

## Myths and Legends of the Northeast

Did you think you were familiar with the myths and legends of the northeast? The speaker at the May u3a zoom meeting certainly was. Dave Dean romped through a host of stories from the region many of which we were unfamiliar with.

Dave began with the story of the Lambton Worm, which takes place around the River Wear and is one of the region's most famous pieces of folklore. It has even been adapted for pantomime. The story states that in the 14th Century, John Lambton, a rebellious youth, throws an eel into a well after an unsuccessful fishing expedition and goes off to fight in the crusades. On his return after 7 years, he finds that the eel has grown into an enormous worm, which is eating sheep and cows and terrorising the local population. Determined to kill the worm, Lambton seeks help from a local witch who tells him to fight the worm in the river as any pieces chopped off there will not grow back again. However, having killed the worm, he must then kill the next living thing he sees, or his family will be cursed. After a fierce fight, John kills the worm and alerts his father, who, forgetting to release a dog, goes immediately to congratulate his son who cannot of course kill him, thereby starting the curse. So, it is said that the following 9 generations of Lambtons did not die peacefully in their beds.

Still with worms, the next story was about the ferocious Sockburn Worm, sometimes referred to as a wyvern, a 2 - legged winged dragon. This worm laid waste to the village of Sockburn near Durham. It is said that the beast was finally slain by local worthy John Conyers using a broadsword called a falchion. This event is still celebrated today when each new Bishop of Durham is consecrated on the bridge at Croft on Tees and presented with a falchion by the Lord of Sockburn.

Dave then related many other stories from the region which included:

The occasional appearance of the deceased Director of the Darlington Hippodrome, Señor Pèpé. The Grey Lady from Room 21 in Durham Castle. The sounds of an ancient battle in Neville's Cross. Shape changing people called Braags who throw people into ponds and rivers. Ettins who are 2 headed monsters who helped build Dere Street. Fairies who kidnap children. How Semerwater Lake drowned an ancient village. The 'Hand of Glory' which is a Stainmore legend where a severed human hand holds a lighted candle which can only be extinguished with milk.

Dave's talk reminded us how much superstition affected people's lives in earlier times and many of these myths and legends have a familiar ring about them today. The vote of thanks was given by Elizabeth Long.

The next Zoom meeting will be held on Thursday 17th June when Anthony Atkinson will be speaking on Admiral Lord Collingwood. For more information about u3a, visit the website [www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk](http://www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk)

Ian Reid