

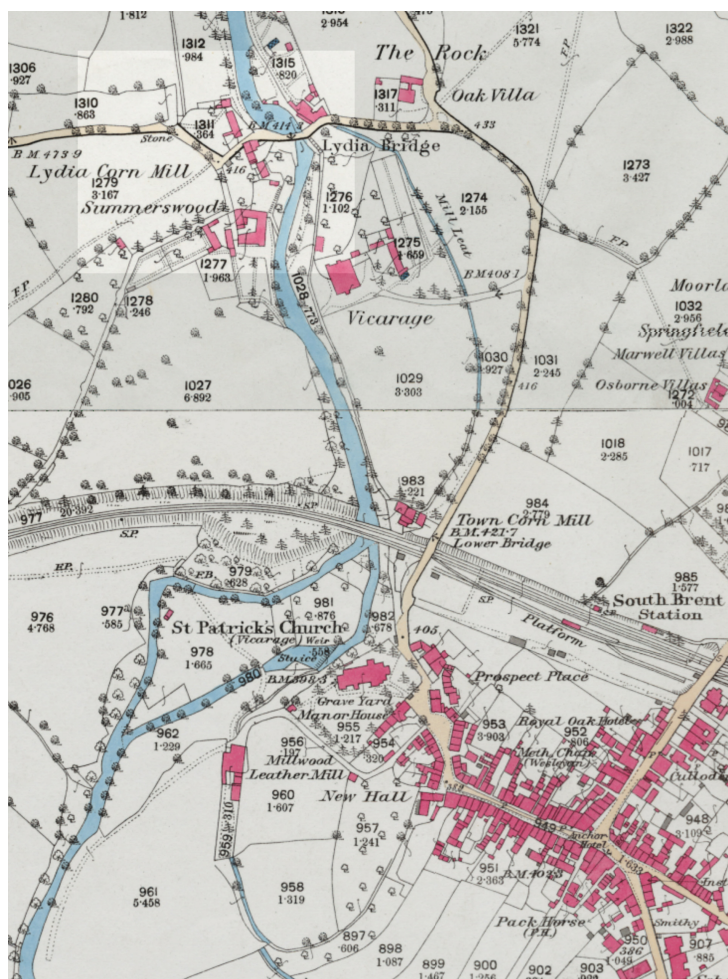
South Dartmoor's haunted bridge

Members of South Brent Storytellers & Archive's popular Facebook group have reported a surprising number of ghost sightings around Lydia Bridge, near South Brent. The hamlet squats in a shady dip at the bottom of a torrential stretch of Dartmoor's River Avon. Though in easy walking distance of South Brent village, it feels isolated, and most of the dwellings are hidden from view.

Historic England says Lydia Bridge is a:

"Road bridge over River Avon. C17 or C18 packhorse bridge with hump back and widened on upstream side. Stone rubble. single round arch. Large stone slabs forming string with parapets above with large granite coping stones. In 1669 Lydia Bridge was in decay and the existing bridge appears to be either the restored earlier bridge or an entire rebuilding of late C17 or C18."

[Link](#)



Devon CXX.9, Surveyed: 1885, Published: 1887. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

The friendly ghost

In November 2022, Kath McCaffrey posted an intriguing account of a ghost haunting Wisteria Cottage at Lydia Bridge. She said that, shortly after her son moved into the cottage with his girlfriend, a rocking chair moved from the fireplace to the bottom of the stairs while they were out. No one else was living there, and all the doors and windows had been locked. There was absolutely no logical explanation because the rocking chair would have to have been forcibly dragged to the bottom of the stairs.

The couple often heard unexplained noises coming from upstairs when they were downstairs. The noises often sounded like footsteps.

When her son first saw the apparition of a woman in the hallway, he assumed he must have imagined it. At the same time, he was certain that he hadn't.

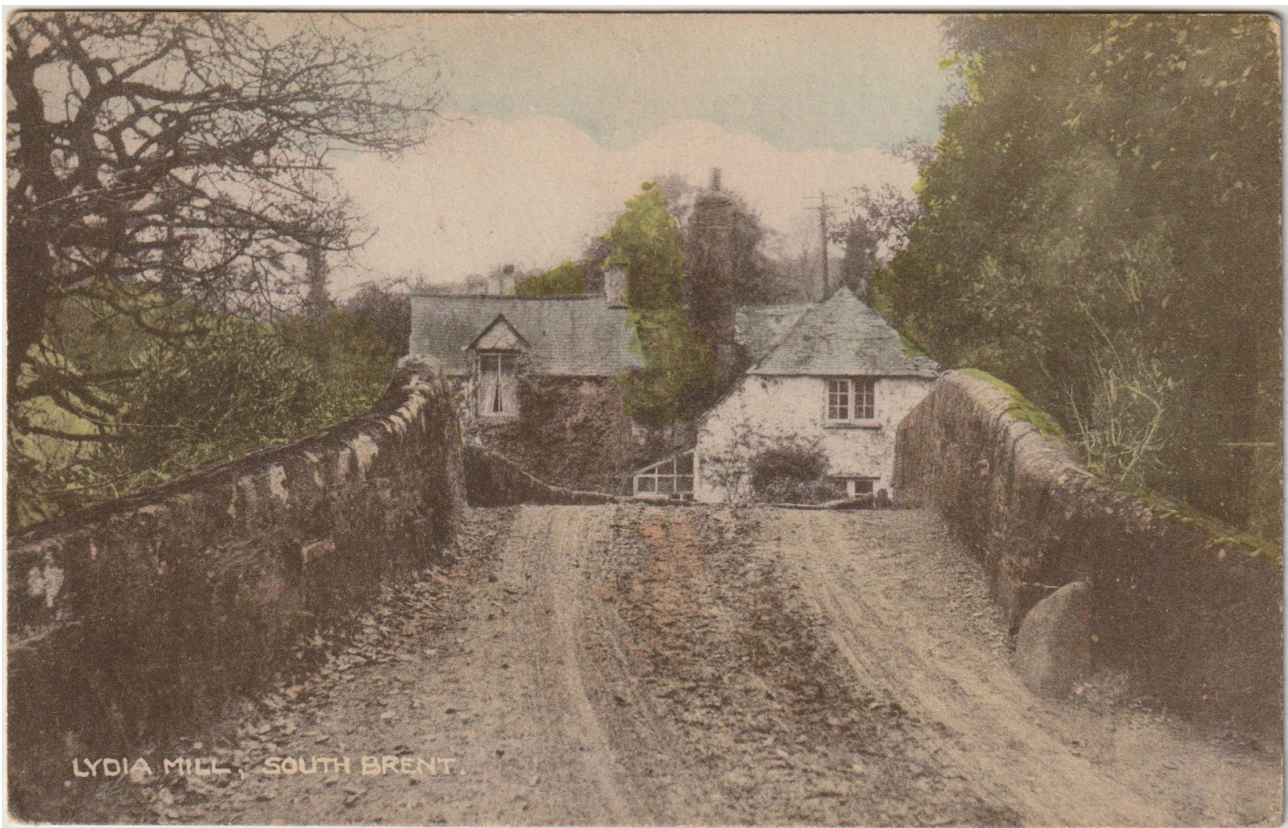
He said the ghostly woman was in her late twenties, or early thirties. She had longish hair and a skirt that reached to the floor. Her dress was 19th century, maybe earlier. He couldn't make out her features because her face was "kind of translucent".

His girlfriend witnessed the ghost on two occasions. He was there each time. The first time was when they were in the kitchen together. She was really scared and wanted to move out, but he persuaded her that the ghost meant them no harm. He'd never once felt scared, or threatened, by the apparition. His strong feeling was that she merely wanted to make her presence felt and be their friend.

Kath clarified that the couple aren't prone to imagining this type of thing, and have never experienced anything like it before, or since. She added:

"Whenever I stayed over at the cottage I never saw anything and I never felt scared to sleep in a room by myself as I also felt that she didn't want to cause any of us any harm."

"Another thing that we all noticed was that their dog would be sitting in the living room with us and she would suddenly stare intently through the open door into the hallway as if she was looking at someone or something. This wasn't something she ever did in any other house."



Early 20th century R. H. Gill postcard showing Lydia Bridge

A second witness

Amazingly, Meg Berry De Blank also knew of the ghost woman:

"My husband and I lived at [Lydia] Bridge for 18 years. There were, indeed, strange things that happened. A friend, who had deep empathetic feelings, saw the lady your son saw on the stairs. Probably all true."

Other ghosts at Lydia Bridge

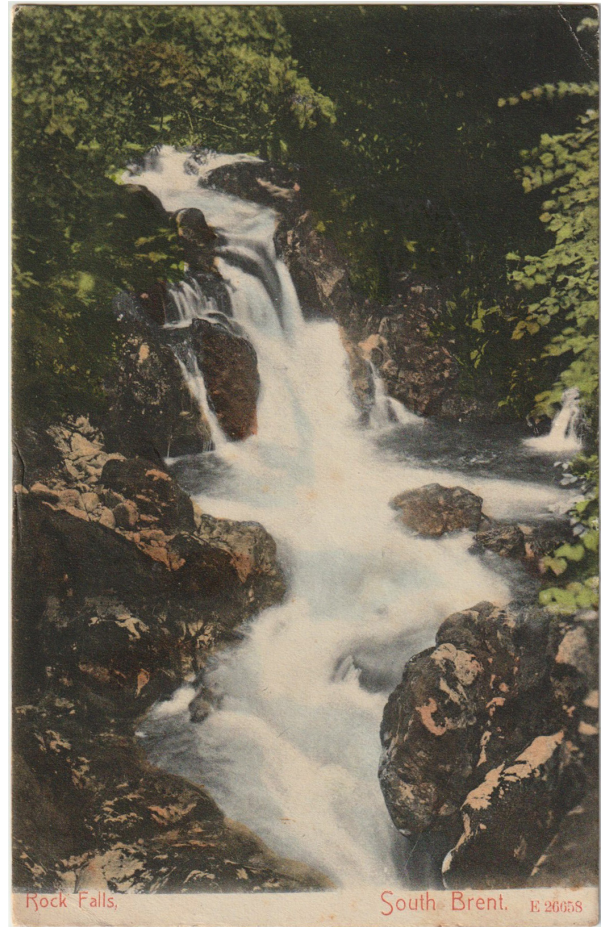
Meg Berry De Blank, told the a Facebook group, "We lived in the middle cottage and, quite often we could see a depression go down on the end of the bed... no one there." She added:

"A guest in [Lydia] Mill, sleeping on the pullout sofa, felt his mother touch his foot on the way back from the loo. When he opened his eyes, his mother was in her bed, fast asleep. She hadn't been up at all."

Also in the Mill, our empathetic friend saw a middle-aged woman, seemingly worried about something."

Someone else recalled that a friend, who'd lived near Lydia Bridge, said he'd seen the ghost of a soldier in full, red uniform.

Another member of Facebook group recounted a local belief ghostly monks haunt the riverside path between South Brent and Lydia Bridge, adding that medieval parts of Somerswood – a house at Lydia Bridge – were once used to accommodate monks travelling between the abbeys of Tavistock and Buckfastleigh.



Stengel & Co postcard showing the falls at Lydia Bridge, franked 26th March 1907

Ted Westcott commented:

"My uncle, William Hannaford, as a lad of 16 or so, was courting a girl at Lutton cottages. He would visit her evenings and walk back to Wellington Square. He told me that one evening just as dusk was falling he looked back along the lane and saw a monk. He said he never ran so fast in his life down Lutton hill. I always used to wonder why should an apparition of a monk appear there as the moor route to Tavistock was well north. This answers that."

Superstitions connected to Lydia Bridge

Karen Thomson, said:

"We had so many funny things we use to do ... had to hold your breath on the way in under the bridge and not speak else you'd wake the Devil (because he lived in Devil's tunnel that went under the river). If you touched the kissing gates you had to kiss the person behind you, or bad luck, and if your finger fits the devils finger you were meant to spit on it ... Not quite sure why everything was so Devil-related at such a beautiful spot!"

The “Devil’s finger” Karen mentions is known by locals. The photo of it (right) was provided by John Soper, who says it’s on the riverside path from South Brent to Lydia Bridge, at waist height about ten feet from bottom of the stone steps that lead up to the bridge.

Conclusion

The ancient settlement of Lydia Bridge, just outside South Brent village, abounds with myths and superstitions, including a Devil’s finger. Several witnesses have reported seeing the phantom of a woman in a floor-length skirt. There have also been apparitions of monks; a redcoat soldier; a worried, middle-aged woman; touching hands; and bedsheets being squashed down when no one was there. It certainly seems to be a haunting hotspot.

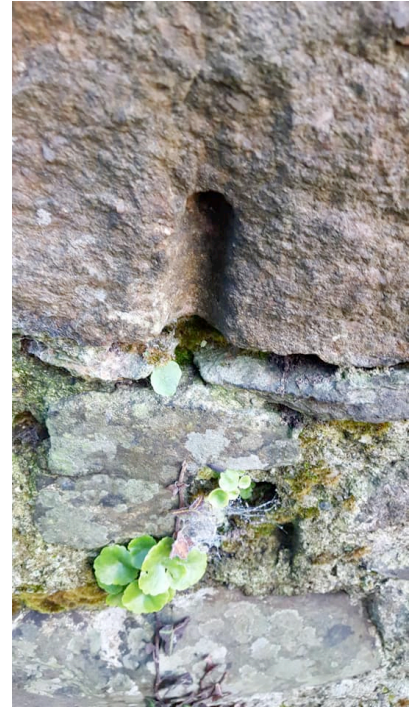


Photo of the Devil's finger by John Soper