



15 GHOSTS & MYTHS

... there was no way he was staying in that house any longer ...

The story of the ghost at Knight Farm was told to Richard James Lambert by his father, Richard Wallbank Lambert.

I did not know anything at all about the unwelcome inhabitant of Knight Farm until just before my father decided to sell the house some five years ago. Our family lived over the river in the village of Stainforth: most days after school and at weekends and in school holidays we would go 'over to the farm'. Aidan and Paul Warton lived there with their mother, Anne, who came to house-keep for my Grandad and help on the farm after Granny died. The boys were much the same age as Dale, my brother, and myself and we all grew up together helping Dad with the work on the farm and getting into all sorts of mischief, just as any other kids would do.

'Little old man'

We stayed overnight many times and played for hours in the large upstairs rooms of the house, but I can never remember seeing or hearing anything out of the ordinary. I do recall, however, that on several occasions Paul, who was the youngest of us, would say when he got up in the morning that during the night he had woken up and spoken to a little old man who was sitting in a rocking chair that used to be at the other side of the room. Of course, we thought he was just making it up or had been dreaming as we knew nothing of the ghost.

It is not quite clear who actually first saw the old man. My father remembers being told by his father, Rob Lambert, that Rob's father when lying ill in bed had heard the ghost many times wandering up and down the landing and he used to say, 'Listen, there he goes again'. Old Tom Lambert dismissed the ghostly stories as 'a load of rubbish' and even though on numerous occasions he said he had heard strange noises and footsteps, he would try to find another explanation. One night, however, whilst making his way to bed by candlelight, he met 'a little old man' and ever afterwards was convinced of the haunting.

Lizzie, who was Rob's Aunty, also had a close encounter with the ghost when she went to put hot water bottles in the bed in the far room. A scream was heard downstairs and Lizzie was found collapsed on the bedroom floor. She told how, on entering the room, she had found an old man lying on the bed. Everyone saw the indentation in the bedclothes where he had been lying.



*Maggie & Richard Lambert & John
Wallbank at Knight Farm about 1938
- photo courtesy Mrs Judith Lambert*

The 'ghost room'

Every year, at the beginning of July, farmers would go to Skipton and hire Irishmen to help with the hay time. The work lasted for some three to four weeks and they would then move on to another area for harvest-time, where they would be employed doing jobs such as potato-picking. The Irishmen would sleep in the first room on the left at the top of the stairs in which were two single beds. One Irishman came downstairs in the morning with his bags packed after spending only one night in the room. He said there was no way he was staying in that house any longer as the place was haunted. Another year, two Irishmen named Mick and John

stayed in the same room. On the first morning when they went out to catch the horses ready for mowing, Mick asked if there was anything funny about the room. Rob said no, not that he knew of. Mick said that he had felt uneasy as he had seen a little old man in the room. Rob told him that he must have been dreaming, but that night Mick woke John up and they both saw the little old man at the bottom of the beds. So, for the rest of their stay they slept downstairs. That room became known as the 'ghost room'.

Secured door

My Dad says that his Mother and Father and Uncle Frank used to tell him how when they were sitting downstairs in the middle room they would hear the sneck on the ghost room door click and then the door would open and let a draught through. After going up and closing it numerous times, Rob got fed up and decided to secure the door more firmly. He got a double horse rein and tied it double around the door sneck and banister. Downstairs, three or four minutes later, there was a loud bang and on going upstairs they found the rein to be snapped and the ghost room door wide open.

Eric, who was a German prisoner-of-war and helped on the farm, stayed in the ghost room. He claimed he had seen the little old man, but said he was not frightened by the ghost and laughed about it.

Annie Huddleston, who lives in Settle, used to clean at the house. She got a fright when she met the ghost on the landing.

A fright for Dad

My Dad, who was brought up at Knight Farm, has never actually seen the ghost, but says he probably could have done on two occasions had he not been too frightened. He was about 16 or 17 years old and early one evening he was in the middle bedroom getting ready to go out. His mother and Frank were away visiting Aunty Edna and only Rob and himself were at home. Dad heard his father's footsteps as he went along the landing to the far room. Dad shouted to him, asking if he was going to put his blanket on (items such as electric blankets were a bit of a novelty as mains electric had only just been installed at the farm). There was no answer, so Dad shouted again. Then he heard the back door open and the sound on his father's clogs on the stone kitchen floor. The footsteps then went back along the upstairs landing. My Dad said he broke out in a cold sweat and then he was downstairs like a shot!

The second occasion was later the same evening when his mother and Frank had returned. He was in bed when he heard footsteps and the bedroom door opened, followed by the sound of footsteps approaching the bed. His mother shouted from the bottom of the stairs that Clifford Oliver was here. My Dad asked who was upstairs. 'Nobody', she replied. He was soon downstairs!

Bangs and other goings on

Every time one of the Lambert family died a terrific bang was heard in the house at the exact time of death, even if the person who died was in hospital. When Frank died the family had been expecting to hear of it. My Dad, who was married by then and lived at Stackhouse, went up to the farm to do the milking. A police car pulled up and a policeman came up the steps to the Cooling House. Rob said, 'I know what you have come for and I know the time it happened.' He was right, too.

One evening friends of the family, Arthur and Margaret Kitchener, arrived at the house in their new car, an Austin 55. They had a cup of tea standing just inside the front room door and Arthur said, 'I'd give owt to see the thing come through that door', and immediately the door flew open with a bang and Arthur rushed to the bottom of the stairs thinking someone was having them on. There was no one there. That door was normally very hard to open.

Dad remembers that when he was a little boy he was sitting downstairs with other members of the family when they all heard noises coming from the stairs. Rob jumped up and rushed to the bottom of the stairs cursing the ghost. That was the only occasion it was known to venture downstairs.

Rob's sister, Edna, and her husband, Billy, were staying at the farm with their daughters, June and Elizabeth. Billy was lying awake in the far room and heard footsteps. He thought it was one of the lasses. His door opened but no one came in. He got up and went to have a look at the girls, but they

were both fast asleep in the next room. Up to this point he had always dismissed the ghost stories as rubbish.

Aidan's and Paul's Aunty Joyce said she was taken by the hand on leaving the bathroom and led along the landing. On another occasion Joyce and her daughter, Barbara, were sleeping in the middle room. They were awoken by someone moving about and they both saw a green face looking around the door at them and then it went away again.

Brandy, the pet golden Labrador, once followed Dad as he went into the pantry to get some chickens. The hair on Brandy's back stood on end and he backed out of the pantry. He could not be coaxed back in there.

Mike Ainsley, who worked with my Dad, came to check the pheasants late one night. The farmhouse at this time was unoccupied and, on hearing doors banging inside the house, Mike came to Stainforth to get my Dad to go back to Knight Farm with a key and check there was no one inside. They searched the house with a torch, but no one was found.

After the farmhouse was sold Campbell's, the builders from Settle, were renovating the house for the new owners. Every night they checked that all the lights were switched off before leaving. On two occasions they returned the following morning to find lights on in the house.

At the time the house was sold, the new occupiers knew about the ghost, but they have never said they have seen or heard anything.

The article below is from (presumably) a local newspaper, but no name or date is available. It bears out much of the account above:

All mod cons ... and a ghost

'Knights Farm at Little Stainforth, near Settle, has been the haunt of the Lambert family for more than 50 years. According to its owner, who is trying to sell the place, it is also the haunt of someone else. This may pose a slight problem to sensitive or superstitious potential owners because the "someone else" who goes with the 350-year-old property and its £39,000 asking price, is a diminutive ghost.

Now there are ghosts and ghosts, but even the agents, Dacre, Son and Hartley, a level headed lot, admit that the house is haunted and contrive to find a selling point in the fact. "Unfortunately, the background on the resident ghost is unknown, but the presence of the benign old man in the back bedroom adds a unique facet to this fascinating property", ran the accompanying literature.

Fascinating, maybe, but not sufficiently fascinating to persuade Richard Lambert, the owner of the property to move there. Although it was his parents' home and he was brought up there, he has no desire to move back, largely because of the thing that goes bump in the night.

From his bungalow in the village he tells people, "One reason that I didn't move in after my father died was the ghost. I'm not particularly frightened of it, it's a feature of the house. I don't know the history of it, but I know

that as far back as my father's time it used to make a nuisance of itself. It never harmed anybody or threw things about and I never saw it, though a lot of people have. All their descriptions were the same, of a very small old man. When I was at home you could hear it walking about. It would come out of the bedroom and walk along the landing two or three times a night."

On one occasion Mr Lambert's father, determined to lay the ghost, took a leather horse rein tying one end to the door handle of the apparition's room and the other to the banister. But before he had taken his seat to watch the result, there was a loud bang as the door flew open and the rein snapped.

During haymaking on the farm, which stands on the western bank of the river Ribble two miles from Settle, Irish labourers used to come to stay at Knight Farm. More often than not they would put down the presence of the small old man standing at the foot of the bed to the local Guinness.

Besides four bedrooms, the Carolean house has other things to offer. Mr Lambert, a poultry farmer, says, "There is a room that no one has ever been into. There is a window there and a door there, but the opening is blocked over. There are also hidden cupboards, it's a queer sort of a place."

The agents say, "There is no point in trying to pretend there is not a ghost because it is known about. So we thought we would come clean on it. Some people might be attracted by the idea."

That's the spirit.'

Robin Hood's Mill – A Ghostly Story

Extract from *Yorkshire Legends* compiled by David Joy and published by *Dalesman*:

'Folklore is usually lost, or forgotten, and seldom is it destroyed. Yet potholers who went to Robin Hood's Mill, near Stainforth in North Ribblesdale, before the last war, were blamed for stopping some old grindstones from turning deep in the earth! The shaft, near the river, had been known as the "Mill" for generations and a local legend stated that a mill once stood here, the owner of which, not content with making a great deal of money during the week, once kept his grindstone turning on the Sabbath Day. As a punishment for his breach of the Commandment, the mill sank out of sight, and a low murmuring sound, which came from the sink-hole, was said to be the noise of the millstones still grinding away.

Before the potholers began their exploration they were warned by a clergyman that in trying to solve the mystery they might destroy the romance associated with it. The potholers excavated the hole to a depth of 10ft to 12 ft and the rumbling sound was then to be heard. Later the rumbling ceased, and it was believed that debris was interposed between the sound from below and the ear of the listener. It had been muffled rather than stopped.'

Spectres of Stainforth ... A Man and his Dog

The extract below is from (presumably) a local newspaper of 1967:

‘Stainforth Bridge, in North Ribblesdale, is one of the very few Yorkshire possessions of the National Trust. It spans the river as a single graceful arch and is just wide enough to be crossed by a family saloon. But if you tramp the bridge on a clear, moonlit night you might feel a shiver pass down your spine, for several ghost stories are told of this part of Ribblesdale.

Best known story features two ghosts: a man and his dog, who they say roamed between Stainforth Hall and Dog Hill. Ghosts prefer the twilight, and this spectral couple were said to live in an old part of the Hall. There was a fire there in the latter part of the 18th century and the woodwork was gutted, but the landlord refused to renew it so their quarters are rather draughty now.

It may be that man and dog found other accommodation for several of my Ribblesdale friends are convinced they are still to be seen. When the sun shines, and the picnickers throng the banks of the Ribble near Stainforth Bridge, no one thinks of ghosts. Nor do most of them know that Samuel Watson, a Quaker, built both the Hall and the bridge in the 1670s.

Until the tourist age, which spread thousands of day-trippers through the Dales, busiest time for the bridge was in the days when packhorses used it on the popular route between York and Lancaster. At quiet times one can conjure up a picture of lines of stocky ponies, with their attendants, and a jingling bell on the lead horse to give warning of its approach.

Stainforth’s bridge was handed over to the National Trust 36 years ago, and it has been kept in a fine state of preservation. It is frequently battered by a river in flood, and then there is a deafening roar as water spills into a deep pool lower down.’

5 Hollies Cottages

Hollies Cottages were built in 1930 and No. 5 was occupied by Mr and Mrs Taylor, Mary Rayner’s grandparents. Mrs Taylor delivered babies and laid people out and Mary’s mother, a nurse, also laid people out, so perhaps ghostly stories were to be expected. Mary often stayed at her grandmother’s when she was a girl, but never experienced any strange feelings or saw anything unusual. However, the same cannot be said about the family who lived here in the 1960s.

Laura Dunn lived at No. 5 when she was a newly married young woman. One evening she was sitting on a stool in front of the washer in the kitchen when she felt someone was watching her: ‘I turned round and saw a lady wearing a grey crinoline dress and a big bonnet, but she had no face!’ Clearly this was not one of the neighbours! Joan, Laura’s sister, had known about this lady for years, having heard the tale from Mrs Taylor, but had decided to say

nothing when Laura had moved in. Mrs Taylor would say, 'Did you see her Joan, she just walked through', but Joan had never seen anything.

There were also other strange events—things would move around, such as a pair of sandals left at the bedside overnight would be out on the landing in the morning. A wallet containing £100 disappeared from a jacket pocket and was found weeks later at the back of the sideboard downstairs.

Such mysteries may be recounted in many families, but surely the above tales are not merely idle chatter, are they?