

# The Legend of the Mistletoe Bough

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The Legend of the Mistletoe Bough is a ghost story which has been connected to many old houses and mansions in Britain.

The story tells how a young bride got married at Christmas-time to Lord Lovell. After the ceremony she suggested playing a game of hide and seek to keep everyone amused, as a game that both adults and children could join in. As it was her wedding day it was decided that the young bride should be the first person to hide and off she went.

It was the last time her husband, or any of the wedding guests would see her.

The guests looked until they finally had to go home. They thought she must have fallen asleep whilst hiding and would return as soon as she awoke, much to the amusement of the other wedding guests.

Her new husband, father and servants searched for her late into the night, and the next day. Still nothing was found. There was no clue at all as to where she had got or what had happened to her.

The days passed into weeks, then months and eventually years. Still the young bride had not been found or any trace of her discovered. Her story was told to newcomers to the village and passed down from parents to children. The bridegroom, Lord Lovell grew into an old man never knowing what had happened to his beautiful young bride.

The family house was sold to a new family and the story of Lord Lovell's bride became legendary in the area. But still, no trace of her was ever discovered.

One day, many, many years later the attics of the old house were emptied. Amongst the old paintings and furniture stored there was an old oak chest that seemed to be locked.

After much difficulty, the lid was finally lifted. There, in the chest, still in her wedding dress and holding her bridal bouquet was the young bride, hiding from the other wedding guests in a chest in the attic. She had closed the lid of the chest and it had stuck fast, locking her forever in the chest.

Many old houses claim that the story happened there, some even displaying the chest, in which the body was supposedly found. They include:

Bramshill House and Marwell Hall in Hampshire,

Castle Horneck in Cornwall

Basildon Grotto in Berkshire

Minster Lovell Hall in Oxfordshire,

Excton Hall in Rutland,

Brockdish Hall in Norfolk

Bawdrip Rectory in Somerset.

The tale first appeared in print in the form of a poem by Samuel Rogers entitled 'Ginevra', in his book 'Italy' published in 1823. Rogers said of the story:

'The story is, I believe, founded on fact; though the time and the place are uncertain. Many old houses lay claim to it.'

The popularity of the tale was greatly increased when it appeared as a song in the 1830s entitled 'The Mistletoe Bough' written by Thomas Haynes Bayley and Sir Henry Bishop. The song was very popular at the time. In 1859, its 'solemn chanting' was referred to as a 'national occurrence at Christmas' in English households, and by 1862 the song was referred to as 'one of the most popular songs ever written', 'which must be known by heart by many readers'. Although the song has been mainly forgotten the story is still a popular mystery to be told at Christmas-time

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