

## The Witches of Easton

Down our street some neighbours have been policing our lockdown compliance. Seeing faces at windows has brought back a memory from my childhood on Portland.

Every Saturday evening our dad took my sister and me to Mr. Crab, the fish shop in Easton and we would park in the same place by the Methodist church.

Opposite was a decrepit stone house, probably centuries old. It used to be a workhouse. Three old spinsters had moved in during the previous winter. Someone said they were from the North. I didn't know what that meant.

Jenny, in my class at school, lived next door. She was convinced the house was haunted. She said there were screams and weird flashes every night.

Our dad laughed at the idea. "The women are witches not ghosts."

From where we parked we could look up at the house and there would always be a face behind the front room curtain.

One Saturday, our dad said "Give a wave, show the nosey women you can see them," When we did the downstairs curtains shut quickly.

Others curtains moved upstairs in both bay windows and we saw ghostly white faces staring at us. The women didn't smile so my sister and I started making funny faces.

"Don't do that," Dad said. "You'll have toads in your bed tonight."

He didn't frighten us. He was always making up stories. But that night we both felt something slimy between the sheets. My eight year old sister screamed but I was only five and still more curious than fearful and uncovered half a tinned peach in both our beds.

I always laughed at our dad's stories until a night, much later, when my sister and I were teenagers at a late night party in Easton. She says she never saw them. But I still get a cold sweat when I remember the sight of three black shapes floating from the roof of the old workhouse and rising towards The Bill through the Portland mist.

My dad winked when I told him what I'd seen.