

# Secrets in the Mist

## Historical Note

**Warning! Contains spoilers if you have not read the book.**

*Secrets in the Mist* was initially inspired by an anecdote I read about the myth of The Lantern Men who haunted Wicken Fen and other parts of East Anglia. The Lantern Men are just one of the many legends that grew up in and around the marshy areas of the UK and Europe to explain the appearance of will o' the wisps—the pale, blue flickering lights that sometimes hover over boggy ground. These lights are now believed to be nothing more than balls of escaped marsh gasses that catch fire, but not so long ago that fact simply wasn't known. These lights have been utilized in many works of fiction, from the will o' the wisps in Disney's *Brave*, to the marsh lights Gollum warned Frodo and Sam not to look at in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings - The Two Towers*, to the Hinkypunk in Rowling's Harry Potter series. However, the idea of actual Lantern Men haunting the marshes, waiting to lure unsuspecting travelers to their deaths, particularly intrigued me. I couldn't help asking myself, what if a young woman encountered one of these mysterious beings? And what if, rather than killing her, he let her go?

Researching the Lantern Man myth led me to the village of Thurlton in the heart of the Norfolk Broads, and the sad tale of Joseph Bexfield, who drowned in the surrounding marshes in 1809, supposedly lured to his death by Lantern Men. His grave can still be seen in the All Saints Churchyard in Thurlton. It also brought the village's White Horse Inn, which no longer exists, to my attention.

In Norfolk, smugglers most often operated by sinking contraband in tubs in the Yarmouth roads—a system of waterways—for local fishermen to collect later. The sea beds there were often covered in soft silt, which made it difficult to recover the tubs if they sunk in. So instead they would attach them to a weighted plank that would float 6-feet from the muddy bottom, and mark their position using corks tied to pieces of cord. Pulling on the cord would bring the tub to the surface.

Smuggling was simply a way of life in many areas of the UK in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries. Most of the community either took part in the smuggling or were

bribed for their silence on the matter, even clergymen. Local windmills and large, roomy cellars, sometimes even those located in vicarages and churches, were used to store the smuggled goods. Many wherrymen who plyed a legitimate trade of coal or other goods were more than happy to take on a little extra cargo and transport them through the intricate system of the Broads inland to where the contraband could be distributed by cart to London or further afield. The windmills were also used as a semaphore warning system, just as I portrayed in the book, to alert people to the presence of customs authorities.

The revenue men were just as disliked in Norfolk as in other parts of the country. This resulted in a number of notable skirmishes, some of which turned deadly. In 1902, The Vine Inn, an old smugglers haunt located in the village of Skegness, was remodeled, and the skeleton of a revenue man was discovered under the floor. The man had been killed and buried there sometime during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There were many intriguing tricks to the smuggling trade, including the method I described by which they watered down the over-proof brandy French distillers shipped to them in smaller casks that were more easily concealed in ship's hulls. They then added caramel to color it in order to finish transforming it into its traditional form.

I got the idea to have Ella smuggle fabrics and gems off a ship from the real life tale of Lovey Warnes. Lovey and her two brothers were smugglers who operated in Christchurch harbor. Lovey would visit ships and enter the captain's cabin to undress and wind herself in valuable silks and other fabrics, before redressing and waltzing straight past revenue men, somewhat fatter. However, this ingenious deception came to a stop when one day a revenue man asked her to have a drink at the local pub and then tried to feel her thighs. She jabbed him in the eye and escaped, but the family decided the risk was too great for her to continue such a ploy.

The article "Napoleon and the 'City of Smugglers', 1810-1814" by Gavin Daly is filled with fascinating information about smugglers and Napoleon's plans to use them to undermine the British economy. The article is available online and well worth a read if you're interested in learning more about the guinea run and the other smuggling activities that took place during the Napoleonic Wars. It also includes the interesting tidbit that a Captain Haywood dominated the trade moving in and out of Gravelines during those years, which led to the speculation that more than one man was actually operating under that surname.

The smuggling of French prisoners-of-war out of the Britain was another aspect of the trade that Daly's article highlighted. It was, in fact, a common practice for officer POWs to be granted parole and stationed comfortably in a specific parole town, as long as they gave their word as officers and gentlemen not to attempt to escape. But many of these officers did not honor their word, and escape was all too common.

The plan to have a French POW pose as Ella's lady's maid in order to smuggle him out of the country was inspired by the true tale of Bonnie Prince Charlie's flight from Scotland after the Battle of Culloden and the collapse of his Jacobite forces in 1746. Prince Charles was able to escape the country and return to France by posing as Flora Macdonald's lady's maid.