

The Littles of Arnside Knott

“Do you believe in fairies?”

somebody asked me once.

And at the time, I gave them the same answer I always used to give when I wasn't sure about something...

“I will believe it when I see it,”

I said. Well, that was many years ago now and how things have changed...

Arnside Knott is a very special place tucked away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. It is particularly tricky to find as it is surrounded by racing tides and dense forests, and often lies in the shadows of the greatest mountains of England. It is a very magical place indeed... enchanted some might say.

I had always heard people talking about little folks like fairies and pixies but didn't really believe in them and had certainly never seen any. Then one day, right at the very top of Arnside Knott an extremely special little being caught my eye.

I was sitting on a remarkable tree that had fallen to the ground in a storm but which was amazingly still alive. The leaves were thick and green and offered me much-needed shade on a very hot Spring day. I was daydreaming as usual when I saw something move out of the corner of my eye. A bright light flickered in and out of the leaves and moved towards me, floating up and down like



a delicate butterfly. The little orb landed gently next to me on the trunk of the fallen tree and to my amazement its wings unfurled and a very small fairy-like creature emerged.

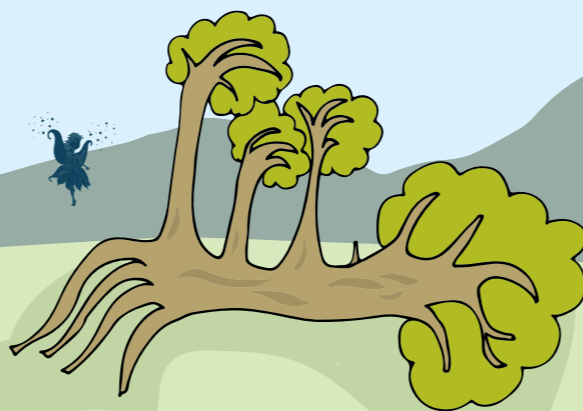
“Good day,” said the creature before springing up onto my lap. “I am the May Fairy and this is the forever tree.”

Can you find the forever tree on your map near to the top of Arnside Knott?

I shook my head and pinched my arm to make sure I wasn't dreaming and then looked again. Yes, she was still there looking up at me with a chirpy smile on her face.

This was my first encounter with one of the 'littles' of Arnside Knott.

I don't know about you, but I have always been a little confused when it comes to sprites, goblins and fairy-type creatures. What jobs do they do? Which ones



have wings? Are they all mischievous? So many questions!

'Littles' are very tiny creatures, smaller even than the map you are holding right now. They are all around us and are actually quite helpful if not a bit mischievous at times!

And in exchange for just a few breadcrumbs, this is what the May Fairy whispered into my ear that day...

“The most important thing to know about us littles is that although we are very small, you can learn something from every single one of us. You humans aren't as clever as you think! We are always watching and listening but might only appear once in a lifetime. Sometimes we might disguise ourselves as a firefly, a butterfly or even a flower... we are all around you.”

Look out for the strange mounds in Grubbins Wood. They are nests made by the southern wood ants.

“Pixies are mischievous but harmless sprites that remain childlike all their lives; they love dancing and gather outdoors in their hundreds to dance and wrestle throughout the night. Pixies have pointed ears and wear pointy hats made from bluebell and wood sorrel flowers. Pixies always dress in raggedy clothes but consider themselves happier than any other being on Earth. Pixies love playing tricks on people, so take care when you are walking through the Pixie Woodlands!”

“The will-o'-the-wisp is a very mysterious light that appears in the mist and sea fog. You often see it in bogs and swamps or at night in gloomy woodlands. It looks like a flickering lamp and if you approach it, it will only get further away, drawing you from the safe pathways. Luckily for you a fenced pathway leads you through the will-o'-the-wisp fields so don't be afraid.”



“The elves have been here the longest; they live in the yew woodlands amongst the most ancient trees of Grubbins Wood. Elves are very wise and very beautiful and live for a very long time. They have long pointy ears and light, shimmering hair and some of them can even tell you what the future holds. At midsummer the elves all meet at the sacred Nim Nim tree, at the far end of Grubbins Wood. In the daytime they hide in the yew trees but if you look carefully you might see strands of their silver hair glistening in the sunlight near the forest floor.”

Yew trees have been associated with sacred places for thousands of years. It is said that the greatest warriors were buried under yew trees so that their spirit would grow into the trees.

A 'wisp' is a bundle of sticks that used to be used as a torch. Travellers would be drawn towards the light and would often become lost, lured by the 'will of the wisp'.

“Fairies of course are the most magical and enchanted of all winged tree spirits. We love humans and get very excited when we see you coming but we don't always show ourselves. Sometimes we fly amongst your hair, making tangles called fairy locks, and leave little clues to show we are about. We don't like metal, especially iron, and so won't come near you if we see you are wearing jewellery. At night time we disguise ourselves as fireflies and dance in the moonlight and in the day we transform into little lime green butterflies. When you blow dandelion seeds into the air we catch a ride and wave goodbye to you as we float up into the sky.”

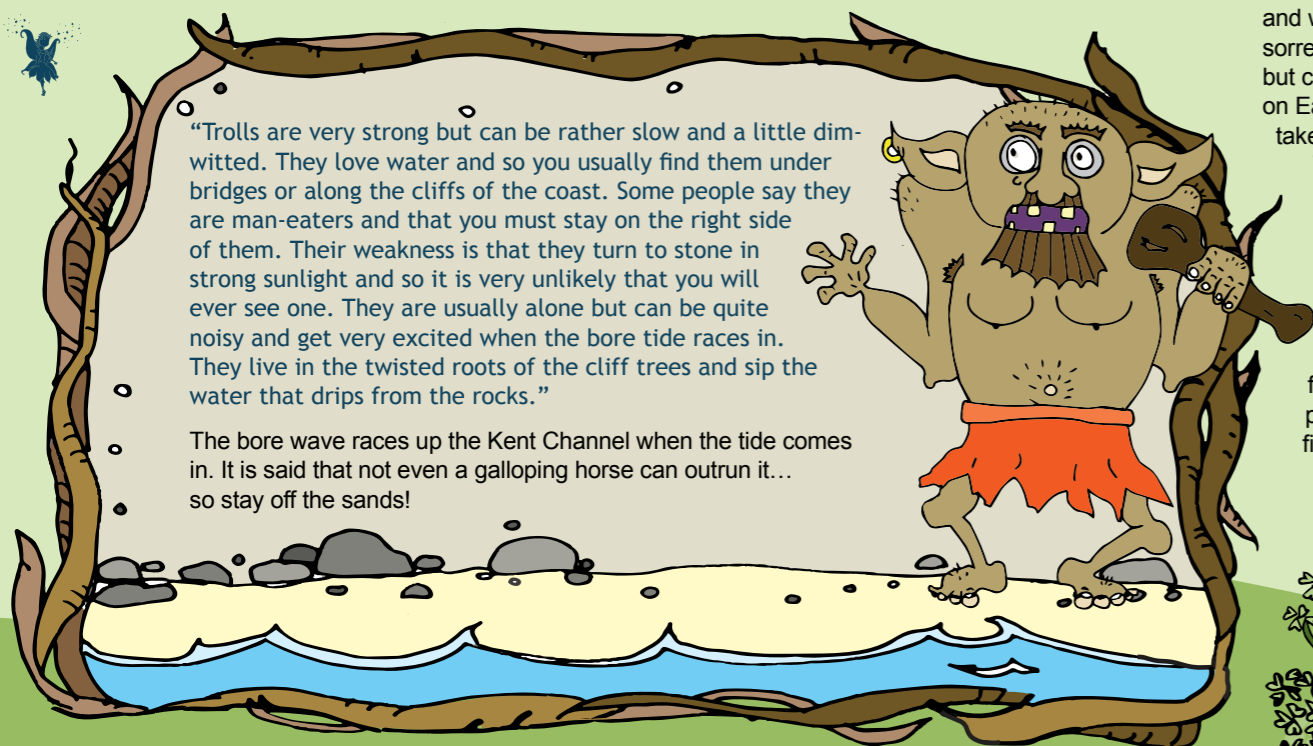
And with that the May Fairy was gone.

People used to be very frightened of fairies and tried many different things to protect themselves from their spells. Before visiting a fairy-haunted place, it was traditional to put a piece of bread in your pocket, wear your clothes inside out and carry a four-leaf clover!

I have been to Arnside Knott many times since that day and often think about the May Fairy and the other littles and now when people ask me if I believe in fairies I say this...

“You will see it when you believe it!”

And that doesn't just apply to fairies, you know!



“Trolls are very strong but can be rather slow and a little dim-witted. They love water and so you usually find them under bridges or along the cliffs of the coast. Some people say they are man-eaters and that you must stay on the right side of them. Their weakness is that they turn to stone in strong sunlight and so it is very unlikely that you will ever see one. They are usually alone but can be quite noisy and get very excited when the bore tide races in. They live in the twisted roots of the cliff trees and sip the water that drips from the rocks.”

The bore wave races up the Kent Channel when the tide comes in. It is said that not even a galloping horse can outrun it... so stay off the sands!