more dangerous than the ghosts of mothers.

Certainly, many old houses of the British Isles are haunted by the spirits of famous (or infamous) matriarchs. Readers are no doubt familiar with the banshee of Ireland and Scotland. Usually described as an unnamed (female) ancestor, the banshee's appearance or wail forewarns a coming death or other ill fortune for its family. But this ghost is not restricted to Celtic lands! Take, for example, the lost Mother of Yorkshire, who wanders the coast near Penrove Fort, calling out for her disobedient sons, long since gone to war. All who hear her cries, local legend holds, suffer bad luck soon thereafter. Further west, the bitter laugh of the Bloody Duchess of Collinsford, who murdered three cousins to secure her son's title, can still be heard around the oak tree from which that very son hanged her, once her crimes were revealed.

Besides family, these English ghosts share two traits: First, some sort of audible manifestation, such as a cry, wail, or laugh; and second, some physical anchor. From that latter bond, it seems, stems their power, and perhaps also their weakness, should they have any. (It may be worth investigating if Celtic banshees share that trait.)

Tread carefully if you suspect the presence of such a spirit. Like most ghosts, these manifest unpredictably, and often in ways indistinguishable from common ill luck. Besides the telltale audible clues, animals such as cats and dogs are disturbed by their presence; as are particularly sensitive humans, such as children.

Fathers and male ancestors are far less dangerous, at least as attested by

A particularly interesting page from

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