

THE SCREAMING HORROR OF CREECH HILL

SOMERSET, ENGLAND

The Legend

Creech Hill in Somerset has the grim reputation of being haunted by the figure of a tall gaunt man (known locally as a *bullbegger* or ghost), whose insane laughter echoes from the hillside, the eerie cackling terrifying all who hear it... Those foolhardy enough to walk at night on the hill have heard heavy footsteps and a soul piercing scream, which makes the blood run like ice. The truly unfortunate report glimpsing the tall spectral figure through the trees...

The best known story associated with the apparition is that of a farmer making his way home from market and coming across a body lying in the road. As he bent down to help it, it rose up till it was far taller than he and let out a terrifying shriek. The awful thing proceeded to chase the terrified man all the way home. This event could easily serve as a catalyst for investigations; date the event during your campaign, or have it happen again, and place the first time in the 1880's.

Other stories tell of a phantom black dog and another of a chilling encounter by a traveller on his way to an important appointment. As he walked over the hill carrying his lantern he entered an area of icy cold, whereupon a tall black figure grew from the ground in front of him. As the evil being shrieked with hideous laughter, the man struck at it with his staff which passed through it. The traveller found himself frozen to the spot and unable to flee until dawn, when the apparition vanished.

The story may have been invented in the 1880's after the discovery of two skeletons intertwined here. They are thought to be the remains of a Norman and a Saxon who fell having given each other mortal wounds, and speak of the possibility of bloody conflict in the vicinity. Local newspaper archives and antiquarian journals can tell of the discovery of the bodies; modern investigators can find much ghost lore and this fact on the internet.

Explaining the Legend

If the Keeper decides to use the story in his campaign there are four main possibilities; Witchcraft, the Roman Temple to Mars, a Shuck (see page XX) and the ghosts from the Norman Conquest. There is also the intriguing possibility that for many years someone quite mortal has tried to keep locals from the hill, to cover their nefarious activities; it could be as mundane as poachers, as a cult performing dark

rites in the old temple precincts, or something more unusual. We provide no solution, just facts... The Keeper must decide what would work in their campaign.

Note the Temple has not been found in the 1990's or 1920's, and will have to be unearthed by the investigators actions, perhaps literally.

Involving the Investigators

There are many ways to involve the investigators in the mystery of Creech Hill.

- They could be Country House Weekend guests staying at *Greywood Lodge*, and out on a shooting trip. As the sun sets and twilight settles over the woods on the hill, when a terrible scream is heard, (causing some loss to those close enough) and then a single shot. One of the other guests is dead, with shotgun wounds, probably from their own gun. As they look around they see a tall dark figure moving away through the trees, cackling wildly, and yet if pursued the figure simply vanishes. This works especially well in Victorian or 1920's games. In the 1990's *Greywood Lodge* is probably a Country House Hotel; the investigators may well be guests at a wedding, or following a suspect who is staying there, or any other device which brings them close. The locals are frightened of the hill, and not keen to go up there except in an emergency..
- A fun option for a one off scenario from any period uses one of the Boarding Schools as a basis. If you have any knowledge of British Boarding School fictions, such as Frank Richards' *Greyfriars* stories featuring Billy Bunter, the *Jennings* stories of Anthony Buckeridge, or even *Harry Potter*, you might want to make the characters a group of 13 year old schoolboys who learn the legend while on a nature ramble, and choose to investigate with terrible results.
- Those playing in the *Hauntings* TV campaign may well find they are sent to investigate Creech Hill for a three day live event. This one is a special; I is a crossover show with the famous British Live archaeology show *Unearthed* (look up Time Team, the real show for inspiration) where the *Hauntings* Crew are looking at the folklore and investigating the hill by night, while the *Unearthed* Team are doing a daytime dig over the three days on the Roman Temple. The crews don't necessarily get on, and the archaeologists are bemused and confused by the ghosthunters; you need to design six archaeologists, with varying attitudes towards ghosts and ghosthunters, and have names for the other teams producers, camera crew etc. This idea reappears later in the discussion of the Vanishing House, Suffolk, and the *Unearthed* Team may well reappear in other stories, such as Hermitage Castle, Scotland. Things can range from friendly rivalry to simmering tension, but once night falls...

A Victorian/1920's variant has the ghosthunters as folklorists while antiquarians or archaeologists do the digging.

Location

Somerset is a county in the West of England. It is a mostly rural and agricultural county with no large population centres. The local dialect is a variant of the regional

West Country one, with rolled r's and long vowel sounds, and sound quite 'country' to outsiders – any strong rural accent will suffice, but Hollywood 'mummerset' as it is often called serves admirably.

There are small fields and dairy farming is common here. Creech Hill is in the easternmost part of the county near the Wiltshire border. Here the land is hillier and less flat than the Somerset Levels a few miles to the west and not as high as Salisbury Plain to the east.

There is a degree of forestation around this area, the remains of the ancient Forest of Selwood and there is a dark and eerie wood on the hill itself. The local geology is sandstone as opposed to the limestone rock to the west and the chalk landscape of Salisbury plain to the east.

Creech Hill is about a mile NE of the village of Bruton and reaches a height of approximately 653 ft at the highest point, known as Lamyatt Beacon. As well as Bruton there are the villages of Lamyatt on its western flank and Milton Clevedon that lies beneath the highest point to the north. Both these villages have traditional Somerset towered churches. The B3081 runs from Bruton, along the eastern side of the hill, past Milton Clevedon, then on to Evercreech another two miles away to the NW. By the side of this road in Milton Clevedon is the Ilchester Arms pub, which has had this name since before 1861. A narrow winding lane runs along the northern and western base of the hill between Lamyatt and Milton Clevedon, half way down this is the gravel tree-lined driveway of *Greywood Lodge*; an isolated moated brick house of the Regency period.

The name derives from the Celtic word 'cric' meaning hill.

Bruton

Bruton is an ancient sandstone market town with buildings of golden stone dating back hundreds of years.

The River Brue winds through the town and is crossed by two road bridges, a tiny 15th century packhorse bridge (Bruton Bow) and some stepping stones next to the packhorse bridge. In Bruton there are the Castle Inn, the Bull Inn and the Sun Inn. In addition to this there is the Blue Ball Hotel, a 17th century coaching inn in Bruton, a possible place to stay...



The Blue Ball hotel

It has a continuous history extending back to at least 1588, when it was the White Hart, and provides excellent service and a friendly atmosphere. Locals can be found drinking here day and night, and good food is served.

Bruton had a population of around 1,900 in 1881 and about 1,000 more than that now. It is a small village; outsiders are very noticeable, but folk are friendly and welcoming. The village has a railway station that dates from the 1860's and St. Mary's Church that dates from the 14th Century. There is a large buttressed wall by the road next to the church called the Abbey Wall.



The Abbey Wall

The railway line crosses the main road to Castle Cary along a high arched bridge a short distance south from the town centre. Bruton is home to three prestigious boarding schools; where the wealthy send their children away to school. They are King's, Sexey's and Sunny Hill. King's is the most central and the most senior dating from 1519. Sunny Hill dates from 1900 and Sexey's was founded in 1891.

Creech Hill Roman Temple

The record of human habitation of Creech Hill dates back to at least the times of the Romans who built a temple on Lamyatt Beacon there, which was probably dedicated to the god Mars. It was built out of mortared stone in the late third century and stayed in use till the late 5th century. The roof was made out of hexagonal limestone slates and the floor had some paving. It fell out of use as a pagan temple around 370 AD and became a Christian shrine in the latter part of its existence, functioning as an oratory and a cemetery.

The temple was square and built of local stone. Today it is largely hidden under undergrowth and trees; there is plenty of scope for archaeology. There was a sunken room to the south. There was a road that connected the temple to the Fosse Way at West Pennard Hill. Niches in the walls contained statues and a statue of what is believed to be Mars was on a podium in the east side of the building.

Offerings have been found in the form of a coin in a jar, miniature spears and axes, pots, beads, antlers, a brooch with the image of a horseman on it and two bronze figurines of Mercury. The temple was probably that of a local cult of the war god Mars, because of the miniature weapons. Among the archaeological remains were thirteen pits containing antlers. This is symbolic of Mars combined with the Celtic horned god Cernunnos. Perhaps your characters turn up these artefacts in the course of a dig they organise?

The temple stood in isolation without any attendant buildings such as bath houses. Nearby there was a cemetery containing the graves of fifteen women and one man, as well as a small building contained within a boundary bank. These were most likely of a later period than the temple and the fact that the bodies were laid east to west would indicate they were Christian, probably 6th to 8th century Saxons. This would indicate that the site was still considered sacred after the abandonment of the temple.

In reality the site was excavated in 1955-60 by Mrs G. M. Bennett and the boys of King's School and re-excavated in 1973 by Roger Leach. Treasure hunters later destroyed any further remains on the site.

Witchcraft Traditions

While today you mention witchcraft and most people immediately think of the benign and friendly Wiccan tradition, which dates back to the 1950's, older British Witchcraft Traditions are far darker. There can be little doubt that while there were many completely innocent little old ladies who were hanged as witches during the 17th century, many of those who faced trial admitted without torture to attending coven meetings. Imagination under terrible pressure? Maybe.

What is clear is that there were plenty of folk who enjoyed the reputation of witches, and some, male and female alike, used this reputation to intimidate and terrify their neighbours. There well have been a genuine witch tradition in Britain, practising peculiar sorceries related to agricultural practices, and long since lost from view as Wicca has become dominant as people's idea of witchcraft.

The older tradition would have had great knowledge of herbs, used both as medicines and poisons, and peculiar spells, quite unlike mythos magic yet based perhaps upon the same arcane scientific principles. The Cunning Men as they were known were most feared and respected in East Anglia, and one of their spells gave the ability to bind a person or a horse and cart to one particular spot, making it almost impossible to use. We have given this spell below, but many others may exist.

Bind Them That Would Wander ; A Traditional Witchcraft Spell

This spell may be cast on a living target. Its effects last till dawn or sunset, whichever comes first. The person, horse, ox, or other animal targeted is immediately trapped as if mired in mud, or glued to the ground. It relies upon a brief incantation and ceremony, and the target must be in sight. Common rural ingredients such as an earthworm, rooks feathers and a bit of damp clay are needed to cast the spell, and the victim must be in sight, so sometimes it is cast in front of them following a row, or sometimes from cover while spying on them.

The spell costs one permanent power point to cast, and a variable number of magic points. Each magic point holds the victim to the ground with an effective strength of 5; so if ten magic points are used, it requires strength 50 to move the victim and break the spell. The victims own strength is useless against the spell and they will rapidly tire themselves out trying to move.

It is entirely possible that some of the older witch traditions still exist today, and certainly they were still feared as recently as the 1920's. keeper s interested in such things may wish to look up the Lower Compton Witch Murder of 1920, in which a suspected elderly witch, Charles Walton, was found dead pinned t the floor by a pitchfork through his neck, and with an upside down cross slashed in his chest with a billhook.

The present of expensive men and women's shoe marks and car tracks led Inspector Fabian of Scotland Yard to speculate the involvement of wealthy outsiders. Do the investigators know more about this grisly enigma?

