

The worm that returned

Jo Haywood slithers into a new book about an old North East tale (or should that be 'tail'?)

John Lambton was not the luckiest of chaps. Not only did he blight his village with a terrible serpent-like creature, but he also cursed his entire family for nine generations. Safe to say, if he bent to pick up a penny he'd lose his wallet down a drain.

But now his luck seems to have changed, thanks to the endeavours of artist Andrew Jenkin, who has created a new illustrated book retelling the famous North East folk tale *The Curse of the Lambton Worm*, with a foreword written by the Earl of Durham, a descendent of the Lambtons.

Jenkin has rewritten the story and painted a number of watercolour illustrations, casting an original eye over a well-remembered, much-loved and oft-repeated tale.

For those of you unfamiliar with the North East myth (where have you been hiding – in a worm hole perhaps with your fingers firmly lodged in your ears?), it is believed to have started in medieval times and tells the story of poor, blundering John Lambton who curses the River Wear when he fails to catch a fish and inadvertently hooks an evil giant worm that wreaks havoc in the neighbourhood for seven long years.

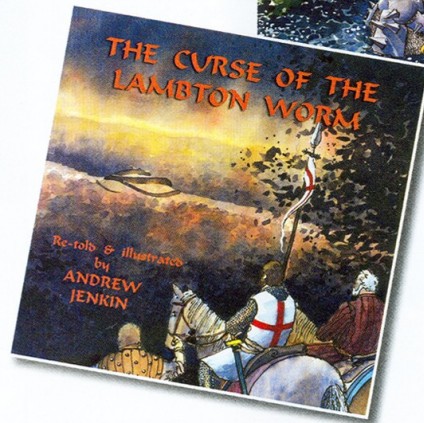
In a fit of remorse, the daft lad sets out to combat the monster but – whoops-a-daisy – somehow manages to inflict a remorseless curse on his own family that lasts for nine generations. Bet he was top of the guest list for christenings, marriages and birthday parties, don't you?

With a degree in history as well as proven artistic skills, the author has used his academic expertise to carry out extensive research into the background of the legend. He has examined its origins, the location of the action, the early Lambton family tree and the tale's subsequent influence on later stories, plays and culture.

'This is an idea which I suppose began more than 25 years ago when I used to come to County Durham to visit my grandparents,' he explained.



Above: An illustration from the new retelling of *The Curse of the Lambton Worm*
Left: *The Curse of the Lambton Worm* by Andrew Jenkin



'I've always remembered the story and when I came back to the area with an exhibition five years ago I thought it would be a really great project to produce a book which brought together the legend and the historical background.'

To celebrate the launch of his book, Jenkin has chosen to put on an exhibition of his paintings at Washington Arts Centre – just five minutes from Worm Hill and Worm Well where the action is supposed to have unfolded almost 600 years ago – before taking them on the road across the North East in a series of exhibitions that will run until Christmas. 🐉

🐉 **The Curse of the Lambton Worm by Andrew Jenkin (£7.95 + £1.50 postage, Arjent) will be on sale at each exhibition as well as selected tourist information offices and libraries. To find out more, visit www.lambton-worm.com.**

If you want to catch the Lambton Worm, wiggle along to:

- 🐉 Washington Arts Centre, until July 4th
- 🐉 Witham Hall, Barnard Castle, from July 30th to August 5th
- 🐉 Sunderland Library & Art Gallery, in September (exact dates to be confirmed)
- 🐉 Houghton Feast, Houghton-le-Spring, from October 5th to 9th
- 🐉 Durham Clayport Library, in October (dates to be confirmed)
- 🐉 Durham University Botanical Gardens, from November 14th to December 4th
- 🐉 South Shields Library, from November 23rd to December 19th
- 🐉 Bishop Auckland Town Hall, from November 30th to December 31st