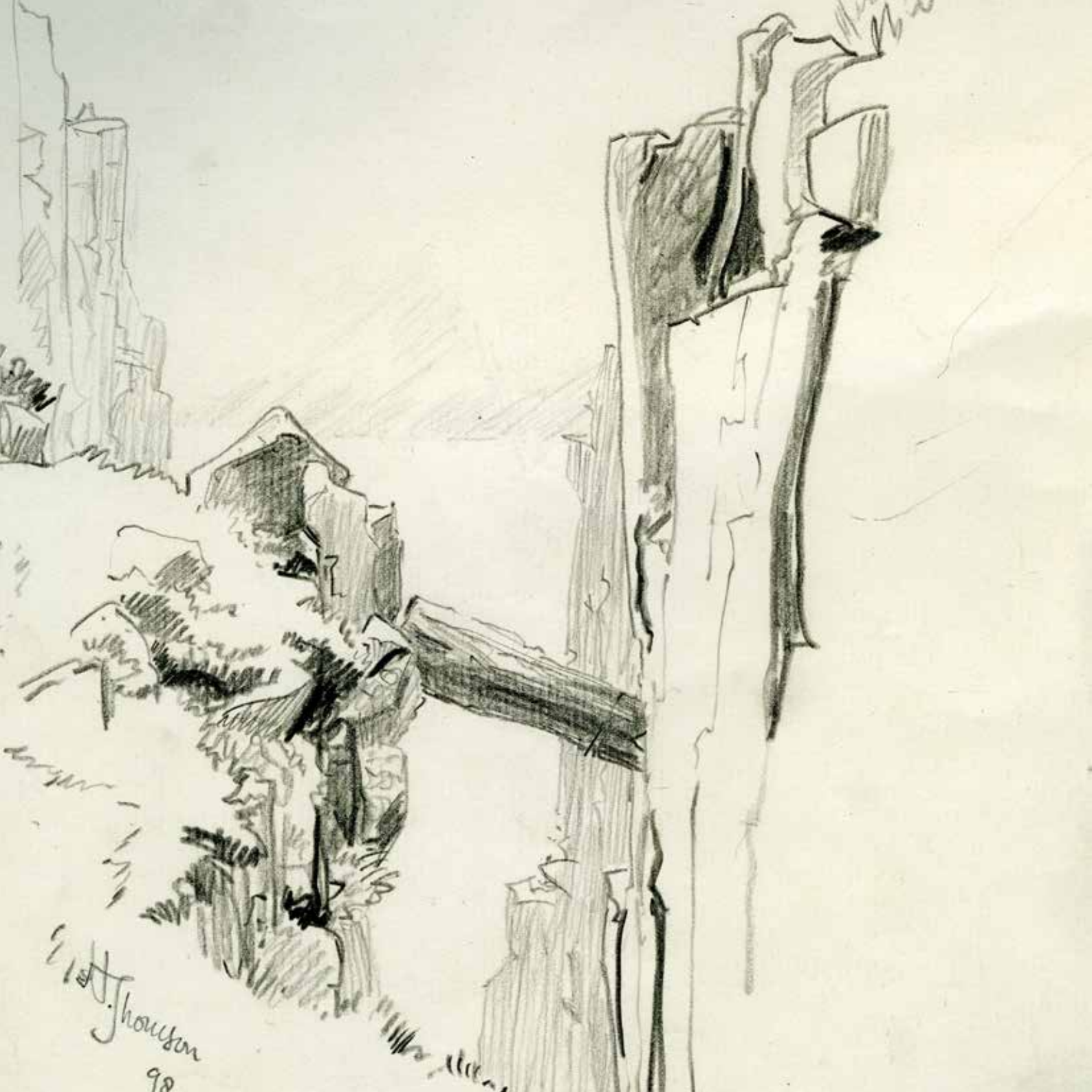
*His cloak was a ragged thundercloud,
And his cap the whirling snow,
And his eyes were the lightning and
the storm
And his horn began to blow.*¹⁹⁹

The Grey Man is an enigmatic figure and it is unclear whether he should be considered one of the fairy folk, a ghostly apparition, or even the Devil himself. The stories below give differing descriptions. Mary McAnulty's story likens the Grey Man to a shape-shifting pooka, or even a version of the water horse. However, the anonymous annalist who published Alick's story makes it clear that Alick and Jemmy considered the Grey Man to be a manifestation of the Devil rather than any kind of fairy. Elizabeth Andrews states that, "In the Grey Man of the Path we have, doubtless, a purely mythical character, an impersonation of the mists which gather round Benmore [Fairhead]."²⁰⁰

198 Linda-May Ballard, "Thomas Cecil, the Compleat Islandman?" *Folk Life* 39 (2000) p.43.

199 Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2017:1622.

200 Elizabeth Andrews, *Ulster Folklore*, Eliot Stock, London (1913), p.49.



E. H. Johnson

98

The Grey Man's Path', pencil sketch by Hugh Thomson for S Gwynne's Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim (1899), Coleraine Museum.

The Grey Man's Path, which descends from Fair Head to the water below, is named for the mysterious grey figure who is said to have been seen there on several occasions. One evening, an old woman called Mary McAnulty was returning up Grey Man's Path after gathering seaweed along the shore. On the path, she was joined by a strange figure whom she described as having green hair and cloven hooves. The figure told her he lived below Loch Dubh and, as they neared the lough, he transformed into a horse and disappeared into the water.²⁰¹

Another person to witness the Grey Man at Fair Head described a figure wearing a long coat emerging out of the fog as he came up the path. On reaching the top, the figure turned and raised his arms, yelling out towards the sea. Later, that same night, a violent storm broke upon Fair Head and caused a large part of

the cliff face to collapse, forming the present boulder field on the shore below.²⁰²

Deeper in the Glens, the townland of Fallinerlea lies between Cushendun and Cushendall. The townland's name is a version of the original Irish, Fál an Fhir Léith, which means the Grey Man's enclosure. It is believed that the name refers to a small fort there which was said to be another of the Grey Man's dwellings.²⁰³

The nineteenth century *Fairy Annals of Ulster* records an interview with a Co. Antrim man named Alick who reported having seen the Grey Man further west at Bushfoot. Together with another man, Jemmy Thompson, Alick was tending his cattle down by the mouth of the River Bush early one morning. There had been a great deal of rain recently and the river was flooding – there was also a spring tide

201 Thomas McErlaine, *A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim*, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Coleraine (2018), p.32.

202 Thomas McErlaine, *A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim*, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Coleraine (2018), p.32.

203 Thomas McErlaine, *A Door into the Mythological Landscape of the Glens of Antrim*, Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme, Coleraine (2018), p.32.



backed by a strong westerly wind. Alick reported that he'd never seen a "greater commotion at the mouth of the Bush than there was that mornin', - between the breakers as they came foamin' up, and the flood in the river." As the two men assessed the situation, they noticed "a tall figure of a man standin' on one of the pillars in the middle of the Bush, with a long, loose, grey cloak on him, his face turned next the strand, so that we could not see it."²⁰⁴

Alick and Jemmy were scared for the figure at first, as they couldn't think of a way that they'd be able to take a boat across such a surge of water to bring him safe back to shore. Alick called out to the figure twice and, while he shifted around on his rock, he neither responded, nor turned to face the men. The two men went home and, after his breakfast, Alick went in search for his friend. He found

Jemmy had taken to his bed. "I found him in bed, and it was shakin' under him, he trembled at such a rate, and the perspiration hailin' off him with the fright he got!"²⁰⁵

Jemmy was convinced that the figure in the flood had been the Grey Man; "... it was clear enough that mornin' for us to see the colour of the cloak he had on, and we could have seen his cloven foot, only he was standin' in the water that was over the pillar at the time."²⁰⁶

WHEN THE DEVIL IS NOT A DEVIL

Historically speaking, not all associations of the Devil with specific places or objects have been fairly made. The salt pans at Broughanlea, near Ballycastle, Co. Antrim were used from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries in the production of salt. The site features a set of rock-cut steps descending through the

204 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

205 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

206 *Fairy Annals of Ulster*, Causeway Books, Bushmills (2005), reprinted from *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vols.6 (1857) and 7 (1858).

sandstone, and down to the water below, which then flows through a cave to settle in a natural sink hole. Known as the Devil's Churn, water surges created by the tides cause the water to erupt up the stairs to form a blowhole.

The ill reputation for the Devil's Churn was perhaps made worse by the death of the red-haired Fr James McCann. As foretold by Julia McQuillan, the Black Nun of Bonamargy "He was going down to bless it or something, so he was, and the water was down, so it was, and I think he got down to the third step or some so he did, and the water just come up and took him away."²⁰⁷ Some people have suggested that Fr McCann's face was later carved into one of the rock stacks nearby. However, there are many different stories to identify the face. One account says it is the face of a different, much earlier, priest cast to his death in the Devil's Churn by druids, others suggest a priest carved

by a lovelorn nun, a nun carved by a priest, a man carved by a woman who was forbidden to marry him, or a young girl who drowned carved by her father. "I don't know what it was ... I think it's supposed to be a couple so it is, it's somebody that lost his wife and he carved her face in the rocks so he did, that's what I heard."²⁰⁸ A more mundane suggestion names the sculptor as Charlie Darragh, a stonemason working on the Parish Church at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Major General Hugh Boyd, then serving as an officer in the East India Company, brought back a small group of statues from northern India to his family home in Ballycastle. They were mounted above the archway into the Boyd yard, off Mary Street where they were to remain for more than a century. Over that time, they were treated with suspicion by many people in the town. Although commonly thought to be some sort of river gods,

²⁰⁷ James Murphy, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.

²⁰⁸ James Murphy, participating in the Lore of the Land project, 21/05/2018.



to some people they were much more sinister. John Holbrook remembers that “it was never drawn attention to, that’s what I would state. It was ignored, or else it was to do with evil or something like that. Sinister.”²⁰⁹ For Raymond Bakewell though, “we always thought that was the Devil. Nobody ever told me, everybody just regarded them as something to do with the Devil.”²¹⁰

Although he would later, briefly, own the statues before donating them to Ballycastle Museum, Peter Molloy also recalled their fearsome reputation: “We used to refer to it as the devils, you know, as children. We were scared to go past it at night on our own because we were always told ‘That’s the Devil!’ from a very early age. A way of scaring us off from places we shouldn’t have been in.”²¹¹

Boyd’s statues were not the only objects from India to be treated with suspicion in nineteenth and early twentieth century Ulster. Sam Henry records that an 18 inch high statue of the Buddha was brought back to Derry from India by Major Hezlett. It seems that bad luck followed the little Buddha wherever it went. J.W. Foster admired the statue and was given it as a gift. “I took sick. A friend came to see me. I gave him the Buddha. I got better; my friend died. Statue bought by Mrs Nicholson of Beech Hill. Her cows and pigs died. She gave it to Mrs Cooke, Government House. Butler fell and broke his arm and horse fell dead in stable.” After more misfortune, the statue was ultimately taken to the local museum in Derry, after which time “the caretaker’s wife has never had health since.”²¹²

209 John Holbrook, participating in the Big Houses project, 14/02/2017.

210 Raymond Bakewell, participating in the Big Houses project, 14/02/2017.

211 Peter Molloy, participating in the Big Houses project, 25/02/2016.

212 Sam Henry’s notes taken from J.W. Foster’s Commonplace Book, 17th April 1943, Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2014:604; see also Sam Henry Collection, Coleraine Museum, accession no. CM:2016:326.

*The night it was late,
I was going home straight,
The cold it was very severe.
I had a good drop,
Was going home for a nap,
When something to me did appear.
I stood and I stared;
I looked at its beard;
Its eyes they did glitter like fire.*

*Says I, "Mr. Divil, try to be civil,
And tell me what is your desire."*

*I dashed to get past,
But there came a great blast;
I saw that I had been a fool.
It rose for to fly,
And between you and I,
It was only a common night ool! ²¹²*

by Jock Gilmore



Owl by J. Stirling, Sam Henry Collection,
Coleraine Museum

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