

# CHAPTERS FROM STORYTELLING HISTORY

*This occasional series focuses on people, books or events which have either added to the development of oral storytelling or used it as a starting point for other art forms.*

*This time it is a book for children:*

## THE HOLLOW LAND by JANE GARDAM

**T**he Hollow Land was first published in 1981. It is a set of linked short stories although it can be read as a novel. The Hollow Land is the Cumbrian fells, that land to the east of the Lake District off towards Penrith and Appleby. The story is about several generations of one family of hill farmers and their neighbours—particularly the summer visitors who come from London every year and become part of the community.

The whole book is peppered with little bits of local folklore and legend. Every nook and cranny of the landscape has its ghost. Some of these ghosts are ancient, some are people known to the older inhabitants in their younger days. They are all equally real.

An early chapter is based around the legend of the Hand of Glory which burglars used to keep the householders asleep whilst they went about their work:

*“Let those who rest more deeply sleep:  
Let those awake their vigil keep.  
Oh, Hand of Glory, shed thy light,  
Direct us to our spoil tonight -*

*And there’s not a child at Stainmer nor at Kirkby school nor yet a conductress on the G.N.E. buses over Stainmer doesn’t know that verse to this day...”*

I wonder whether that is still true?

A chapter called Table Talk centred around the gypsies arriving for Appleby Fair starts with the following chunk of folklore:

*“It was Appleby Horse Fair and all the roads near and far were threaded with gypsies. They came from all over England, and had done every year since the gypsies started. There had been other people ahead of them - starting they say with the Greeks on their way to Scotland to leave stories and bagpipe dances behind them. Then the brooding Celts with their copper pans and choppers. Then the Romans who traveled light but left re-arrangements behind them. Then King Arthur and his knights who fell asleep in a room under*

*Richmond Castle and are still there if we could only find the way down. Then the dreadful Eric Bloodaxe arrived who bit the Stainmore dust, and the unspeakable Scotsman, Malcolm the Red, who burned Appleby to the ground twice, before the Danes came and looked about more sanely and thought that this would be a nice place to settle down. But even after all this, it was still a long time ago that the blue-eyed gypsies arrived for the Horse Fair...”*

The final chapter is set in the future—far off 1999! when there has been an oil crisis, there are no cars and the roads are being re-colonised by plants and flowers.



Jane Gardam was born in Coatham, N.Yorkshire in 1928 and went to Saltburn Grammar School for Girls and Bedford College, London. She has written many novels and short stories for both children and adults and a non-fiction work *The Iron Coast* about her childhood home.