



Alan Lee, 'Jenny Greenteeth'
in Brian Froud and
Alan Lee's *Fairies* (1978).

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In Search of Jenny Greenteeth¹

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Introduction

In 1977 Jenny Greenteeth – a minor British water demon – made it into what, in supernatural circles, passes for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame: Katharine Briggs' *Dictionary of Fairies*. If Briggs had seen fit to give Jenny an entry of her own, the *grande dame* of British folklore proved, though, to be unenthusiastic about this particular recruit. Briggs noted, airily, that parents had a number of 'nursery bogies' (a low insult among fairyists).² These bogies were to keep kids away from rivers and ponds and the 'Lancashire version ... is Jenny Greenteeth, who is supposed to seize children in her long, green fangs and drag them down into stagnant pools at the river's edge.'³ And that was more or less it. Peg Powler, Jenny's undine rival from the north east, was given almost ten times as much space by the British folklorist.⁴ Here was immortality, then, but of a disappointing sort.

However, so influential was Briggs that even two score words offered Jenny, in a period when she was dying on the lips of English parents, a new lease of life. She appeared a year later in Brian Froud and Alan Lee's *Fairies*: to judge by my children's reaction, Jenny's is the single most terrifying picture in the book.⁵ She made a cameo in the 1985 film *Legend* as Meg Mucklebones (Alan Lee's depiction of 'Jenny' was the inspiration according to scriptwriter William Hjortsberg).⁶ She, then, began to appear in British fantasy and horror fiction. Perhaps her most impressive outing to date has been in Terry Pratchett's *The Wee Free Men* in 2003, though she is spoken of there as being 'only a Grade One Prohibitory Monster' (more slights from the folklore establishment).⁷ In the 2010s, meanwhile, Jeny [sic] Greenteeth started slumming in Dungeons & Dragons modules.⁸

Jenny's future, it will be clear, is assured. Much more of interest, to this writer at least, is her past. Very little has been written about the traditional Jenny Greenteeth other than generic descriptions (e.g. Briggs) and an excellent 1983 article by Roy Vickery.⁹ Even basic 'where', 'when', 'what' questions have been neglected or answered glibly: perhaps because so little evidence was available, something which has happily changed with digitisation.¹⁰ My aim in this short article is straightforward: to bring together newly available and previously known sources (a source file is provided, see note 1) and to give some sense of Jenny's range in 19th- and 20th-century folklore. As readers will soon see, Jenny had a more variegated character than Katharine Briggs' potted biography might suggest.

Jenny Essentials

Jenny Greenteeth belongs to the class of, let's call them, 'freshwater fairies': supernatural beings attached to bodies of water who typically kill people. Ronald Hutton was unkind but fair in calling Jenny and her ilk 'homicidal spirits'.¹¹ Peggy Powler has already been mentioned. There was, too, Blood and Bones, Rawhead, Jinny the Whinney, Mary Hosies, Peg o' Nell, Jenny wi' the Airn Teeth, Grindylow, Cutty Dyer, Nelly or Jenny Long Arms and the several inland 'mermaids' in East Anglian and Midland pools ...¹² With diligence this list could certainly be extended. In fact, there are few areas of British supernatural folklore that are more neglected and this is particularly true of the 'aqueous nymphs' of England.¹³ Jenny lived in all kinds of bodies of water. She was found in canals, lakes, rivers, springs, wells, and the sea¹⁴ but her favourite habitation seems to have been ponds and marl pits.¹⁵

Jenny/Jennie goes, it is worth noting, by slightly different names. Sometimes she is 'Jinny Greenteeth', sometimes 'Jeannie Greenteeth', there is one 'Jenny Green' (Westmorland), and she is also sometimes called 'old' Jenny Greenteeth, or Granny Greenteeth.¹⁶ In east Lancashire she seems to have been called simply 'Greenteeth' on occasion.¹⁷ Both 'Jenny' and 'Greenteeth' link her to water. The use of names like 'Janet' and 'Jenny' for freshwater fairies has been noted by Katherine Langrish in an article in this number of *Gramarye*. A repeated characteristic of European freshwater fairies, meanwhile, are their green dentures: F420.1.4.8: 'Water-spirits with green teeth'. Note, though, also the existence of a series of English and Scottish child-scarers named for iron teeth, including 'Jenny wi' the airn teeth' from Castle Semple Loch in Renfrewshire.¹⁸ Part of Jenny's success comes down, it would be fair to say, to her unforgettable name.

What was Jenny Greenteeth? Katharine Briggs' definition, given above, is typical of many offered in the hundred and twenty years previous: she was a water-dwelling drowner. But there were also two other, related, meanings. First, 'Jenny Greenteeth' was also used to refer to pond vegetation. Lesser duckweed (*Lemna minor*) went by the name 'Jenny Greenteeth' in some parts of the north and the Midlands.¹⁹ But reading the 19th-century sources it is clear that the name was also given to pond scum or green algae.²⁰ Whether the botanical term was fluid everywhere, or whether its sense changed from place to place is now impossible to establish. It is clear, though, that weed could sometimes be called 'Jenny Greenteeth' without any reference to the monster.²¹ Second, I know of three instances – one from Liverpool in 1855, another still from west Derbyshire before the Great War and another from Oswaldtwistle in the 1950s – when 'Jenny Greenteeth' was used as the name of a pond.²² We do not know whether Jenny lived in these pools, but the woman from West Derbyshire, recalling her childhood in the 1910s, admitted that she 'was terrified to go near'.²³

Where was Jenny's England, what might be called Jennydom?²⁴ There are several contradictory pointers in the writings of our most important folklorists: Jenny came from 'Lancashire', from 'Lancashire and Yorkshire', from 'Lancashire, Cheshire and Shropshire'

and from 'the Lake Counties', and she was 'most common in Lancashire and Cheshire'.²⁵ In Joseph Wright's *Dialect Dictionary*, Wright gives two meanings – pond weed and 'boggart' – and associates these with Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Shropshire and the West Riding.²⁶ Elizabeth Wright, Joseph's wife, who used the same data as her husband, also offered some geographical reflections, but her passage on Jenny is confusing.²⁷ As an alternative I have taken about forty different geographically grounded references from 1850 to 2019 for the three meanings of 'Jenny Greenteeth' and these are placed on the map on page 33 (for references see appendix). Circles are for supernatural Jennys; stars are for non-supernatural Jennys (weed without a stated supernatural association). I have also placed two crosses to show where Jenny was said *not to be found*.

There are, note, coverage issues with this map. Lancashire and particularly south-eastern Lancashire had enthusiastic folklore collectors in the mid-late 19th century: clumping there means nothing more than that there were collectors ready to record folklore facts like these. Cheshire and Derbyshire, on the other hand, had a paucity of folklore collectors in the same period. There is some, it will be seen, Jenny activity in the Midlands, though again here folklore coverage was disappointing. Westmorland, meanwhile, was lucky to have had a systematic survey in 1952 that included 'water spirits'.²⁸ Two references from the West Riding (Athersley and Wombwell) are rather curious. Neither has water and one refers to 'Nanny Greenteeth' and bed, and the other to 'Daddy Greenteeth' and the coalshed. On the basis of this information we can cautiously talk about Jennydom as southern Westmorland, Lancashire, most(?) of Cheshire and a corner(?) of Derbyshire, an island in the West Riding and a southern peninsula or island (we have too little data to be certain) in the Midlands. The 'isolate' from Somerset (Watchet) should probably be ignored. This was presumably a name brought in by an immigrant from further north.²⁹

As to her history, Jenny Greenteeth first appears in 1850 in a newspaper article on the Peel family.³⁰ However, an allusive and now obscure 1831 political satire suggests that Jenny was known twenty years before in Liverpool,³¹ and an 1855 article from the same city recalls the author's childhood and a pool named 'Jenny Greenteeth' a generation prior to publication.³² In fact, given how little interest was shown in freshwater fairies in print, we might guess that Jenny is a good deal older, but that she had not previously been of interest to writers. Certainly by the later 19th century she controlled pools across half a dozen English counties, while, as we saw above, her green teeth recall other European water monsters. It has even been suggested that she is a surviving British nature goddess or, more modestly, that she is a relative 'of the Swedish *näck* and German *nix*' and by extension the Anglo-Saxon *nicor*, whom we glimpse when Beowulf goes to Grendel's mere.³³ It is not impossible and there are many lyrical passages where historians and folklorists associate her with pagan deities.³⁴

Jenny Greenteeth's death in popular tradition is similarly difficult to pin down. When I began writing this article, I was sceptical of Roy Vickery's claim that Jenny was 'still employed

to frighten youngsters' in the Liverpool area in the very early 1980s.³⁵ But I have since gathered, myself, interviews about Jenny relating to north-western childhoods in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.³⁶ In fact, I received this September a message from a Lancashire grandmother who still, in 2019, tells her grandchildren about Jenny Greenteeth: a drowning in the family, a generation before, had made this grandmother particularly wary of the dangers of water.³⁷ It is a remarkable survival.

Child-Scarer Jenny

There is no question that Jenny Greenteeth 'was in league with all mothers to frighten children'³⁸ and that a son or daughter's 'youthful soul' was thus 'carefully harrowed' by parents.³⁹ The warnings and taunts have survived in several sources: 'Be careful, or Jinny Greenteeth'll get you';⁴⁰ 'Jenny Greenteeth will have thee if thee goest on't river banks';⁴¹ 'Jinny Greenteeth will come out and pull you in'.⁴² The mechanics, though, by which Jenny captured her prey are not always clear. In some instances children seem simply to have 'ventured too close to the slippery edge of her lair' and fell;⁴³ in other cases they mistakenly walked onto the 'carpet' of weed, thinking that it was grass;⁴⁴ in other cases still Jenny shot out 'her long, sinewy arms' and dragged the children down;⁴⁵ there is also one peculiar reference to Jenny using a dart on her victims.⁴⁶ The child, in any case, hit the water and the green weed would give way and then close over the child's head: Jenny had 'opened her jaws'.⁴⁷ Jenny would then devour ('she might make a toothsome meal')⁴⁸ or torture and kill ('subject me to other tortures besides death by drowning').⁴⁹

This all, as can be imagined, had its effect on children. A number of middle-aged or elderly 19th-century writers vividly recalled infant stories about Jenny.⁵⁰ Then, in the late 20th century, there were still memories loaded with emotion: perhaps more emphatically expressed in a society that no longer approved of this form of child control. One woman recalled how descriptions of the weed closing over the child's head 'really terrified me and kept me well away from ponds'.⁵¹ Another woman recalling her parents' warnings stated instead: 'I know that Jinny Greenteeth figured largely in my dreams for a long time as was the case with my brothers and sisters'.⁵² Jenny was terrifying, then.⁵³ But warnings could be counterproductive as was the case with one small boy, Edward, who in 1931 had to be rescued by his brother from the canal at Morecambe: 'I put my leg near the water,' [Edward] said, 'to see if Jinny Green Teeth would get me and I fell in'.⁵⁴

So effective did Jenny prove in the imaginations of children that her remit was extended. There was the pleasing notion that Jenny not only went after those who were foolish enough to go near the edges of dangerous pools: she also punished tooth decay. She became, in fact, a tooth fairy *ante litteram*, though one who used sticks (she would hunt you down), not carrots (50 pence under the pillow).⁵⁵ Here we have a precious 1904 reference stating that in 'east Lancashire':

I have often been told by my mother and nurse that if I did not keep my teeth clean I should some day be dragged into one of these ponds by Jenny Greenteeth, and I have met many elderly people who have had the same threat applied to them.⁵⁶

Roy Vickery found similar sentiments vaguely remembered on the other side of Lancashire, in Merseyside some eighty years later;⁵⁷ and I have, likewise, found a reference to the Wigan area in the 1950s,⁵⁸ suggesting that this belief was taught to (some, most?) Lancashire children from perhaps about 1820 to 1950. A hint of Jenny the tooth-cleaner might be glimpsed, incidentally, in a letter to *Notes and Queries* by John Higson (1825-71) in 1870 recalling his own childhood in rural Gorton. Proof of the existence of Jenny Greenteeth 'was afforded to our unsophisticated minds by the exhibition of a set of human teeth enamelled with green tartar.'⁵⁹ Were these teeth also used as a lesson to show children what would happen if they did not brush their teeth properly?

Eccentric Jenny

Jenny the drowner is to be found in tens of sources. Even Jenny the tooth demon is, by the rather poor standards of British supernatural folklore, well attested. We have three records from different parts of Lancashire, the best part of a century apart, saying the same thing, with no realistic possibility of cross-contamination. Were someone to write a new entry on Jenny Greenteeth, in the style of Briggs, then Jenny's role as a tooth demon would deserve a mention. Indeed, the entry would be incomplete without it.⁶⁰ In other instances, though, Jenny behaves in ways that are difficult to account for. She slips her leash.

Some examples. In mid-19th-century Preston Jenny had a reputation for 'riding on a broomstick, cutting wonderful capers' above Lady Well.⁶¹ Later in the 1800s, in Burnley, just outside the town boundaries, there was 'an old disused pit-shaft'. A 'woman called "Jenny Greenteeth"' was said to have been thrown down' and this Jenny returned every full moon.⁶² In the 1840s 'Back Lane, near Rose Hill', in Newton Chapelry, 'was believed to be haunted by Jennie Greenteeth who guarded some buried treasure.'⁶³ In one Lancashire work of fiction from 1891 Jenny lived in a tunnel and the children had a rhyme, which gives a sense of her reputation: 'Hey lads! Hey, lads, run for yo're life,/ Owd Jinny Greenteeth's comin' with a knife.'⁶⁴ In another work of Lancashire fiction – this time set in the north east of the county – Jenny was introduced as something like a nature goddess:

[S]he, who in the summer-time made the flowers grow and the birds sing, hid herself in winter on a shelf of rock above the Gin Spa Well, a lone streamlet that gurgled from out the rocky sides of the gorge.⁶⁵

A small boy goes, in the story, to look for her home and finds shelter on the ledge.

In the early part of the 20th century Jenny lived in Lunefield Wood near Kirkby Lonsdale and would 'gobble up' naughty children.⁶⁶ At a farm at Heage in Derbyshire, it was reported in 1934 that Jenny was a ghost who had met 'a violent death a long time ago'.

Our friend told us that once [Jenny] came towards him and he struck at her with a milking stool but the stool went through her and he fell headlong through overbalancing. The lady, or rather her apparition, passed between the cows and disappeared.⁶⁷

In the mid-20th century Jenny was used by parents to scare children from staying after dark in Sefton Park in Liverpool.⁶⁸ She (or another Jenny?) was also associated with St James Cemetery in that city: she used to devour children in the vaults.⁶⁹ One Dave Arthur, meanwhile, described how Jenny was invoked to keep children away from railways in southern Cheshire in the 1940s.⁷⁰ A memory from the same general area detailed how Jenny Greenteeth lived behind peeling wallpaper.⁷¹

But wait, isn't Jenny about water and duckweed? Yes, and even in this list water can often be detected in the background. Jenny flew above Lady Well in Preston; in the second work of fiction referenced above, Jenny was tied to Gin Spa Well, even if she preferred, in winter, to reside on a nearby rock; Jenny only retreated to Lunefield Wood after (the relevant source informs us) her old pool had dried up;⁷² Sefton Park has several magnificent pools; Heage Hall had (looking at early OS maps) a pond and there was a brook running nearby.⁷³ But in other cases there is a notable lack of water: there were, to the best of my knowledge, no streams, ponds or lakes in or near St James Cemetery; nor were there in the disused pit shaft in Burnley ... So what was Jenny doing in these places?

The easiest answer is that her traditional role as a 'nursery bogie' had been extended, by inventive mums and dads, to other spheres, much as we saw before with teeth: she was, as one victim remembers, effective 'in keeping children away from dangerous places – ponds, tunnels, old buildings etc.'⁷⁴ I can well imagine that parents used to scaring children with stories about Jenny to keep them away from marl pits, would not scruple to do the same with railway lines. Jenny had the necessary prestige. She had that unforgettable name. Why invent a new bogie? I can well imagine, too, that a harassed nurse would not allow a detail like a dried-out pond to deprive her of a useful ally such as Jenny, who was promptly transferred to a nearby wood. But why would parents try and keep their children out of a cemetery? Why would parents frighten their children away from buried treasure on a rural lane? Why introduce broomsticks into the legends? Why make Jenny into a ghost who walked around a Derbyshire farm?

The only answer that makes sense to this author is the following. Yes, Jenny had, at a certain point, taken on the role of a watery child-scarer in parts of the north and Midlands of England. Whether she was created just for that role, or whether she was an older spirit

who had adapted must remain a mystery. Perhaps it is besides the point. What does matter is that she had broken free. If monsters have, let's say, the 'charisma' to affect the imagination of those in a given community, they will take on a life of their own. They'll get on their horses and gallop off the reservation. The price of effectiveness is autonomy. Nor will their activities be limited to children. In the case of Jenny Greenteeth already in our earliest records, 'superstitious' *old women* saw Jenny Greenteeth fly through the sky in Preston;⁷⁵ and, in the 1840s, a *grown man*, at Newton Chapelry, would not pass through Jenny's territory alone at night because he had angered her.⁷⁶

A nursery bogie, indeed ... We are perhaps too ready to see belief in the supernatural in neat evolutionary phases, with the last phase being strictly 'children only': 'In the final stage of fairy-lore, belief is deliberately instilled by adults (who do not themselves share it) as a way of controlling children and ensuring their safety by threats of danger from ... *bogey figures, e.g. *Jenny Greenteeth, *hytersprites, or *poldies.'⁷⁷ There is no reason that adults cannot terrify children with the supernatural in a calculated fashion, while themselves believing in the same entity: think of how the devil (and attendants) were invoked against children.⁷⁸ Likewise, there is nothing preventing a child-only demon breaking through into the adult realm: children grow; adults become frightened; our imagination is immensely powerful. Two figures who would make an excellent modern study of 'childish' supernatural beings acting outside their typical roles would be Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy. It would be particularly interesting to gather accounts of encounters.

Conclusion: Encyclopedia Jenny

We started with Katharine Briggs's entry on Jenny. It will be useful, here in the conclusion, while reflecting on Jenny's flexibility in tradition, to return to the *Dictionary of Fairies* and its maker. The *Dictionary* – an updated medieval bestiary – was central to how Briggs understood folklore. She had effectively been writing drafts of it for years in the appendices of earlier publications.⁷⁹ It was also, in terms of popular culture, her most influential publication. Not only did Alan Lee popularise it in his art, but her model of the supernatural A-Z was picked up by dozens of writers in other countries. I have, on a shelf near my desk, supernatural A-Zs from Spain, from Italy and from France: I know of others from Germany, from Japan and from Latin America ...⁸⁰ But folklorists have been uneasy about this approach. Can you really – thinking of, say, Jenny – boil down chaotic oral traditions or, for later periods, hybrid oral-print traditions, to a paragraph or two?

These objections have crystallised in the writing of a number of skeptical folklorists who argue that taxonomic approaches of the kind that Briggs favoured do violence to tradition.⁸¹ Ármann Jakobsson, for instance, has pointed out that natural and supernatural taxonomies are quite different. The first are based primarily in the physical world, the second, primarily, in the human mind.⁸² This has to be right, whether or not these creatures

exist outside the brain. Most people, we must hope, imagined Jenny Greenteeth rather than saw her. No wonder that she sometimes turned up as a ghost, or a fertility goddess or a flying witch. She had a freedom that is not given, thinking of Jakobsson, to members of the animal kingdom. A squirrel is a squirrel is a squirrel. It can lose a leg or tail, but it cannot hunt gazelle or live on ice floes.

This is an inconvenient fact for anyone who wants to write up Jenny as an entry in a fairy encyclopaedia and, in Chesterton's words, 'chase myths like moths, and fight them with a pin'. But nor should we envisage, I think, supernatural entities as balls of plasma changing shape and character at (our) will. Ideas are mushy things, but they have consistency and can be classified as we see with politics, with religion and with psychology.⁸³ Turning instead to folklore, take three supernatural creatures common in British legend, all of which appear in British memorates, British place names and British legends: angels, demons and mermaids. These three entities are flexible. There are evil demons, loveable demons, disgusting demons, buffoonish demons ... But the terms survived in tradition because these terms were useful. Demons do not bring in the harvest for farmers. Mermaids do not play tricks on country roads. Angels do not put changelings in the cot. Supernatural tradition offers flexibility, but (elastic) boundaries exist.

It could be argued that angels, demons and mermaids are heavily codified ideas, whereas Jenny Greenteeth was not. Perhaps this explains Jenny's propensity to become something that we think that she should not be. After all, if asked to draw an angel, a demon or a mermaid I suspect that most 19th-century Britons would have come up with something quite similar.⁸⁴ Victorians, it must be remembered, had not just heard and told stories about these three. They had seen mermaids on pub signs, demons in books, and angels on stained-glass windows. I have been unable to find any image of Jenny from before 1978 (Alan Lee's work) and part of her ability to cause terror comes perhaps from the reluctance of tradition-bearers to describe her: she was the faceless horror.⁸⁵ But it is also true that most, though certainly not all, descriptions of Jenny involve death and water. In many parts of Jennydom there seems to have been a consensus on that.

Still, I have been continuously struck by the 'other' references: Jenny the treasure guard, airborne Jenny, undead Jenny ... There are a surprisingly large number of such 'irregularities', despite the fact that inconvenient traditions like these are the ones that will have been most easily edited out of written collections and memory, particularly as water killer Jenny became known nationally from the 1870s.⁸⁶ Were these chance outshoots from an original murderous mermaid tradition that caught on in one mind? The short-story writer who made Jenny into a nature deity may, for example, have invented the idea with no inspiration from tradition. Or were there entire towns, perhaps parishes and regions, that had evolved a different kind of Jenny? The ghost tradition in Burnley or the broomstick tradition in Preston are only attested once, but they were written about in local newspapers with great familiarity.⁸⁷ Unfortunately our 19th- and

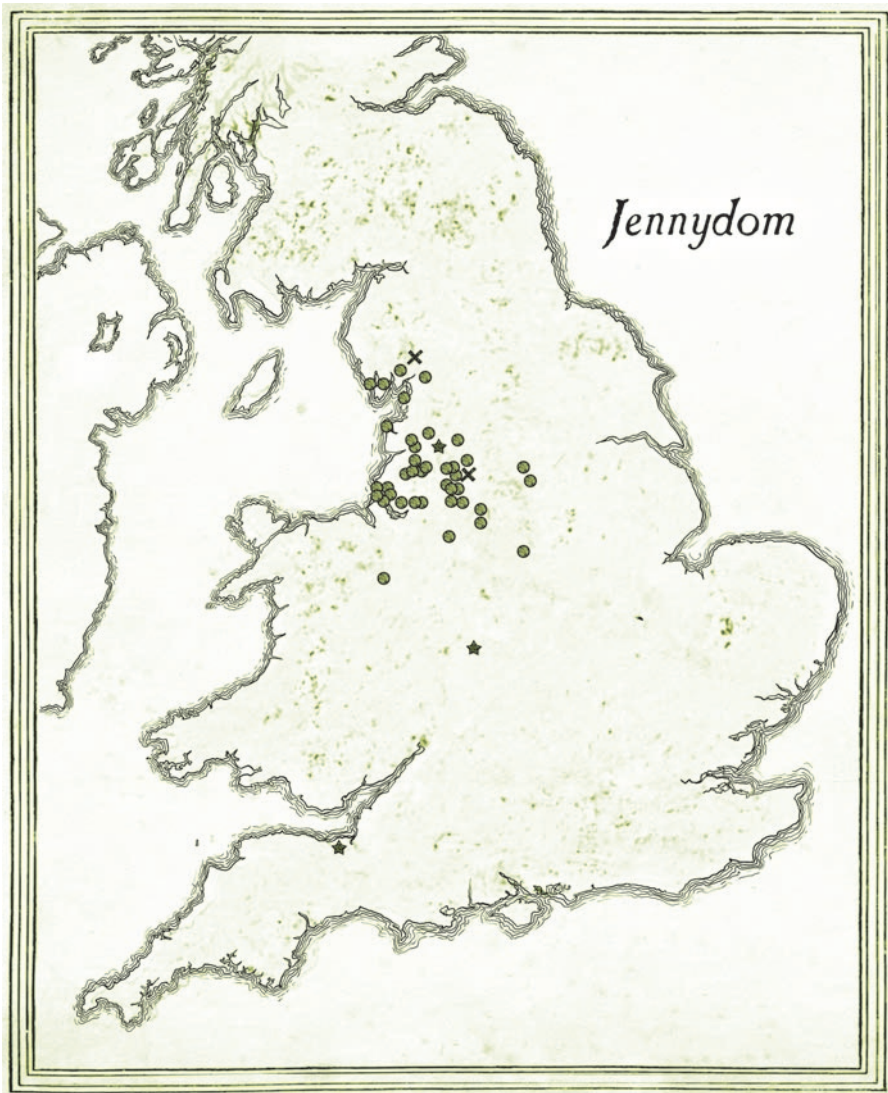


Figure: Jennydom
(circles supernatural reference,
stars non-supernatural,
crosses no Jenny;
for data see appendix).

20th-century folklore records are too sparse, even in eastern Lancashire, to judge these matters. But in the case of Jenny Greenteeth we should be grateful that the sources are available. Just enough was written down to liberate us from the illusion of uniformity.

Appendix: Jennydom Map

I have only taken locations which are precise. For instance, I ignored 'the Ribble' (Bowker, 'Boggarts'), or 'Cheshire' (Robert Holland, *A glossary of words used in the County of Chester* (London: Trübner and Co., 1886, 182). I also ignored interviews where a location was given for the present (the interview), rather than the past (the experiences or beliefs) (e.g. Vickery, 'Lemna', 247-8 for 'Lorraine Cromarty of Great Meols, Cheshire' referring to the time of interview). When there are multiple references for one place I have chosen the earliest, save if there is an early non-supernatural or a later supernatural reference.

Supernatural: Anfield (*Sources*, 'Interview: JM'); Adlington (*Sources*, 'Interview: Rita'); Askam in Furness (Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore', 102); Athersley (Widdowson, 'Plants', 207); Black Rod (*Sources*, 'Interview: Anne J. '); Bradley (*Sources*, 'Interview: Chrissy'); Burnley (Viscount, 'The Turn Bridge'); Buxton (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Cheadle (*Sources*, 'Interview: Fi'); Chorley (*Sources*, 'Interview: Margaret A. '); Cronton (Vickery, 'Lemna', 247-8); Dalton (Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore', 102); Ellesmere ('Miniature lakeland'); Fazakerley (Vickery, 'Lemna', 248); Fleetwood (*Sources*, 'Interview: Denise'); Gorton (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Heage ('Rambling Notes'); Heywood (Waugh, *Sketches*, 152); Kirkby Lonsdale (Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore', 102); High Peak (*Sources*, 'Interview: Kathrine'); Latchford (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Horwich (*Sources*, 'Interview: Joan'); Liverpool (Marion Smith, 'Ginny Greenteeth', *Liverpool Echo*, 1 Aug 1966, 6); Manchester (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Middleton (*Sources*, 'Interview: Edward'); Morecambe ('A Brave Boy'); Moss Side ('Review: Old Moss Side', *Notes and Queries* 1, 1904, 10th series, 319); New Brighton (*Sources*, 'Interview: Barbara Hudson'); Preston ('A Prestonian', 'Forty'); Ribchester (*Sources*, 'Interview: DR'); Salford (*Sources*, 'Interview: Gwen'); Siddington (Vickery, 'Lemna', 250, n. 15); Stockport (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Thornton (*Sources*, 'Interview: VP'); Ulverston (Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore', 102); Walton le Dale (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Wardle (*Sources*, 'Interview: Bev'); Warrington (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Witherslack (Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore', 102); Wombwell (Widdowson, 'Plants', 207).

Non Supernatural: Birmingham (James Britten, 'Boggarts, Feorin, "Jenny Greenteeth"', *Notes and Queries* 5, 1870, 287); Longridge (Vickery, 'Lemna', 248); Oswaldtwistle (*Sources*, 'Interview: Edward'); Watchet (Alexander Stuart Macmillan, *Popular names of flowers, fruits, &c., as used in the county of Somerset and the adjacent parts of Devon, Dorset and Wilts* (Yeovil: *Western Gazette*, 1922), 158).

No Jenny: Lees (Higson, 'Boggarts'); Northern Westmorland (Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore', 102), this is not a 'precise' location, but the comment is so valuable that it seems worth including.

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Simon Young

Notes

1. I've put all important early sources in a source file on my academia.edu site as *Sources for Jenny Greenteeth and Other Freshwater English Fairies*. I have also included there about three dozen interviews 1979-2019 on Jenny Greenteeth. In writing this article I benefited from the help of John Clark, Laura Coulson, Davide Ermacora, Lucy Evans, Roberto Labante, Katherine Langrish, Roy Vickery and John Widdowson. I thank all.
2. Roy Vickery, 'Lemna minor and Jenny Greenteeth', *Folklore* 94 (1983), 247-50 at 247 politely notes 'Dr. Briggs was comparatively uninterested in Nursery Bogies'.
3. K.M. Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies* (London: Routledge, 2003), 242.
4. Briggs, *A Dictionary*, 323-4.
5. Brian Froud and Alan Lee, *Faeries* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1978), unnumbered.
6. William Hjortsberg, 'Legend Making' (www.figmentfly.com/legend/script2.html) (2001) (accessed 20 Jun 2019).
7. Terry Pratchett, *The Wee Free Men* (London: Corgi, 2017 [2003]), 46. Thinking of novels, Jenny also got a nod in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973; perhaps, one Pynchon scholar suggests (Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 86-7) on the basis of reading some of Katharine Briggs' earlier works.
8. An example from many – Jenny seems to have become a D&D favourite – Claire Hoffman *et al.*, *Suits of the Mists* (Wizards of the Coast, Renton: 2016), 32: 'Hush now dearie, or I'll carve out your eyes, too.'
9. Vickery, 'Lemna', was important, not least because he interviewed people whose memories stretched back into the late 19th century: e.g. *Sources*, 'Interview: MS'. Other works on Jenny Greenteeth include John Widdowson, 'Plants as Elements in Systems of Traditional Verbal Social Control' in Roy Vickery (ed.), *Plant-Lore Studies* (London: Folklore Society, 1984), 202-35 at 206-8; Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 199; and now Roy Vickery, *Vickery's Folk Flora* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2019), 220-2.
10. Simon Young, 'And a Historical Folklore Survey? A Reply to John Widdowson's "New Beginnings"', *Folklore* 129 (2018), 181-91 at 184-5.
11. Ronald Hutton, 'Witch-Hunting in Celtic Societies', *Past and Present* 212 (2011), 33-71 at 52.
12. Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land* (London: Penguin, 2005), 696-7. For other references, Hutton, 'Witch-Hunting', 52-3; for Anglo-Saxon background, Jeremy Harte, 'From Ogre to Woodlouse: A Journey Through Names', *Gramarye* 14 (2018), 33-8 at 34-5; and for some fascinating Newfoundland reports, John Widdowson, 'The Witch as a Frightening and Threatening Figure' in Venetia Newall (ed.), *The Witch Figure* (London: Routledge, 1973), 200-20 at 216-17 (it would be possible to add several British 'witch in the well' stories to Widdowson's list); see also, from Newfoundland, John Widdowson, *If You Don't Be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland* (St Johns: Institute of Social and Economic Affairs, 1977), 149-50.
13. John Higson, *Historical and Descriptive Notices of Droydsden: Past and Present* (Manchester: Beresford & Souther, 1859), 67.
14. 'A Brave Boy Rescues Little Brother From the Canal', *Morecambe Guardian* (22 Apr 1932), 5 (canal); 'Miniature lakeland of the Midlands', *Birmingham Weekly Post*, 22 Jul 1955, 10 (lake); James Bowker, 'Boggarts, Feorin, etc' *Notes and Queries* 5 (1870), 365 (river); Marshall Mather, *Lancashire Idylls* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1898), 239 (spring); A Prestonian, 'Preston More than Forty Years Ago', *Preston Chronicle* (2 Oct 1852), 6 (well); Widdowson, 'Plants', 206 and 208; *Sources*, 'Interview: Barbara Hudson' (the sea).

15. For ponds and marl pits see, *inter alia*, Vickery, 'Lemna'.
16. Tony Crowley, *The Liverpool English Dictionary* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017) under 'Ginny/Jinny Greenteeth (n.); for Jenny Green, L.F. Newman and E.M. Wilson, 'Folklore Survivals in the Southern "Lake Counties"' and in Essex: A Comparison and Contrast', *Folklore* 63 (1952), 91-104, 102; for 'old' HERMENTRUDE, 'Boggarts', *Notes and Queries* 5 (1870), 23; for 'Granny', *Sources*, 'Interview: Margaret A.'
17. John Harland and T.T. Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-lore Illustrative of the Superstitious Beliefs and Practices, Local Customs and Usages of the People of the County Palatine* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1867), 85-6; Edwin Waugh, *Sketches of Lancashire Life and Localities* (London: Simpkin, 1857), 182.
18. Sandy Hobbs and David Cornwell, 'Hunting the Monster with Iron Teeth', *Monsters with Iron Teeth: Perspectives on Contemporary Legend* 3 (1988), 115-38 at 123-6.
19. Vickery, 'Lemna', 248 for the suggestion that the duckweed looks like tiny teeth.
20. E.g. John Howard Nodal and George Milner, *A Glossary of the Lancashire Dialect* (Manchester: Alexander Ireland and Co., 1875), 169; P., 'Nature Notes: Pond Life', *Todmorden Advertiser* (17 May 1901), 5. See also a supplementary entry in James Britten, *A Dictionary of English Plant-Names* (London: Trübner, 1886), 546.
21. Vickery, 'Lemna', 247 and, forcefully, Simpson and Roud, *A Dictionary*, 199. Compare: Bowker, 'Boggarts'.
22. The Old Delf, 'The Fountain at St James Cemetery', *Liverpool Daily Post* (17 Jul 1855), 4; *Sources*, 'Interview: Edward', for Oswaldtwistle, Vickery, 'Lemna', 248, for Derbyshire.
23. Vickery, 'Lemna', 248.
24. Inspired by John Widdowson, 'The Bogyman: Some Preliminary Observations on Frightening Figures', *Folklore* 82 (1971), 99-115 at 111 and 'bogydom' in the *OED*.
25. Respectively Briggs, *A Dictionary*, 242; Christina Hole, *English Shrines and Sanctuaries* (London: Batsford, 1954), 39; Simpson and Roud, *A Dictionary*, 199; Westwood and Simpson, *The Lore*, 697 (I take 'Lake Counties' to mean Cumberland, Lancashire beyond the Sands and Westmorland); Widdowson, 'Plants', 206.
26. Joseph Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1898-1905), 6 vols, III, 356-7.
27. Elizabeth Mary Wright, *Rustic Speech and Folk-lore* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1913), 198-9: 'Grindylow, Jenny Green-teeth, and Nelly Long-arms (Yks. Lan. Chs. Der. Shr.) are the various names of a nymph or water-demon who is said to lurk at the bottom of deep pits, ponds, and wells: I take the five counties to refer to the three collectively. Briggs, *A Dictionary*, 324 (and I presume Westwood and Simpson, *The Lore*, 697) took it just to refer to Nelly. Nelly certainly did not have this range.
28. Newman and Wilson, 'Folklore Survivals', 102.
29. This might be the place to note that some very few references to Jenny turn up in Ireland: 'Tamáísín the sparkle-smith of hell', *The Schools' Collection*, Cromadh (B.), Limerick, vol. 507 (1935-7), 99-104 at 102-3; K.M. Harris, 'Extracts from the Society's Collection, IV', *Ulster Folklife* 7 (1961), 23-32 at 29; Mrs Stewart, 'Greenteeth', *Belfast Telegraph* (7 Nov 1981), 9.
30. 'The Peel Family: Its Rise and Fortunes: Bury Eighty Years Ago', *Supplement to Manchester Examiner and Times* (2 Nov 1850), 3.
31. This is an extremely complicated source: see further the notes in *Sources for Jenny Greenteeth* (Academia.edu file), source 1.
32. The Old Delf, 'The Fountain at St James Cemetery', 4. For a similar chronology see also A Prestonian, 'Preston'.
33. Martin Puhvel, *Beowulf and Celtic Tradition* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1979), 65, n. 9. See also Harte, 'From Ogre', 33-5.
34. E.g. Ronald Hutton according to whom (*The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 330) Jenny and Peg Powler 'are ghastly reincarnations of figures such as Verbeia and Coventina'.
35. Vickery, 'Lemna', 247.
36. *Sources*, 'Interview: Chrissy Sweeney'; 'Interview: J. Craig Melia'; 'Interview: Kathrin Barber'; 'Interview: Lynda Sim'; 'Interview: RP'.
37. *Sources*, 'Interview: Anne J'.
38. Edward Kirk, 'A Nook of North Lancashire', *Lancashire Advertiser* (30 Sep 1876), 3.
39. James Bowker, *Goblin Tales of Lancashire* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1883), 132.

40. Widdowson, 'Plants', 207.
41. Percy Green, *A History of Nursery Rhymes* (London: Greening and Co., 1899), 41.
42. Mrs Stewart, 'Greenteeth'.
43. W.W. Gill, 'Jenny Green-Teeth', *Taunton Courier* (26 Jun 1935), 10.
44. W. Davies, 'Boggarts, Feorin, etc', *Notes and Queries* 5 (1870), 216.
45. Wright, *Rustic*, 199.
46. Waugh, *Sketches*, 182.
47. Davies, 'Boggarts': Much is made of Jenny's bite: e.g. Widdowson, 'Plants', 207 (in icy water).
48. P. 'Nature Notes'.
49. Charles Hardwick, *Traditions, superstitions, and folklore, (chiefly Lancashire and the north of England: their affinity to others in widely-distributed localities; their eastern origin and mythical significance)* (Manchester: A. Ireland, 1872), 279.
50. Best collected in John Higson, 'Boggarts, Feorin, etc.' *Notes and Queries* 5 (1870), 156-7.
51. Vickery, 'Lemna', 248.
52. Stewart, 'Greenteeth'.
53. For a minority opinion, a grown child from Cheshire remembers (in Widdowson, 'Plants', 207) 'the figure Jinny Greenteeth didn't really frighten. Its power was more in its seductive and entrancing qualities – not evil, more mischievous and sprite like.'
54. 'A Brave Boy'. There's always one ... Note that there are other accounts of children provoking Jenny, e.g. 'Interview: Chrissy Sweeney'.
55. Tád Tuleja has related Jenny to the tooth fairy: 'The Tooth Fairy: Perspectives on Money and Magic', Peter Narváez (ed.), *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (New York: Garland, 1991) 406-25, at 409-10.
56. Henry Brierley, 'Jenny Greenteeth', *Notes and Queries* 1 (1904, 10th series), 365.
57. Vickery, 'Lemna', 250.
58. Sources, 'Interview: Joan'.
59. Higson, 'Boggarts', 156.
60. Simpson and Roud found space, *Dictionary*, 199.
61. A Prestonian, 'Preston', 6.
62. Viscount, 'The Turn Bridge at Finsley Gate', *Burnley Express* (8 Aug 1885), 6.
63. H.T. Crofton, *A History of Newton Chapelry in the Ancient Parish of Manchester* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1904), 164.
64. J.T. Volla, 'In Evil Days: A Story of the Cotton Famine', *Burnley Express* (16 Sep 1891), 4.
65. Mather, *Lancashire*, 239.
66. Marjorie Rowling, *The Folklore of the Lake District* (London: Batsford, 1976), 36.
67. 'Rambling Notes', *Ripley and Heanor News and Ilkeston Division Free Press* (20 Jul 1934), 5.
68. Adrian Henri, *Dinner with the Spratts* (London: Egmont, 1993), 'Jenny Greenteeth: A Legend of Sefton Park', 12-15, for background to this poem and Sefton Park; 'Child's Play for Our Henri', *Liverpool Echo* (25 Sep 1993), 18.
69. Vickery, 'Lemna', 248-9; Crowley, *Liverpool English Dictionary*, under 'Ginny/Jinny Greenteeth (n.)'. Note that this incarnation of Jenny survives: Kate McMullin, 'Is this the ghost of 'witch' Jenny Greenteeth at St James cemetery?', *Liverpool Echo* (14 Feb 2018), <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/ghost-witch-jenny-greenteeth-st-14288058> (accessed 20 Jun 2019), on a photograph taken by an Australian tourist.
70. Vickery, 'Lemna', 249 (quoting a 1980 BBC programme).
71. Sources, 'Interview: JHS'; compare with the reference to the tapestry in Oliver Madox-Brown, *The Dwale Bluth: Hebditch's Legacy & Other Literary Remains of Oliver Madox Brown* (London: Tinsley, 1876), vol. 1, 162.
72. Rowling, *The Folklore*, 36.
73. There is on Derbyshire OS40NW (1885, 6 inch) an impressive pool to the east of the house just past Downmeadow Brook. Looking at satellite imagery the pool appears to be no longer there in the 2010s.
74. Widdowson, 'Plants', 208.
75. A Prestonian, 'Preston', 6.

76. Crofton, *A History*, 164.
77. Simpson and Roud, *A Dictionary*, 116.
78. Widdowson, *If You Don't Be Good*, 107-19.
79. E.g. her first folklore book, *The Personnel of Fairyland* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1969), 189-226.
80. There were earlier encyclopaedias of gods (Larousse, etc.), but this is a different model, closer to biographical encyclopaedias than the species encyclopaedias that Briggs was pioneering.
81. Torsten Löfstedt, 'How to Define Supernatural Beings', *Studies in Folklore and Popular Religion* 1 (1996), 107-12; V. Hafstein, 'Biological metaphors in folklore theory: an essay in the history of ideas', *Arv* (2001), 7-32; Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Taxonomy of the Non-Existent: Some Medieval Icelandic Concepts of the Paranormal', *Fabula* 54 (2013), 199-213.
82. Jakobsson, 'Taxonomy', 207: 'The taxonomy of the non-existent cannot imitate that of the natural kingdom in every way, given the essential ontological difference between the existent and the non-existent ... The focus has to be on the human who experiences the paranormal and our starting point cannot be situated outside of the human psyche supernatural.'
83. Note that attempts have been made to render supernatural systems as folk taxonomies: for the most recent, Manasikarn Hengsuwan, Amara Prasithrathsint, 'A Folk Taxonomy of Terms for Ghosts and Spirits in Thai', *MANUYSA* 17 (2014), 29-40. The problem with any attempt to create a supernatural folk taxonomy is that you need complete records at a very local level. For most, perhaps all of Britain, this would be impossible for the 1800s. A study using emic terms needs that extreme localism: if not we are doomed to the use of etic terms.
84. Richard Sugg, *Fairies: A Dangerous History* (London: Reaktion, 2018), 237-8, for a similar exercise with fairies.
85. For a rare exception, Vickery, 'Lemna', 248: 'Jenny Greenteeth had pale green skin, green teeth, very long green locks of hair; long green fingers with long nails, and she was very thin with a pointed chin and very big eyes'. See also Newman and E.M. Wilson, 'Folklore', 102: 'the green slime on the surface is supposed to be her face'.
86. Two breakthrough moments in, for the first time, nationally known publications: Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-lore*, 85-6 and the chain of letters begun by HERMENTRUDE, 'Boggarts' in 1873 in *Notes and Queries*. In the later 1870s Jenny appears in several national works.
87. Viscount, 'The Turn Bridge'; A Prestonian, 'Preston', 6.