

Myths and Legends

of the English-Speaking World

Epic Stories, Ancient Secrets, and Monsters
You Won't Forget!



Opracowanie: Magdalena Rowecka

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The Legend of the Leprechaun



The legend of the Leprechaun can be traced back to the 8th century, and it is an important part of Irish folklore. The name of the mischievous creature that is neither good nor evil derives from Old Irish 'luchorpan', which means 'little body', and it points to its small size.

According to fables, Leprechauns normally take the form of an old man in a green coat and a pointed hat. In earlier times, however, they were said to wear red clothes. Interestingly, Irish folklore describes Leprechauns as men and there is no record of any female Leprechauns. In fact, some people claim that Leprechauns are actually deformed children of the fairies.

Leprechauns are cobblers by trade, and they make and mend shoes. Solitary by nature, they are said to live in remote places, and their presence may be betrayed by the sound of their hammering.

According to legend, their most important customers are the fairies, who love to dance and often dance the night away, ruining their tiny shoes. When this happens, the Leprechauns are happy and busy: they earn money by mending fairy shoes. Unfortunately, sometimes, when there are no fairy dances, there are no fairy shoes to be mended. When the Leprechauns have nothing to do, they venture into the human world in search of work.

The Irish believe it is reasonable to always have a pair of shoes in need of mending. Leprechauns do not take well to not getting what they want, and they might curse you if they come knocking on your door and you have no work for them. The most frequent curses involve spoiled milk or cursing children so that they can only speak backwards.

Apart from being known as cobblers, Leprechauns are also famous for hiding their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Some stories say that this gold is what they have saved from their shoemaking, but since this is not a very lucrative profession, other stories suggest that the creatures found the gold.

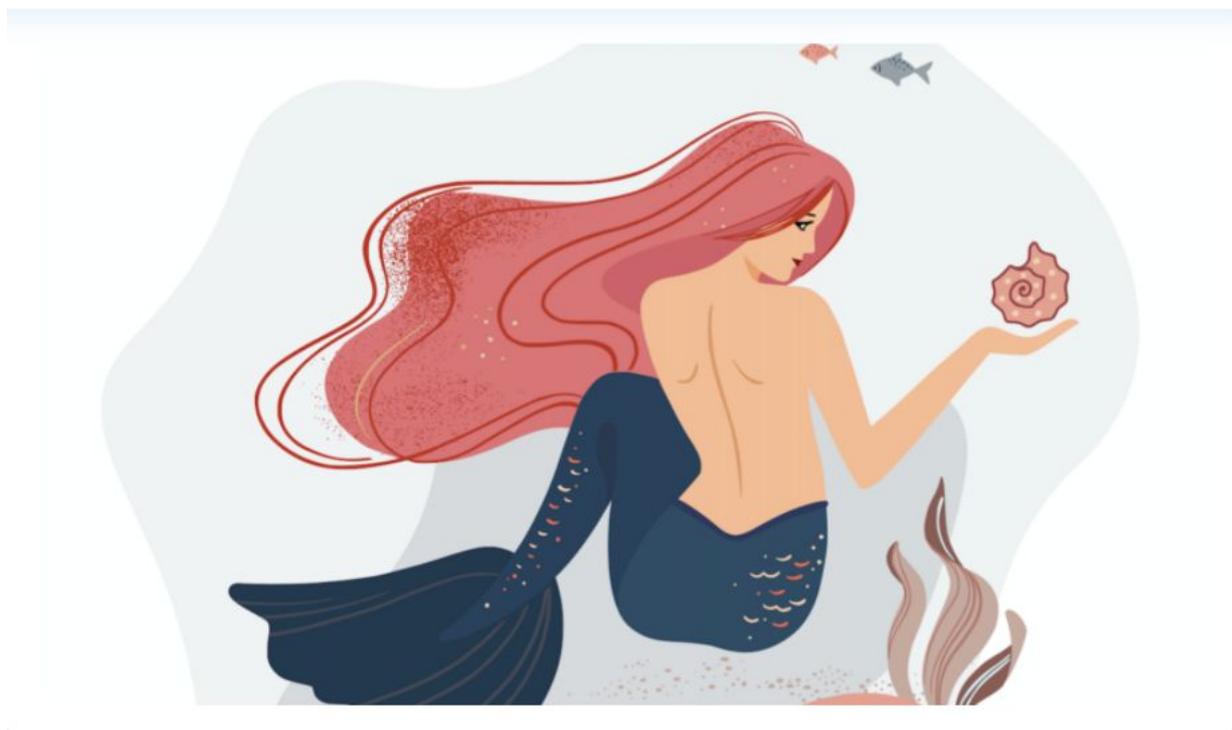
According to one tale, when the Vikings invaded the Emerald Isle, they left gold scattered all over the country. The Leprechauns found it and have guarded it ever since in a secret place at the end of the rainbow.

Unsurprisingly, such a treasure might be tempting for many humans. However, it is impossible to find without the help of the Leprechaun himself. Of course, the little green man must be caught first and forced to reveal the hiding place, but catching one is no easy task. Legend has it that the best way to catch a Leprechaun is to grab him tightly around the neck and make sure that he cannot break free.

It is said that the lucky person who has managed to catch a Leprechaun is entitled to one wish. Other versions of the legend say that he will give his captor as many as three wishes if they set him free. The wish may include the leprechaun's gold, hidden at the end of the rainbow!

The Irish take the legend of the Leprechaun very seriously and since 2009, Leprechauns, being such important figures in Ireland, have been a protected species under European Union law.

The Selkie Bride



Selkies or Seal Folk, whose name comes from the Scottish word for 'seal', are mythical creatures that have the power to change from seal to human by shedding their skin. They are present in many tales and the most popular one involves a man who steals a female selkie's skin and forces her to become his wife.

According to legend, there was a young Scottish fisherman who had spent all day at sea but had only caught a few very small fish. As he was walking across the beach toward his cottage, he heard beautiful voices. He turned toward the sound and saw a dozen selkie folk who were singing and took on human forms to play onshore. When the creatures noticed him, they quickly dived into the sea and disappeared.

The fisherman could not believe his eyes and thought that he was dreaming. However, a moment later he noticed a shiny seal skin lying on a rock. He picked it up and decided that he could sell it and make some money. Then, he heard footsteps close behind him and when he turned, he saw a beautiful young woman who was crying.

She begged the fisherman to give the seal skin back and explained that she could not live under the sea without her skin. The young man could not take his eyes off the beautiful woman. He fell in love with her and decided he must keep her with him.

He asked the selkie woman to marry him and live with him on land. He also promised her he would make her happy. She cried she would never be happy without her folk, but the fisherman was stubborn. The young woman could not return to her home in the sea without her skin, so she followed the fisherman to his cottage, hoping that somehow she would get the seal skin back.

The fisherman hid the skin inside a crevice in the chimney and the selkie could not find it. After a few weeks she agreed to marry him. The man truly loved his wife, and he always worked hard to make her happy. Over time she also grew to love her husband. As the years passed, the couple had seven children, and she loved them with all her heart. However, she missed her folk and the sea.

One day the fisherman and the eldest children went out in their boat to catch fish, and the mother stayed at home with her youngest son. When she looked out of the window, she noticed a band of seals playing and barking. Her eyes filled with tears, and the boy asked her what made her so sad. She told him she had been born in the sea, and her heart was filled with sorrow because she could not return home as her husband had hidden her seal skin.

The boy had heard tales of the selkie folk, and he also knew his father had hidden something in the fireplace, so he pulled the seal skin from its hiding place and gave it to his mother. The woman embraced the boy and kissed him. Then she ran outside to the sea. She put on her seal skin and dived into the water.

When the fisherman arrived home, the boy told him what had happened. The fisherman was heartbroken, but he was not angry with his son. He understood that the boy was braver and more generous than he himself had ever been.

The fisherman and the children missed the selkie woman very much, but they knew that she was happy in the world where she belonged. They also often saw a seal swimming close to the shore, and they never went hungry because the fisherman's net was always full of large, shiny fish.

Queen Boudica



When the Romans conquered the British Isles in AD 43, the Celtic kings and chiefs had to accept the Roman 'protection' and the laws imposed by the invaders. The Celts accepted the authority of female leaders, but under Roman law, women had few rights. When the Iceni King Prasutagus died in AD 60 without a male heir, his wife Boudica (sometimes also called Boadicea), a striking looking woman whose appearance was described as terrifying, became the sole ruler of the Iceni tribe. Boudica was very tall, with fierce eyes and great mass of long red hair. Above all, she was proud and fearless.

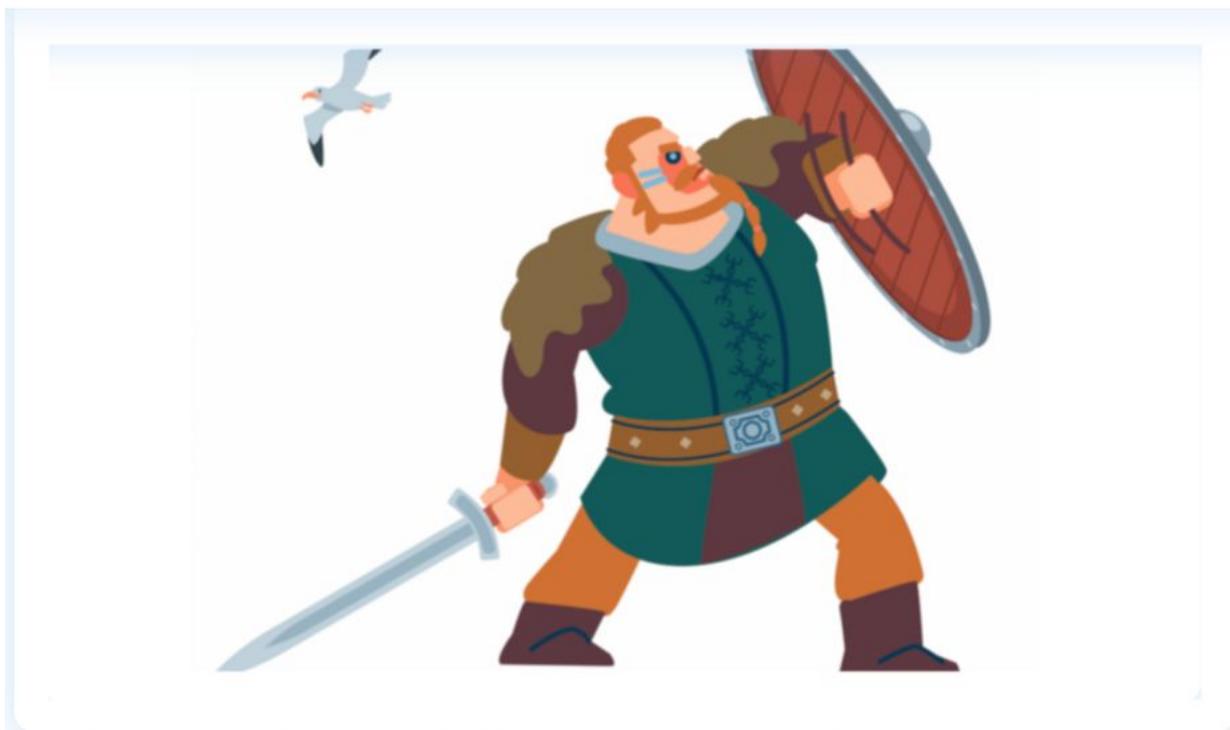
The Romans wanted the queen to resign, but she refused to step down, so the invaders decided to annex the entire Iceni kingdom for the Roman Emperor. Boudica was captured and flogged in public, and her two daughters were tortured.

This insult was too much. Boudica reached out to other tribes in the region, who had also suffered at the hand of the Romans, and she gathered a great army of over 230,000 men and women. When the Celts were ready to meet the Romans, Boudica appeared in a chariot and spoke to the warriors telling them that they must fight for their lost freedom and win or die. Boudica's army marched on Londinium, and then they looted the city and burned it to the ground. Next, the Celts attacked two other Roman settlements. According to Roman sources, 70,000 to 80,000 people were killed in the attacks. The Celts were very brutal, and they did not take prisoners.

However, the Romans were much better trained and equipped. They withdrew to assemble an army of 10,000 soldiers that would be capable of challenging Boudica. The final battle was fought in the Midlands of England in AD 61. The fearless Boudica and her daughters drove round in her chariot to all her tribes before the battle, encouraging them to be brave. Unfortunately, this time Boudica's army was defeated. The Romans killed 80,000 Britons; men, women and children. The Iceni queen was not killed in the battle but, true to her word, she killed herself by poison as she did not want to be taken alive by the Romans.

Boudica has a very special place in British history and is remembered as the Warrior Queen who had the courage to challenge the might of Rome. In 1902 a bronze statue of her riding high in her chariot was placed on the Thames embankment next to the Houses of Parliament in London and it can still be seen there today.

The Giant's Causeway



Long, long ago, when giants roamed the earth, there lived a giant named Finn MacCool. Not only was he a giant: he was also the tallest and strongest giant in Ireland. He was 54 feet tall, his voice was like thunder, and he had the strength of 500 men. He lived happily with his wife Oonagh on the Irish coast until he learned about another giant, named Benandonner, who dwelled some 40 kilometres across the sea on the Scottish coast. Benandonner was certain that he was the strongest of all the giants, and he started shouting out insults at Finn.

Finally, he challenged Finn to a duel to see who was the strongest. Finn was very angry, so he picked up a huge rock and threw it at Benandonner. He missed, and the rock landed in the middle of the Irish sea, and this is how the Isle of Man was made.

Tired of the Scottish giant's insults, Finn finally accepted to fight him. He was not a very good swimmer, so he laid down 40,000 rocks with his enormous hands to build a walkway between Northern Ireland and Scotland that he called the causeway. When the Scottish giant heard what Finn was doing, he also decided to build a path from Scotland to meet up with Finn's path. The two giants worked for weeks and finally they met. Alas, when Finn saw Benandonner coming over the hill, he was terrified because his opponent turned out to be twice his size, and he looked twice as strong.

Benandonner had not yet noticed Finn, so the Irish giant decided to run back to his house and ask his wife what to do. She was a clever woman, and she came up with a smart idea. She dressed Finn up as a baby and put him into a huge cradle. When the Scottish giant knocked on the door, 'the baby' started to cry. When Benandonner saw how big the infant was, he got scared. He thought that if the baby was so huge, his father must be enormous! Thus, he rushed back to Scotland, destroying the causeway as he went, so that Finn could not come after him. And that is why only two fragments of the causeway now remain, one end on the coast of Northern Ireland and the other on the Scottish coast.

Interesting as it is, the legend is not supported by scientific evidence. Scientists believe that the Giant's Causeway was first formed over 60 million years ago, following a period of volcanic activity, where the lava cooled and formed these near-perfectly hexagonal interlocking basalt columns. No matter which explanation you prefer, the Giant's Causeway is undeniably a unique and awe-inspiring site that draws thousands of tourists every year.

Ravens of the Tower of London



The Tower of London is famous for its ravens, also known as 'The Guardians of the Tower'. It is not known when the birds first came to the fortress on the banks of the River Thames, but their presence there is surrounded by legend, and it is believed that the kingdom and the Tower of London will fall if the birds ever leave the fortress.

Even though the origins of the legend are not known, the prophecy is taken very seriously, and seven ravens are kept at the Tower of London at all times - there is always one spare bird, just in case!

Ravens have probably inhabited the Tower of London for centuries. Many prisoners were executed there, and the ravens were attracted to the dead bodies. It was said that at the execution of Anne Boleyn who was Henry VIII's second wife, the ravens of the Tower sat silent and were looking at the strange scene.

The birds behaved much worse during the execution of Lady Jane Gray, and they pecked the eyes from the queen's severed head.

According to legend, the official court astronomer of King Charles II complained that the birds constantly interfered with his work from the White Tower by flying past his telescope and making it harder for him to observe the sky.

Thus, the monarch ordered that the birds should be removed from the fortress. However, before they were banished, King Charles II was warned by a witch that if the ravens ever left the Tower, the monarchy would crumble, and England would fall. On second thoughts, the monarch decided to let the birds stay at the fortress and decreed that the Tower would always be home to six ravens.

However the story originated, the tradition is still very much alive, and the ravens at the Tower enjoy a very comfortable life. They are looked after by a full-time keeper called the Raven Master and their diet consists of fresh fruit, cheese, meat, and biscuits soaked in blood.

Ravens are known to be very intelligent, and they were often kept as pets in Victorian times, in the late 19th century. Interestingly, they may have become popular thanks to Edgar Allan Poe who wrote many famous ghost stories where the black birds were often featured. Nowadays, it is believed that the tradition of having ravens at the Tower started with these pets, and the legend was born later. Whether the future of the kingdom really depends on them or not, ravens of the Tower are one of the most popular tourist attractions in London!

King Alfred and the Cakes



King Alfred was an Anglo-Saxon king who lived in the 9th century AD. He was not king of England, because England was not yet one united country. Alfred was king of Wessex. The other kingdoms in

England - Mercia, Northumbria and East Anglia - were occupied by the Vikings, who had come over the sea and wanted to conquer the British Islands. There were so many invaders, and they were so fierce and powerful that they had won many battles and would soon become rulers of the whole country.

King Alfred did not have an easy life. There was war all the time, and he had lost many battles. After he had been defeated by the Vikings in battle yet again, he had to flee and find a hiding place to save his life. Hungry and exhausted, the king came to a shepherd's hut (in other versions of the story the hut belonged to a woodcutter). The shepherd was out, minding his sheep and his wife was baking cakes. The woman invited King Alfred in. She did not recognise the monarch and thought he was merely a soldier of Wessex, not the king! She offered him rest and food, as she had just started baking some cakes for supper.

The woman went out to collect some more firewood and told the soldier to keep an eye on the cakes while she was away. Alas, almost as soon as she had left, poor Alfred fell asleep. According to some other accounts, King Alfred was so deep in thought, planning how to win back his kingdom and defeat the Vikings that he completely forgot about the cakes, which burnt. The shepherd's wife was not pleased to see her visitor had spoiled her supper, so she started beating King Alfred with her broomstick, calling him a lazy, good-for-nothing man. The king accepted being in the wrong, when it was his fault, and did not use his royal authority to avoid punishment. He took the beating and apologised!

Some time after the event, King Alfred gathered his men again and beat the Vikings in a great battle. Over the years, he did so much good for his country that he became known all over the world as Alfred the Great.

The story presents King Alfred as a humble man, who had all the qualities needed to be an outstanding monarch. It also tells us that it is important to take responsibility no matter how large or small a task might seem.

The Children of Lir



'The Children of Lir' is an old legend from Irish mythology that mixes magical elements, such as druidic wands and spells, with a message of Christian faith bringing freedom from suffering. It is also a story of loss and enduring love, and some of its themes can be recognized in other well-known European fairy tales.

According to the legend, long ago there was a king called Lir. He lived in a castle with his wife Aobh and their four kids: three boys and a girl. Alas, their happiness was ruined when Lir's wife died. The king and the children were devastated, and they missed her very much. The monarch knew the children needed a mother, so he decided to marry again. He chose Aobh's younger sister Aoife, who possessed magical powers, to be his new wife.

Aoife was very beautiful, but she turned out to be a wicked and envious woman. At first, she loved the children, but when she realised that Lir loved them more than he loved her, she became jealous. The new queen did not want to share the king's love with anybody, so she decided to get rid of his offspring, and she devised a cruel plan.

She hired some men to kill the children, but when the time came, they backed out and ran. Aoife was so furious that she wanted to kill Lir's children with her own hands, but she was afraid that if she did that, their ghosts would haunt her forever. Thus, she decided that she would cast a spell that would force the three princes and their sister to live as swans for nine hundred years. The evil spell would only be broken by the sound of Christian church bells announcing the arrival of St. Patrick in Ireland.

When the children did not return home that evening, the king went to look for them beside the lake. He did not find them, but he saw four beautiful swans. To his amazement, one of the swans called out. It was his daughter who told him what Aoife had done to them. Lir returned to his castle and pleaded with his wife to reverse the spell, but she refused. The king became very angry and banished her from his

kingdom. He spent the rest of his life beside the lake talking to his children and listening to their beautiful swan songs.

After nine hundred years had passed, the swans finally heard the sound they had been waiting for: the sound of a Christian church bell. They swam to shore and met a monk named Caomhog. He was stunned when he saw the four swans turn into humans in front of him. They were so happy that the spell was broken. However, they were now 900 years old. The monk listened to their sad story and when he noticed they started to age rapidly, he baptised them for fear they would die very soon. When they passed away, Caomhog buried them all in one grave. That night in his dream he saw four children flying up through the clouds. He understood that the children of Lir were now happy in heaven, with their mother and father, and their legend would live on forever.

The Legend of Stonehenge



Stonehenge is one of the most mysterious ancient monuments in the world. It stands on the Salisbury Plain in southern England and consists of huge stone blocks arranged in a circular shape. No one knows exactly why or how it was built, and for centuries the site has been surrounded by legends, magic, and unanswered questions.

According to one popular legend, Stonehenge was created by the wizard Merlin. It is said that he used magic to transport the stones from Ireland, where they were believed to have healing powers. With the help of his spells, Merlin placed the stones carefully on the plain, creating a sacred site where people could be cured of illness and protected from evil. Although this story belongs to legend rather than history, it helped strengthen the belief that Stonehenge was a place of magic.

Another common belief connects Stonehenge with ancient druids. Druids were religious leaders and scholars among the Celtic people, and they were thought to worship nature and the sun. For a long time, many people believed that druids had built Stonehenge and used it for ceremonies, sacrifices, and

important celebrations. Today, historians know that Stonehenge is older than the druids, but the monument has remained an important spiritual symbol for modern druid groups.

Stonehenge is also closely linked to the movement of the sun. Every year, during the summer solstice, the sun rises directly above one of the stones and shines into the centre of the circle. This suggests that the builders had a deep understanding of astronomy and used the monument as a kind of calendar to mark important times of the year. These events may have been connected to farming, religious rituals, or seasonal festivals.

Scientists have developed many theories about the origin of Stonehenge. Some believe it was a temple, others think it was a burial site or a place for healing. Archaeological research has shown that some of the stones, known as bluestones, were brought from Wales, over 200 kilometres away. How people managed to transport such heavy stones without modern technology remains one of the greatest mysteries.

Whatever its true purpose, Stonehenge continues to fascinate people from around the world. Visitors still gather at the site, especially during solstices, to feel its unique atmosphere. Whether it was built for magic, religion, science, or all three, Stonehenge remains a powerful symbol of ancient Britain and one of the most intriguing legends in the English-speaking world.

The Ghost of Anne Boleyn



Anne Boleyn is one of the most well-known queens in English history. She was the second wife of King Henry VIII and the mother of Queen Elizabeth I. Her life at the royal court was full of ambition, danger, and difficult decisions, and her story later became the subject of many legends and ghost tales.

Anne lived at a time when life at the king's court was not only glamorous but also very risky. When she lost the king's favour, she was accused of serious crimes and sent to the Tower of London. In 1536, Anne Boleyn died within the Tower walls. Many people believed that her fate was unfair, and sympathy for the young queen quickly turned her into a tragic figure.

Soon after her death, stories began to appear about a mysterious ghost seen at the Tower of London. Guards and visitors reported seeing a quiet woman dressed in long Tudor clothes walking through the courtyards at night. She was often described as calm and silent, and she never spoke. Some believed the ghost appeared near the chapel where Anne had prayed during her final days.

According to legend, Anne Boleyn's ghost does not only haunt the Tower of London. She is also said to appear at Hever Castle, her childhood home in the countryside. There, her spirit is believed to walk through the gardens and across the bridge, as if remembering her younger, happier days before becoming queen.

People say that Anne's ghost represents sadness and injustice rather than fear. Instead of trying to frighten others, her spirit is thought to remind visitors of how quickly life could change in the Tudor period and how dangerous royal power could be.

Whether the ghost is real or not, the story of Anne Boleyn continues to fascinate young and old alike. Today, visitors to the Tower of London enjoy listening to this gentle but mysterious legend, which keeps the memory of the tragic queen alive and adds to the magical atmosphere of one of England's most famous landmarks.

Oxford University



The University of Oxford is one of the oldest and most respected universities in the world. It is located in the city of Oxford, about 90 km north-west of London, and its name comes from the old word

'Oxanforda' which means 'a place in a river where cattle (or oxen) can cross safely'. Residents and natives of Oxford are known as Oxonians.

The university has no exact date of foundation, but its history goes back to the 11th century. Teaching existed at Oxford as early as 1096 and developed rapidly from 1167, when King Henry II, for political reasons, banned English students from attending the University of Paris.

As the number of students and teachers at Oxford grew, there were some disagreements among the scholars. Eventually, some of them left the university in 1209, and founded a new one in Cambridge. These two universities are now great rivals, each one trying to outdo the other in research, scholarship, and sports. Cambridge and Oxford together are sometimes referred to as Oxbridge. The students who would like to study at one of these great institutions need to make up their mind and choose one or the other, as it is not possible to apply to both in the same year.

The University of Oxford consists of 39 colleges and six private halls with libraries, chapels, museums, and picturesque gardens that attract thousands of tourists from all over the world. Indeed, there is much to be admired. For example, Oxford's Botanical Garden is the oldest in the world. The Bodleian Library, founded in 1602, is one of the oldest libraries in Europe. It is also the second largest library in the United Kingdom after the British Library.

Oxford University is full of tradition, and Christ Church, one of its most famous colleges, is particularly loyal to it - it even has its own time zone and clocks on its campus are five minutes behind the rest of the United Kingdom! To this day, the clock tower at Christ Church runs five minutes later than official British time. Why is that? Well, before the advent of trains, different towns had their own times, based on the actual solar time. When trains became popular, it was important for the whole country to be on the same time. Since Oxford is located 60 miles west of Greenwich, there was a 5-minute difference. While the whole country adopted Greenwich Mean Time, the clocks in Christ Church college remained 5 minutes and 2 seconds behind London.

Thanks to its excellent reputation, Oxford is very popular among students from all over the world. The colleges look for candidates with the best school results in the subjects for which they apply, typically straight A's at their A-level exams. Apart from achieving high grades, applicants need to take a written test and may be asked to submit some written work. If a student's application is shortlisted, they'll be invited for an interview.

Until 1878, women could not study at the University of Oxford, and they were first allowed to take degrees at Oxford in 1920. Nowadays, all the colleges accept both men and women as students, and the number of male and female students is more or less equal.

Oxford University has a long list of famous alumni including Lewis Carroll, who wrote *Alice in Wonderland*; J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*; numerous Nobel Prize winners, seven Catholic saints, 12 kings, 25 British Prime Ministers, and even a pope!

Interestingly, Oxford was not bombed during World War II, and some historians suggest that the city was not destroyed because Hitler wanted Oxford to be the new capital of England after defeating it. Fortunately, Germany lost the war and Oxford remained one of the global centres of science and learning.

Cambridge University



The second-oldest university in all English-speaking countries, Cambridge University is nowadays one of the world's leading places of learning, usually ranked in the world's top five. The city of Cambridge is located 80 km north of London and its name comes from the River Cam, which runs through it.

Famous as it is, the university had rather humble beginnings: it was started by a group of scholars who left Oxford around 1209 after a fight with local people. It officially became a university in 1290 when Pope Nicholas IV called it a studium generale, which was a medieval name for a university. From that point scholars from other European universities started to come to Cambridge to teach and do research there. However, Cambridge remained fairly insignificant until the beginning of the 16th century, when it also became one of the cradles of Protestant Reformation in England, and the Puritan movement was born there.

Over the centuries, many important scientists, writers, politicians and artists as well as members of the Royal Family studied there. Up to now, 89 students from Cambridge won a Nobel Prize in all six disciplines including physics, chemistry, peace, literature, physiology, and medicine.

The university's students include Sir Isaac Newton, who invented his own form of mathematics known as calculus; J.J. Thomson, who discovered the electron; Ernest Rutherford, who split the atom; Charles Darwin, who created the theory of evolution; and Francis Crick and James D. Watson who discovered the structure of DNA. Of course, the list is much longer!

The university is famous for its architecture and gardens, and it is also the most popular place for punting. Punting is an activity that has existed in Cambridge for centuries and involves riding a flat boat down the River Cam while someone in the back uses a pole to push against the riverbed and move the punt down the Cam.

Old as it is, the University also has its traditions and legends. One of them is the wooden spoon tradition, where a spoon made of wood was given to the worst mathematics student in the year. There is also a popular story according to which, Lord Byron, the famous English poet, was not allowed to keep a dog in his rooms at Trinity College Cambridge, so instead, he kept a bear. The college had no rules about bears, so there was no legal basis to tell the creative student to get rid of the animal.

The teaching in Cambridge is done through lectures and practical classes. The students are expected to do some homework and then talk about it with a teacher. The model of teaching, known as tutoring, is very personalized and students can ask lots of questions and really understand the subject. In fact, this is probably one of the best things about studying in Cambridge!

The Devil's Contract



University of Oxford is one of the oldest universities in the world, and for centuries it has been a place of learning, ambition, and hard work. With such a long history, it is not surprising that many legends have grown around its colleges and students. One of the most famous of these stories is known as The Devil's Contract.

According to legend, many years ago there was a student at Oxford who desperately wanted to succeed. His studies were difficult, the books were long and complex, and the exams seemed impossible to pass. No matter how hard he tried, he felt that knowledge was always just out of reach. Late one night, alone in his room, he spoke out loud that he would give anything to become wise and successful.

To his great surprise, a mysterious stranger appeared. The visitor offered the student incredible knowledge and academic success in exchange for his soul. The offer came with a contract, written on an

old piece of parchment. The student was frightened but also curious. Instead of signing immediately, he asked to read the contract very carefully.

As he studied the document, the student noticed something unusual. The contract promised that the Devil would return to collect the soul “when the candles had burned out”. Thinking quickly, the student smiled and agreed to the deal. He signed the contract and received the knowledge he desired. From that moment on, his studies became easy, and his teachers were amazed by his intelligence.

However, the student had a clever plan. He never allowed the candles in his room to burn out completely. Whenever they became short, he replaced them with new ones. Night after night, the candles continued to burn, and the Devil never returned. Realising he had been tricked, the Devil disappeared forever, and the student kept his knowledge without losing his soul.

The legend of the Devil’s Contract was often told to students as a warning and a lesson. It reminded them that intelligence is not only about knowledge but also about careful thinking, patience, and attention to detail. It also suggested that shortcuts and dangerous deals are not the best way to achieve success.

Whether the story is true or not, The Devil’s Contract remains a popular Oxford legend. It adds a touch of mystery to the ancient university and teaches young listeners that clever thinking and hard work are more powerful than any magical promise.

The Ghost of the Bodleian Library



Bodleian Library is one of the oldest and most famous libraries in Europe. It belongs to the University of Oxford and has been a place of learning for over four hundred years. With millions of books and a long academic tradition, it is not surprising that the library has inspired many mysterious stories. One of the most popular of them is the legend of the Bodleian Library ghost.

According to legend, the ghost is the spirit of a former scholar who loved books and knowledge more than anything else. During his life, he spent long hours reading, studying, and writing in the quiet halls of the library. Some say that even after his death, he could not leave the place that meant so much to him.

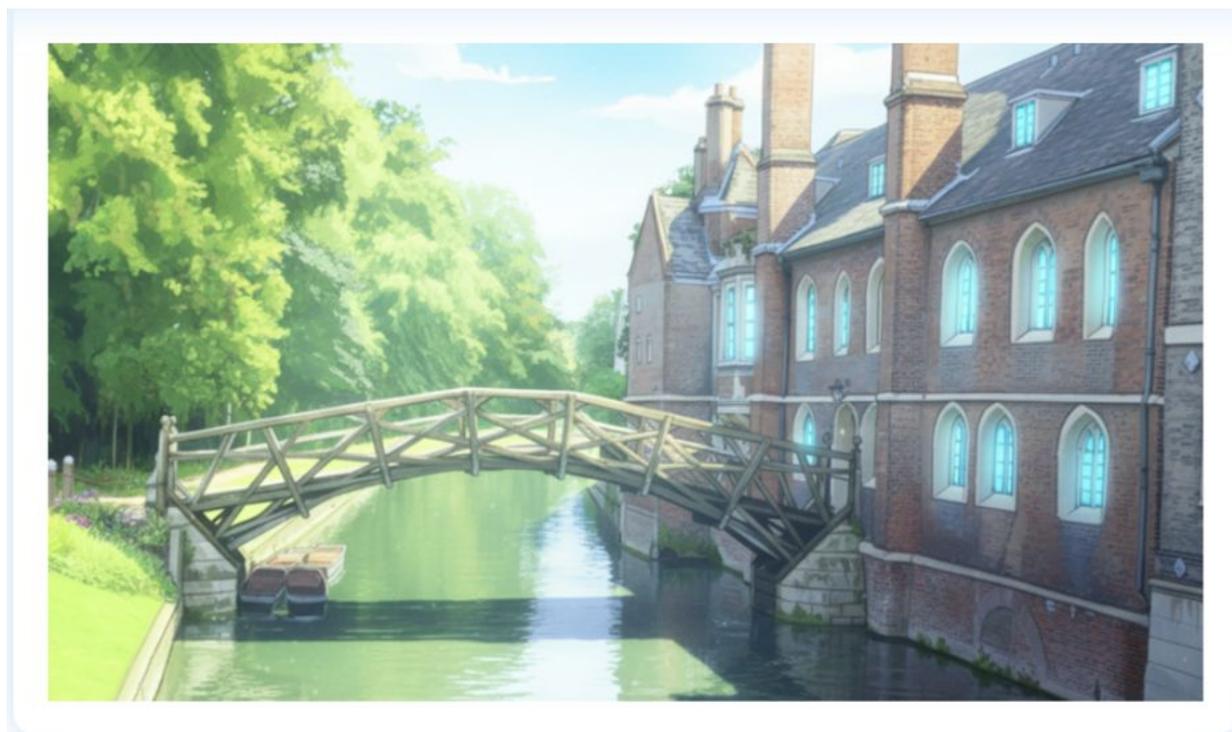
Late at night, when the library is closed and silent, guards and librarians have reported strange experiences. They describe hearing soft footsteps between the bookshelves or the sound of pages turning, even though no one else is there. Sometimes lights are said to flicker, or a book is found lying open on a desk where no one has been sitting.

The ghost is not believed to be frightening or dangerous. Instead, it is described as calm and focused, like a student deeply absorbed in study. Some people believe the spirit appears to protect the books and ensure that knowledge stored in the library is treated with respect. There are even stories that the ghost becomes active during exam periods, when students are under the greatest pressure.

According to one version of the legend, the ghost appears to those who truly love learning. It is said that students who study honestly and work hard have nothing to fear, while careless readers may feel an uncomfortable presence reminding them to respect the rules of the library.

Whether these stories are true or not, the legend of the Bodleian Library ghost adds to the magical atmosphere of Oxford. It reminds visitors that places of learning carry the memories of generations of students and scholars. For many young listeners, the story shows that curiosity and love of knowledge can last forever—even beyond a lifetime.

The Mathematical Bridge



Mathematical Bridge is one of the most famous and curious landmarks at the University of Cambridge. It crosses the River Cam near Queens' College and attracts visitors not only because of its elegant shape, but also because of the legend connected to its construction.

According to the popular story, the bridge was designed by the great scientist Isaac Newton. The legend says that he built the bridge using only mathematical principles, without any metal bolts or screws. Thanks to perfect calculations and balance, the wooden parts were said to hold together entirely on their own.

The story continues with curious students who wanted to understand how such a bridge could exist. One day, they decided to take it apart to discover its secret. However, when they tried to rebuild it, they failed. According to legend, the students could not put the bridge back together without using metal screws, which can still be seen today. This mistake was said to prove that true genius cannot easily be copied.

In reality, historians explain that Newton never designed the bridge and that metal fastenings were always part of its construction. The bridge was built in the 18th century by skilled craftsmen who used careful engineering rather than magic or secret formulas. However, the legend remained popular because it perfectly matched Cambridge's reputation as a place of brilliant minds and bold ideas.

For generations of students, the Mathematical Bridge became a symbol of curiosity and learning. It reminds them that asking questions is important, but so is respecting knowledge and experience. The story also teaches that legends often grow where science, imagination, and admiration meet.

Today, people walking across the bridge still enjoy hearing the story and imagining clever students and great scientists from the past. Whether built by mathematics alone or not, the Mathematical Bridge remains one of Cambridge's most charming legends and a favourite tale among visitors and students alike.

Harvard University



Harvard University is a private Ivy League university located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is one of the most prestigious schools in the United States, as well as its oldest university. It is also ranked as one of the best institutions of higher learning in the world. Harvard's motto is *Veritas*, which is Latin for 'Truth'. The school's official colour is crimson – a dark shade of red.

The university was established in 1636, and later named after John Harvard, who was a Puritan clergyman, and upon his death donated his library and half of his estate to the institution. Today, the Harvard Library is the largest academic library in the world, and it includes over 20 million volumes.

The main campus is located along the Charles River, a few miles west of Boston. Some of Harvard's graduate schools are in Boston, but most of them are in Cambridge. So far, the University has produced numerous Nobel laureates, many outstanding scientists, and lots of billionaires, including Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg. Eight Harvard alumni went on to become United States Presidents including Barack Obama, Rutherford Hayes, George W. Bush, John F. Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, John Quincy Adams, and John Adams.

For most of its history, Harvard admitted only men. Nowadays, both men and women can study there, and the University has about 22,000 students.

The cost of attending Harvard University is very high but talented students can apply for scholarships and financial aid.

Rip Van Winkle



A long time ago, in a village at the foot of the misty and mysterious Catskill Mountains in New York lived a man named Rip Van Winkle. He was a kind and well-liked neighbour who was always quick to help other people. He was married to a fierce and nagging woman who often made his life miserable. He also had kids: a son named Rip, who was his father's spitting image, and a daughter. Rip Van Winkle also had a dog Wolf who often accompanied his master on his long hikes in the Catskill Mountains.

One day, Rip and Wolf went for a walk up the mountains, and as he was about to go back home, he heard someone shouting his name. He turned around and saw a small figure walking toward him. It was a dwarf with a grey beard, wearing old-fashioned Dutch clothes. He was carrying a barrel on his shoulder and asked Rip to help him carry it. Rip agreed and followed the dwarf.

They walked and walked, higher and higher into the misty mountains, and deeper and deeper into the dark woods. Finally, they came to a clearing where Rip saw other dwarves in funny old clothes who were playing ninepins. They opened the barrel, which was full of a strange, dark liquid. The little men poured the liquid into cups and offered one to Rip. The drink was so sweet and so good that he drank a few cups of it. His head began to nod, his eyes began to close, and soon, Rip Van Winkle was asleep.

When he woke up, he was lying on the ground at the foot of the mountains. The strange little man was no longer there. Rip thought to himself that he must have slept here all night long, and he was afraid that his wife would be very angry.

Rip called out for his dog, but Wolf did not return. As he started walking back home, he saw his village down below, but somehow it looked different. When Rip entered the village, he saw faces he did not recognise. The people were also dressed in clothes that seemed strange to him. Even the buildings were different. Rip rubbed his chin, and to his astonishment, he found he had grown a long beard overnight. Then he looked at his clothes and realized that they were in tatters.

Rip Van Winkle walked to the place where his home had once stood, but it was no longer there. The building had fallen apart, it had no roof, and the windows were all broken. He heard a dog bark, and he thought it was Wolf, but the animal growled at Rip, as if it did not know who he was. Sad and confused, Rip went back into the village. There the villagers gathered around him, staring and pointing at him. Then Rip spotted a man who looked very much like himself and asked him what his name was. The young man replied that his name was Rip Van Winkle. Rip's own son, who was a child when he had left, was an adult now! There was also a young woman who looked familiar, and he asked her who she was. She said that her father, Rip Van Winkle, had left the house twenty years before and never returned. Rip told her that he was her lost father.

The people of the village looked closer at Rip. Indeed, the man did look like the Rip Van Winkle of old. The man whom they had not seen for twenty years had finally returned! That night the villagers gathered in order to give Rip Van Winkle a warm welcome after all the long years he had spent sleeping in the misty, mysterious Catskill Mountains.

Rip Van Winkle is probably the most famous American fairy tale with elements of magic. Interestingly, there are also some hidden symbols in the story. For example, Rip went to sleep before 1776, when the American colonies were still ruled by the British, and woke up after the American War of Independence, to an entirely different reality. Some people also think that it is not a coincidence that the main character was named Rip. Some also believe that the acronym 'R.I.P.' stands for *Rest In Peace*, because when America became an independent country, the old ways were dead and gone for good.

The Wendigo



The Wendigo is a legendary creature from the traditional stories of some Indigenous peoples of North America. According to legend, it lives deep in the forests of Canada and the northern United States,

especially in cold, remote areas where winter is long and harsh. The Wendigo is not just a monster from scary stories – it is also a powerful symbol with an important message.

In many versions of the legend, the Wendigo was once a human. During times of great hunger and extreme winter conditions, a person might become so desperate or greedy that they turned away from other people and nature. By choosing selfishness and cruelty, the person was said to slowly transform into a Wendigo – a creature that had lost its humanity.

The Wendigo is often described as very tall and thin, with long arms and glowing eyes. It moves silently through the forest and is almost impossible to escape. No matter how much it eats, it is never full, which represents endless hunger and greed. The colder and lonelier the forest, the stronger the Wendigo is believed to become.

Unlike many other monsters, the Wendigo does not usually attack without reason. Instead, it appears as a warning. The legend teaches that greed, selfishness, and lack of care for others can destroy a person from the inside. By forgetting kindness and community, people risk becoming something they no longer recognise.

For Indigenous communities, the Wendigo story was often told to children and young people to explain the importance of sharing, cooperation, and respect for nature. It reminded listeners that survival in difficult conditions depended on helping one another, not on thinking only about oneself.

Today, the legend of the Wendigo is still remembered and retold. While some people enjoy it as a mysterious and slightly frightening story, others see it as a meaningful lesson about human behaviour. Whether taken as a monster tale or a moral story, the Wendigo remains one of the most powerful and symbolic legends in the English-speaking world.

The Origin of the Human Races



There were many Native American tribes in North America, and each of them had their own myths. Most of these stories were passed down orally, as Native Americans did not use written languages. Instead, they had storytellers whose job was to keep the legends alive.

Although Native American myths differed from tribe to tribe, there are certain things they had in common. Most of them involved a creator, who was sometimes referred to as the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka or Gitche Manitou in a number of Native American and First Nations tribes. Another thing they had in common was the belief that humans, animals, and plants were all interconnected and equally important. Animals often had special roles in Native American mythology. In some cases, they helped humans and granted them special favours, and very often they possessed human traits. Most tribes had myths about the creation of the world and man. The myth below explains the origins of the human races, and it does not come as a surprise that the white race is not portrayed in a very good light.

According to the myth, long, long ago, when the Earth was young, Gitche Manitou, or the Great Spirit, was sitting on a rock, smoking a pipe and watching the beautiful world he had created. He was pleased with his creation, but then he saw that the animals were arguing with each other over which of them was the most powerful. Manitou listened to their bickering and set out to create a being that would be more powerful than all the animals and would instil fear in them.

He put down his pipe and set to work. First, he gathered some stones and built a furnace. Next, he spent four days gathering dry twigs and buffalo manure for fuel. When he had gathered enough, he felt tired, and he took a rest. Alas, as soon as he fell asleep, a rattlesnake crept up, sprayed the brushwood with its venom, and left its old skin in the fire.

The Great Spirit awoke, made a man out of clay, and put him into the furnace. However, when he took him out, it turned out that he was weak and pale. To make things worse, the rattlesnake's venom made him evil, mean and treacherous. Manitou was not pleased with such a creature, so he threw him out across the Great Water, and went back to work.

He took some clay and formed another man, and he baked him in a fire of pine wood, which he had collected over another four days. But he fell asleep, and when he woke up, the man came out completely black. His muscles were strong, but he was anxious and hesitant. Manitou was not pleased with the second man he created, so he hurled him across the Great Water and went back to work.

On his third attempt, the Great Spirit picked up some birch branches to make the new man fast; some oak branches to make him strong; larch branches to give him powerful muscles; and tar and resin to make him resistant to weather conditions and give him a sense of unity with nature.

The third man turned out to be perfect - he was smart, strong, handsome and brown-skinned. The Great Spirit was really pleased when he looked at him, and he gave the man the whole world he had created: the woods, the prairies and the animals. He also warned him that he should live in harmony with nature and other tribes, for if he did not, the white man he had thrown out across the Great Water would return and destroy the prairies and forests together with the people and animals living in them.

The legend contains an order for Native Americans to respect and live in harmony with the natural world and with other tribes, because they can only last as long as there is nature around them, and the prairies and forests are full of wild animals and buffalo. As we know, the arrival of white settlers had disastrous consequences for the indigenous people of North America who were decimated by the colonists, and lost their land they had owned for thousands of years.

The Rainbow Serpent



The Rainbow Serpent legend is based on a traditional Aboriginal Dreamtime tale of how the Earth was transformed, and how mountains, rivers and all the beautiful animals came into being. The Dreaming, or Dreamtime, is a term describing the religious beliefs of Australian Aboriginal people, and it refers to the time when the Earth was created.

According to the legend, in the beginning, the Earth was flat and it was inhabited by powerful Ancestral Beings with supernatural abilities. One day, a beautiful rainbow-coloured snake awoke from its sleep. Known as the Rainbow Serpent, it was one of the most powerful Ancestral Beings of Aboriginal Australia.

The serpent travelled across the land, and as it moved its body, it transformed the flat terrain into beautiful landscapes. It also created long, winding rivers, making it possible for plants to grow and new animals to thrive.

At last, when it grew tired with the effort of shaping the Earth, the Rainbow Serpent crawled into a waterhole where it lay in the cool water. It only came out after heavy rainstorms when its waterhole was disturbed and when the sun touched its colourful body. Then it rose up from the waterhole and travelled over the treetops, up through the clouds and across the plain to another waterhole. Aboriginal people believe that rainbows are the serpent moving from one watering hole to the next, filling waterholes around the country with fresh water.

The Rainbow Serpent Dreamtime Story is one of the most well-known Aboriginal myths, and it continues to have an important place in Australian society today. Rock art featuring this mythical creature dates as far back as 6,000 years, making it one of the oldest religious beliefs in the world.

