

FOR
MATURE GAMERS



THORSTON

THE SHUNNED TOWN ON THE DEE

FOX
COUNTRY

6

Robert Grayston & friends

for 7th Edition

CALL of CTHULHU
GASLIGHT ERA



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STYGIAN FOX

CHESTER & NORTH WALES, UK

THORSTON

THE SHUNNED TOWN ON THE DEE

FOX
COUNTRY

6

Robert Grayston & friends



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WITH THANKS TO

ALL THE DARK MINIONS OF PATREON

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CONTENTS

7

INTRODUCTION

12

THE DECREPIT TOWN

19

THE INHABITANTS

22

SECRETS & LIES

28

THE WALLED CITY

32

'SUPPING WITH THE DEVIL'

45

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

52

SUPPLEMENTARY MAPS

THE SHADOW OVER THORSTON



INTRODUCTION



The coastal “town” of Thorston (pronounced ‘Thorston’) is like a bedraggled half-dead beast washed upon the shore of the Dee Estuary. It was once a happy community but now lies overgrown and gently fading into obscurity, its remnants a haven for scavengers, the dispossessed and worse things that ply their midnight trades.

Found in the north-west of England on the Wirral Peninsula between the industrial port city of Liverpool and the county seat of Chester, Thorston is mostly ignored by its neighbours out of a general sense of unease, either at the dilapidated state of the vagabond-infested ruins, or something much more primal which grips at the hearts of those who venture too close.

Will it survive much past the 1890s or will it finally be allowed to die?

HISTORY

It’s not known what came first, the fishing settlement or the church, but at some point not long after the sacking of Lindisfarne the Danes swept in from the sea. With their swords and axes they descended upon Chester but were beaten back, and made Thorston their base from which to raid. These pillagers gradually became farmers, and their pagan rites gave way to building, rather than burning, churches.

It is said part of the reason the Vikings turned from their pagan ways was that their chieftain, Thorvald, went mad after drinking from a cursed cup and so they turned to Christianity to save themselves.

The first written record of Thorston is in the Domesday Book, the book of records ordered to be made by the Norman conqueror-king of England William I. This book was created in or-



der to gather inventory of William's new realm so he could better tax his subjects. It was listed as a small settlement with only 7 households, and was owned, as with much of North Wales and the nearby villages, by a Norman named **Robert of Rhuddlan** (who was a great one for interfering in Welsh wars until his untimely end in a hail of Welsh javelins).

The settlement grew and prospered in its own small way, with a church community thriving alongside the fishermen and smallholdings of Thorston whilst most of the rest of the Wirral was turned into a royal hunting forest for the pursuit of deer and boar. Not much of note happened for a long time, although there were always rumours of smuggling and other untoward, criminal practices occurring under the cover of darkness. Wars raged and epidemics fell across the land, but neither Parliamentary or Royalist, nor pox or plague would harm Thorston.

Nearby Chester was engaged in seaborne trade with Ireland and the European mainland, with ships frequently laying anchor in the Dee Estuary within sight of Thorston. It grew into a small town, and for a while its people thrived.

But this would not last forever, and gradually Liverpool became a more influential trading centre than Chester ever was. In fact, through the course of the 18th century Liverpool grew to a bustling city of over 80,000 inhabitants.

This emphasis on the northern side of the Wirral saw a steady decline in Thorston's fortune, especially as the Dee Estuary silted up and made it harder for ships to traverse. Although never a prosperous settlement, it had at least been proud of its own place in the world, and

it can probably said its last gasp of hope came in the late 1850s when plans were drawn up to construct a canal right by Thorston through to Chester to avoid the problem of silt blocking Dee Estuary shipping – but this was never enacted, and the commercial focus moved away to the northern, Mersey side of the Wirral.

Then came several terrible incidents in close succession, and whispers began to circulate that Thorston was a place best avoided by all right and upstanding folk. It's said a couple of the labourers who built the railway that ran through it went missing whilst the tracks were being laid, and more than one traveler who passed through never reached their final destination – but nothing could ever be proven.

Still, it made some people uneasy and residents began to move away, in some cases seemingly in such a great hurry they left all their possessions and didn't even think to sell their homes. Vagrancy and squatting from the likes of dispossessed drifters out of Liverpool became commonplace, and petty crimes and vandalism became an increasing problem. It seems as though from the middle of the 19th century it has fallen under a black cloud of mistrust and ill-fortune, as well as several suspicious disappearances such as of a visiting student from Cambridge and the church's minister.

Constabulary from Chester have been called to investigate on more than one occasion, but the calls have become fewer (and depending on which desk sergeant you asked, more 'unhinged') until they eventually stopped altogether. Now not much gets asked for by or from Thorston, and even if it did, it's unlikely much attention would be given to it.

THE ROTTEN BURG OF THORSTON

AWAITS THE INVESTIGATORS

ART BY VLADIMIR MANYUKHIN





THE DECREPIT TOWN

& ITS SIGHTS



Prince Street

The town is generally run-down and most of it is now uninhabited. The only 'road' into town is barely worthy of the name, as whilst it may once have carried traffic from Thorston to nearby Thurstaston, these days are long behind it. Anyone who wants it fixed isn't important enough to do anything about it, and anybody important enough to get it fixed doesn't care enough about it. The road deteriorates steadily from Thurstaston until it gets little better than a hole-ridden dirt track, but unfortunately for any visitors to Thorston, it's the only way in or out of the town that's not just crossing over the Heswall Dales, and it is just about (bumpily) navigable by wheeled traffic.

If you asked your average Cheshireman they would say that there is a sign and chain across the remains of the road, reading '*Condemned. Stay clear for safety*'. In truth, there has never been a sign but it's idea has entered the local psyche as an urban truth which nobody has thought to try and disprove. It could be that people just find it easier to explain away their desire not to go to the place if there's such a convenient excuse as an official sign, but how such a rumour started is anyone's guess.

There are two main parts to Thorston – the inhabited and uninhabited parts, sometimes jestingly called 'Old' and 'New' by the locals when they muster the effort to make a joke. Which part is which seems to change each

time anyway, and there is no clear delineation between architecture which is especially older or younger than any other bit of the town, with 18th century labourers' cottages practically side-by-side with more recent and grander affairs which date from the 1830s.

All of the buildings of interest below are found in the seaside 'inhabited area', which is known as such because its buildings are at least occupied by its residents in a permanent fashion. The uninhabited part of town is not truly uninhabited, but those that dwell here often do so on a part-time basis as drifters and vagrants make their beds for the night in the old run-down buildings – although always on the upper floors where possible, and apparently with the unusual affectation of barricading these properties. It's probably a territorial thing amongst the squatters, or so the very few visitors tell themselves.

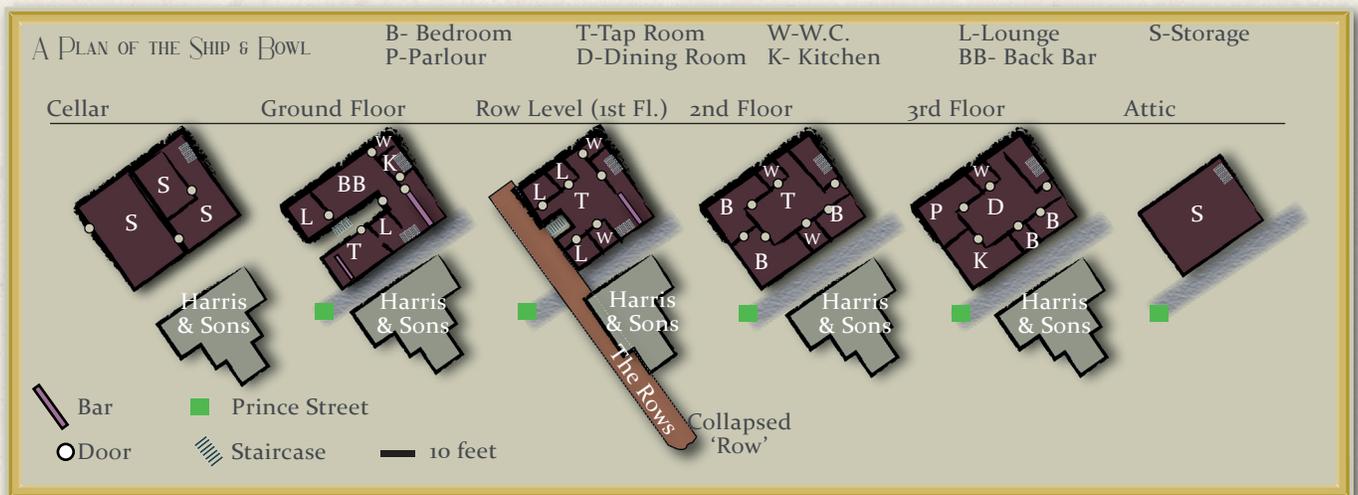
Night time travel around Thorston can be treacherous due to the lack of care & maintenance given to its streets and their lamps, where a stray pothole could twist your ankle in the dark. Most of the street lamps do not work, but a few may give off a half-hearted glow – it seems unlikely anyone is coming to repair

them any time soon – with the exception of those near the railway line, which does seem to receive basic maintenance.

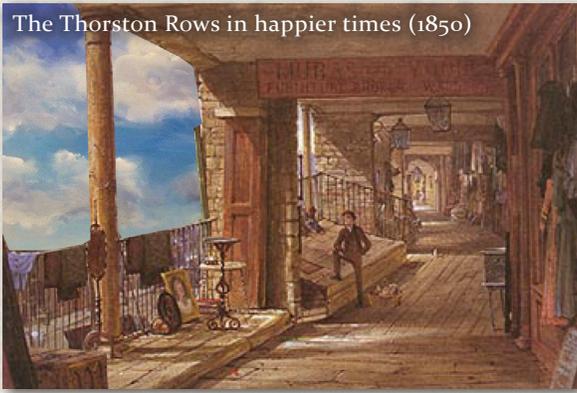
Around the town are some poorly-tended and overgrown fields which don't seem to receive the attention they deserve, and beyond that the gorse and heather of the Heswall Dales. It seems to be unusually quiet in town most of the time, which despite being a coastal settlement may be down to the lack of seagulls in the area. This seems strange enough, but the only birds which make an appearance at all in Thorston are crows which have little fear of humans and seem to congregate on rooftops where they almost give the sense they are watching and judging from on high.

1 THE CHESTER - HOYLAKE RAILWAY

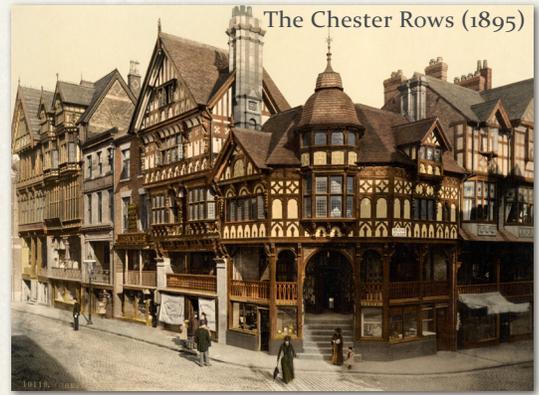
The circuitous route of the 'All Wirral Railway' initially started in Chester and traveled all around the Wirral peninsula taking holiday makers to Parkgate, Thorston, Hoylake, Birkenhead, Bebington and back to Chester. However, in the past few decades, as Birkenhead became the hub of the Wirral due to increasing trade with Liverpool, this route has largely been left behind. There are still a few



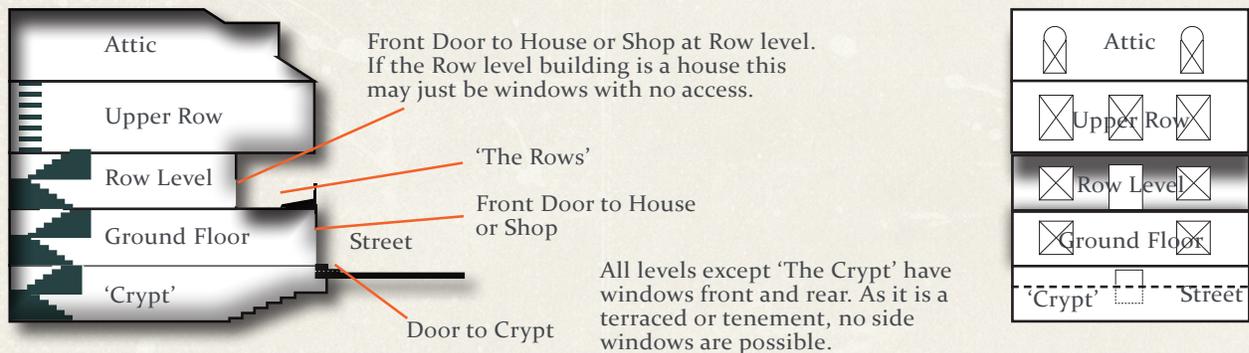
The Thorston Rows in happier times (1850)



THE ROWS



The 'Rows' are unique to Chester & Thorston and are covered walkways above shops most often adjoined to other retail promises and sometimes personal residences of the wealthy. While Chester's Rows are beautifully maintained, Thorston's Rows are much reduced in size and safety due to many years of neglect. Explore Thorston's Rows at your peril!



trains a day taking those with meager incomes to Heswall and New Brighton beach, or to the botanical gardens at Ness, but apart from the postal train due for Liverpool and thence to Dublin this line sees little activity. There is no longer a stop in Thorston. On rare occasions passengers and crew have heard strange an unusual 'thump's while traveling through Thorston, as if, somehow, the train suddenly gained a roof-borne stowaway.

2 STONEBRIDGE

The original cart span over the brook was replaced with a stone one in 1130 and has remained ever since. It is sturdy and is trusted by the locals.

3 ST HILDA'S WAY SHRINE

This small way shrine, as seen on the rear cover, sits at the northern end of Stonebridge and saw pil-

grimage until the building and consecration of St. Hilda's on Gawain Road in the 1300s. As Thorston's fortunes began to fade it was vandalised and now its headless statuette stands alone in testament to the town's isolation.

4 THE SHIP & BOWL

The Ship & Bowl is the local public house, and the only real gathering place for the blighted souls that remain in town. It looks as though, as with the rest of the town, it has seen better days, apart from its sign which appears to be freshly painted. Its peeling red door is always open while the sun is up, but it gives the impression less of being an open invitation and more like a ploy to trap those who lack a basic sense of caution.

The downstairs is split into two sections, a front and a back bar. Each is exactly as appealing as the other. The walls are sparsely decorated with miserable

paintings, and there is an obvious damp affliction which has crept across the ceiling and some of the walls. The smell from this helps contribute to the overall friendly atmosphere of the local patrons.

Upstairs are its rooms for guests which are all in as good a state of repair as could be expected. The nicest of them only has damp on one of its walls. All of the room doors require keys to be locked, but if asked for, the landlady will mention how some of the last guests lost them and there are no replacements. The First Floor (Second Floor for North American investigators) also contain the only 'Rows' in Thorston. The Rows in Chester are a walkway above the street level shops and homes which house another level of establishments. While the main streets of Chester all have extensive Rows, Thorston's Rows only extend to the Pub, a private home, a near ruin, and Harris & Sons next door to the pub. While the Ship & Bowl extends up into the Row level and above, the Row level above Harris & Sons is an empty shop which once sold furniture.

The Ship & Bowl is run by a thin-lipped woman called Maud, who always wears black and has her steel-coloured hair in a severe bun at all times. When conversing with guests she will use the fewest words possible and is not inclined to express any emotions regardless of the situation. She will be icily polite and makes scrupulous notes of every expense incurred by her guests in tiny, neat handwriting, so as to charge them fully later. One important thing to note, after sundown everyone moves upstairs to Row level and the doors are not open until sunrise. The establishment has gained the local nickname 'The Three Arches' after the three stone arches that make up the fascia at Row level. Its menu of ales, spirits, and food is sparse.

5 HARRIS & SONS

While the street level shop and cellar wine store seem to be the most well kept premises in Thorston, they are closed off and completely empty once the sun begins to dip o'r the Welsh hills across the estuary. On Row level there is a closed and seemingly abandoned furniture store. In truth, the owner of the shop and wine cellar relocate through a secret door into the premises upstairs and have set up home in the old shop. The Upper Row and Attic remained unclaimed, however.

The veritable economic hub of Thorston, Harris & Sons is a grocer which seems to survive on a threadbare selection of goods that it retails to the town. Its windows are sparse of produce, and what is displayed is often severely inferior to even the most run-down market stall in Chester or Liverpool. It also doubles as the village's Post Office.

Run by a Daniel Harris, apparently his father established the shop and hoped his son would take over the family business. Daniel certainly has done that, but it does not appear to any of his customers as though he does this through choice, and his constant bitter mutterings and stormy glances at his patrons mean few people linger here for longer than is strictly necessary.

Previously an old costermongers, there are rumours that sometimes Daniel enters the shop but doesn't seem to leave again by its doors. This is not just fanciful gossip, as it is known that there was some smuggling around the Wirral in the earlier part of the 19th century – one memorable raid in 1830 saw large quantities of French brandy recovered on the shore as shadowy figures fled into the streets of Thorston or the nearby misty Dales. There is in fact a short tunnel that exits from a trap door in the back room of the shop and comes out near the brook,

with a rough patch of briar affixed over the exit. Any Investigators can make a **Botany** test to realise the bush is oddly placed and doesn't look quite right, and on closer examination it appears to be mostly painted wire and stuck-on foliage. This will allow them to discover the secret tunnel, which is crawled through will come out into the shop! The adjoining properties along the Row are all residential homes for the most part until the Row collapses at its southern end.

6 THE OLD STATION

This patch of stony ground once held the train station which helped deliver fish to the Wirral and Chester and tourists to Thorston. It was demolished in 1859 when the stop was removed from the schedule and the town was well into its decay. Unlike other station buildings in other towns that were sold for other uses, Thorston's station was demolished and the refuse removed so that, according to Mr Ganley, commissioner of railways, "the damned locals wouldn't steal the bricks to construct their hovels or pitch at our passing mail train."

There are rumours of underground rooms and passages still in existence at the Old Station site. Oddly, these rumours come from the rail workers at Chester or Parkgate. The inhabitants of Thorston remaining oddly quiet on the matter.

7 THE HALL

The community hall is one of the saddest-looking buildings in Thorston, with its red brick walls clustered with moss and crumbling in places. Several of its windows are broken, and its tattered curtains are mold-ridden. At one point it is quite possible there may have been some community gatherings here for festivals and celebrations, but any such joys have long fled this place and now it is a barren reminder of better times.

Built several decades ago, it seems to have been a vain attempt at rallying community spirit after the blight had already taken root in the village. You're far more likely to find what's left of the community huddled in the Ship & Bowl, although some of the dispossessed souls that take up residence in the abandoned properties at the edge of town will meet here, although not after dark if they can avoid it.

8 ST HILDA'S

The old (and only) church in Thorston is a quiet place. Its last minister disappeared some years ago or so the hushed whisper goes in the Ship & Bowl. Despite this, at night sometimes there can still be seen lights inside the old stone building, blurred by the grimy stained glass windows which have seen better days.

The graveyard is filled with crumbling old headstones which are barely legible. No flowers adorn the graves, and in some cases it would appear with some close inspection that there are soft depressions where some of the graves are.

There are no graves here newer than a couple of decades, and in one corner of the graveyard it looks like a patch of ground has been cleared of rampant grass and weeds, with part-burnt logs scattered about the blackened ground.

The heavy wooden door to the church is permanently locked, and seems like it would be difficult to budge by force. There is however a side door to the vestry, which although part-concealed by an overgrown bramble, is just about accessible and can be dragged open with a little bit of 'subtlety' (and a **Spot Hidden** roll to find it in the first place).

Inside, the church seems mostly derelict, with dust covering many of the old pews, and spiderwebs



stretching from old stone column to old stone column. There are some moth-eaten old tapestries which add to the general air of abandonment, but to the eagle-eyed there are signs of more recent activity.

A few candles seem to have been used relatively recently, and in some places the dust on the church floor looks to have been disturbed; there are even a few recent traces of dirt and soil. Anyone **Tracking** these traces will reach the crypt door, which seems to be firmly locked shut. It will take a **Locksmith** roll or basically tearing the door apart with tools to get past it.

Down a narrow spiral staircase is the crypt, which is a small space with a couple of alcoves. There is a boarded-up impromptu doorway made of a door liberated from somewhere else (probably an abandoned house), which is placed over a hole in the crypt's wall which seems to have been made in a non-subtle manner, with some loose bits of masonry still in evidence.

Moving through the door leads to what seems to be a cave tunnel, in pitch darkness. There is an overwhelming smell of fecal matter mixed with rotten meat, and it is likely to make any sane Investigator heave in disgust. It goes through and connects to...

9 THE CAVE

There are two ways to reach the Cave, which in reality is actually the area at the bottom of an old disused well. One is from the crypt entrance, and the other is a good twenty foot drop from the well mouth above. Down here there is faint light from above, filtering through the boards placed over the old well. There are small pools of stagnant water, and the remains of skeletons and far fresher body parts litter the ground. This is the lair of *Arawn's Crows*, and where they bring their victims – often opening the well up to throw their victims down, which usually kills them if not incapacitating them severely before the hungry beasts move in.

Spread amongst the debris are occasional Viking artifacts – this is where the chieftain Thorvald was imprisoned when he went mad from his use of the Black Cauldron.

10 THE SHORE

Thorston's position on the Dee Estuary means it was once home to a small but enthusiastic set of

fishermen who plied their trade in the Irish Sea. Nowadays there is very little activity on the seafront, with old boats rotting away like the carcasses of beached sea creatures. It is also very rare to have anyone visit by water, and most boat traffic on the Dee seems to keep a good distance from shore. There are a couple of determined and hoary old skippers still active, in between the times they are drowning their sorrows with watered-down beer in the **Ship & Bowl**.

11 THE BROOK

A small stream runs into the sea past Thorston, with a small stone bridge crossing it. The bridge looks as though it may not survive should there be a sufficiently vicious storm, although it's hardly like it receives much traffic and is, in fact, quite reliable (see **Stonebridge**). The brook is a gurgling little thing which seems to have a lot of twigs and branches in it – if anyone pays too much close attention (and a regular **Forensic** test) they may discover that some of these are, in fact, bone fragments. It would need a hard forensic test in order to identify them as human bones, which seem to have been gnawed upon.

THE INHABITANTS & NEARBY LOCALES



The Tide Is Out

DEMOGRAPHICS

The town population has fallen well below a hundred (permanent) residents, but this number is swelled by the frequent visitors in the shape of vagrants and the destitute seeking out shelter. It is certainly no secret that there are many people down-on-their-luck who are occupying the empty buildings of Thorston, drawn apparently by rumours that the old ruin of a town can provide shelter and comfort. Whoever's spreading that rumour got it half right, and then only partially.

These people are those at the fringes of society, impoverished and without recourse to any other means of support. They mostly come from Chester and Liverpool, and hearing of a place that's not too far distant where they can lay low they quietly slink off to this supposed haven in ones and twos. Many of them are not the foul and dangerous types the papers would have you believe, and just want somewhere to rest and maybe to try and eke out a safe

little existence. Most will be shy or paranoid at first, but are warm and kind if treated well.

12 SALLY'S HOME

One such person is Sally, a plain and proper woman who has set up her new home in one tidy second-floor corner of what looks like it was an old merchant's house, abandoned for at least a decade. She welcomes others who arrive here and leads small prayer meetings, as well as mending clothes and sometimes doing odd jobs for Maud at the **Ship & Bowl** in return for meager broth she shares with others.

As for the rest of the population, they are the stubborn and the elderly, the remainder of Thorston's old blood. These people have grown up here and are quite insistent they'll die here – some quite possibly sooner than others. A few are still involved with the dwindling maritime industries, but some just seem to be listless and lost, just waiting to die in their quiet little backwater by the sea.

13 THE OLD SCHOOL

It is not recorded what actually happened here but the locals have an aire of sorrow when the subject of the old school is raised. Allegedly, the staff were hounded out of their houses one night and all lynched. Official records just say they left for unnamed positions elsewhere. The mob responsible for the lynching have seemingly all died off. They tried to set the school building ablaze but it just wouldn't burn. It now stands partially flooded.

14 SOUTH VIEW

A high escarpment on the coast lends itself to impressive views of the estuary, the Irish Sea, and the North Wales coast. A small steep path leads to a small gully to the north (known locally as 'Smuggler's Gap'). It used to be a place for couples in love to meet but that changed as a number of disappearances occurred around the beauty spot.

15 A LONELY LIGHT

Out in the estuary, nearer to the Welsh side, is the fishing ketch of one Nathaniel "Nate" Cosgrove. He is a good and honest man and will aid the investigators if he thinks they're in dire trouble. As he is a practical man and has never encountered the Ghouls or Cauldron-Born he will refute any talk of the preternatural. He is usually safe in his boat on the water and any human minions of the filth god Mordiggian know better than to threaten such a well known local man. While his home and mooring is at the bottom of Greenaway Street in Chester, he fishes the Dee estuary for better fish including Pink Salmon. His heart is warmed by the frequent dolphin pods that play around his boat before turning back to open sea waters. The light from his bot can be seen for miles.

NEARBY PLACES

- **Thurstaston** – a modest village clustered around the manor house of Thurstaston Hall and the Church of St Bartholomew, it's the closest settlement to Thorston (although most of its residents wish it wasn't). The church was recently rebuilt over the remains of a plain 'placeholder' place of worship, which in turn replaced an unsafe example of Norman church architecture that was taken apart in the early 19th century before it collapsed on anybody.

- **Caldy** – A pretty little village of red sandstone houses which is home to many agricultural labourers.

- **Heswall** – Although old enough to be recorded in the Domesday Book, it was the coming of Liverpool merchants which saw to the village's prosperity in the last few decades, as they commute via the village's train station. Its church, St Peter's, was rebuilt in 1879 after a terrible thunderstorm which killed both its organist and the boy who pumped the bellows for the organ.

- **The Wirral** – The peninsula Thorston is found on, it juts out with the Dee Estuary to the west, the Irish Sea to the north, the River Mersey (and Liverpool) to its east, and Chester to its south.

- **The Heswall Dales** – Reaching up from Heswall and surrounding Thorston, the Dales are an area of heathland made up of heather, gorse bushes and the occasional copse of trees.

- **Heswall Hill** – The highest point of the Dales is Heswall Hill. Often called 'The Green Church or Chapel' it is said to be where Gawain met the Green Knight to fulfill his oath.



Heswall Hill at 358 feet. Often called 'The Green Church' it was the site of the chapel in 'Gawain and the Green Knight'.

- **The Dungeon** – A wooded valley in the Dales about 4 miles north-east of Thorston along Dungeon Road (a rough but serviceable path to and through it). There is a small waterfall babbling over slabs of rock. Its name is possibly Old English in origin for 'the place by the marsh', as opposed to the usual meaning of the word.

- **Liverpool** – a port city to the north of Thorston that is growing rich as ships from every corner of the British Empire seek a berth with their holds packed to the brim with goods. It has long since overshadowed any rivalry it may once have had with Chester in terms of importance.

- **Chester** – a large market town built around ancient Roman ruins with some fine examples of Tudor architecture, Roman walls, and Norman churches 15 miles to the south-east of Thorston, and technically its administrative centre or county seat.



The Black Cauldron

SECRETS & LIES

HIDDEN IN SHADOW



TOWN SECRETS & PLOT HOOKS

Thorston is populated not just by the stubborn and the desperate. It is a place with a cursed reputation, and for good reason – twisted parodies of men with unnatural appetites stalk the town's streets at night, curious and worn fingers prying at door handles and scratching at boarded-up windows to try to gain access to the warm flesh within.

The ghoulish *Cauldron Born* have been a part of the town's secretive community for some years now, and are undoubtedly the reason it has refused to do the decent thing and fade into the seashore as nothing but silted-over ruins. Although there are some residents who do not actively participate in any ghoulish activities themselves, there can hardly be said to be any that have not noticed at least something unusual in their town. There is a good reason why only the bravest (or drunkest) will venture out onto the streets of Thorston at night.

Whilst Thorston's nights have always been darker than most, its winds chillier than most, and its residents appreciated a slab of rare meat a disturbing amount more than most, it was not until the middle of the

19th century that this unseemly feeling of 'offness' was translated into something corporeal and maddening.

A student of Norse and Celtic history by the name of *Philip Eddington* descended upon the town, seeking out knowledge of the Viking chieftain Thorvald. He said that the Danish warlord had raided Ireland as well as England, and taken several great treasures from the kings who dwelt there. With gusto this mild-mannered young man strode about the place, examining things and taking notes, until one day... he was gone. Soon after, the minister of St Hilda disappeared, and people began to move away under a pall of scandalous rumours which no right-minded person would believe.

Eddington had uncovered a piece of Thorvald's treasure in a hidden cave accessible from the church, the very thing that drove the Viking chief mad – the Black Cauldron.

This artifact is holy to *Mordiggian*, also known as Arawn to the Celts of old. A Mythos deity, Mordiggian's artifact was too alluring to the young student who feasted from it and in doing so became the first Cauldron Born for close to a millennium.



Mr. Philip Eddington before his inevitable corruption by the mythos

Once owned by an ancient king of Ireland whose name is lost to history, the *'Cauldron-Born'* of the Black Cauldron are blighted souls trapped between life and death, but always hungering for the flesh of the truly living. It's said that supping from the Cauldron can grant immortality, but it is at too high a price for most.

Now the people of Thorston are accursed with the ghoulish Cauldron-Born luring the vulnerable to their decrepit town through the human residents who still love and cherish their turned kin.

Once arrived, many of the homeless who take shelter here soon learn to fear the night, and it's rare to find any not living above the ground floor with crude barricades and fires burning to keep the dark away for as long as they are able. Some try to flee again across the Dales, but even during the day it seems few are successful in ever escaping Thorston.

ARAWN'S CROWS

The petty congregation of ghouls in Thorston calls itself *'Arawn's Crows'* after the old Celtic name for Mordiggian, and so they are called by the people of Thorston who know of them. They probably received their name from the student Philip Eddington before his cannibalistic mind was lost completely.

Most of the Crows are Thorston locals who have succumbed to the curse through being lured into using the Black Cauldron, with a handful being people who arrived from outside the village for various reasons. It is an open secret to the hundred or so people left in Thorston there is something untoward going on, but most do not pay too much attention



One of 'Arawn's Crows'.



out of fear and silent horror – maybe a dozen or so of the standard residents take an active part in the activities of the Crows.

This includes covering up evidence of their presence, but also occasionally moving supplies for them, and also “securing” foodstuffs. This could involve rowing out silently at night to take a crewman from a boat moored in the Dee Estuary, or dragging one of the squatters from their homes on the outskirts of town. It’s rare, but not unknown, for them to target people from the Dales – mostly these are well-to-do types who would be missed, and so their status saves them from their doom and having an invitation to their final meal.

A NOTE ON CAULDRON BORN

The terms ‘ghoul’ and ‘Cauldron Born’ can be used interchangeably for ease of use, as they are very similar in many respects – the Cauldron Born use sign language and are all deaf, but beyond that they are functionally the same as the beasts of Mythos lore.

One thing to note about Cauldron Born is that they find seawater caustic against their skin, and will be disinclined to venture into it. They are capable of swimming, but if dumped into saltwater they are more likely to drown as their skin feels like it is set aflame and this drives them (more) mad. In mechanical terms, if splashed by at least a bucket’s worth of saltwater a Cauldron Born must pass a **POW** test or flail around moving randomly for **1D3** rounds. If they are immersed in seawater they must pass an extreme **POW** test to act at all, and take **1D6** damage per round.

Additionally, for reasons unknown, those turned into Cauldron Born all lose their hearing. This is a quick process as they slowly change into feral canni-

bals, and once a full Cauldron Born they will be unable to hear at all. This can be played for tension if this fact is known to the Investigators, and if any of them start to have a hard time hearing – perhaps developing a paranoia that their food has been secretly tainted by servants of the Black Cauldron -or having been saved/interrupted whilst eating from it and the creeping fear as they realise what is happening to them, this can be powerful allies to a canny Keeper.

PLOT SEEDS

- **A** university is aware that there used to be a Viking settlement at Thorston, and whilst there have been several artifacts from the rest of the Wirral it doesn’t seem as though anything has come out of the town, nor has there been any academic investigation into the area as far as they can tell (apart from something anecdotal out of Cambridge, but of course they’d want to say they got there first!). It’s time that was rectified with a bunch of bright-eyed enthusiastic young scholars, hungry to dig into Thorston’s past, although they may not like what they find.

- **D**awpool is a manor owned by the director of the White Star Line, Thomas Ismay, and found in nearby Thurstaston. One day whilst out on a walk to the Dungeon with his faithful hounds he came across a filthy, maddened wretch who was half-deaf and tried to bite him! Horrified, he drove the beast off with his cane and his dogs finished them off, but Thomas is now convinced there are more of the devils nearby. His family are worried for his sanity, especially since the wealthy businessman has hired the Investigators to prove he’s not mad.

- **R**ecently the railway have had reports of... unsettling drivers and passengers as the line passes Thorston. It’s starting to impact on passenger tickets and drivers are leaving for other firms.

It's time to look into what it is that is causing all the fuss, most likely some irate locals – and if necessary put some 'pressure' on them to keep in line. Wait... What was that 'thump' on the roof of our carriage?

- According to diocese records, the Church of St Hilda has apparently gone for some time without a dedicated parish vicar! It's not entirely clear if local ministers have been aware of this and avoiding mentioning it in case they would have to 'fill in' for services in Thorston, but it's about time a new one was appointed. After all, surely the good people of Thorston must be desperately in need of spiritual succour after all this time without... right?

- The Heswall Dales are a popular destination for walking, providing a pleasant setting to enjoy fresh air and the robustness of a fine constitu-

tion. However, upon occasion, especially when mists descend or the sun begins to set, it is quite possible for awful loping figures to be seen picking their way through the patches of briar and heather. They sniff at the air in the manner of beasts, and should they gain the scent of anyone who happens to be out and about, they will surely give chase – but what would any Investigators do who were caught up in this situation?

- One of the Investigators' family members, an unfortunate who had fallen on hard times and was in danger of falling into vagrancy, was last heard of heading towards Thorston. There is some concern over the family members' soundness of mind and general health, and so the Investigators will have to go to Thorston to find the missing person and return them.



THE WALLED CITY

THE ANCIENT & LOYAL FORTRESS ON THE DEE



The Old Dee Bridge as seen from the city walls and facing the suburb of Handbridge

A BRIEF GUIDE TO CHESTER

It's quite possible that the players may stop off in Chester in order to commit to some investigation or research. While Chester is an ideal place to do so, and is in fact very much an 'Arkham on the Dee', it lies outside the current scope of this module. We hope to visit what is known locally as 'The Walled City' in other books.

For now, we include a map and a brief description of the locations of use for this scenario.

- 1 **The County & City Records Office** at the Town Hall are actually in a nearby Georgian building that has a central steep staircase to its front doors and has regrettably seen better days. Parts of its painted facade now looks garish with wear and parts of the brickwork have fallen away. It does however, keep immaculate order in its main record department

and that is known as "Chambers" where the old historical documents are kept in a cool environment below ground. The history of the local tribes, Deva (the local river goddess and the Roman name for their fortress when they arrived in AD79), the Arthurian/Successor kingdoms period, the Saxon period, Normans, and the English civil war records are all kept here.

- 2 **The Chester Courant & Nth. Wales Advertiser** hold their offices here, at 'The Cross' (a small plaza containing a Saxon pillar which is used for may day as a maypole and once had a cross atop it but the arms of the cross has long been lost).

The newspaper offices are full of a raucous din any day either side of Thursday as they make an effort to get the Friday special edition printed. The printing presses are in a particular feature of 'The Rows'; the Crypt. Most of the premises on the Rows have these

and one could mistake the decor for being under a medieval chapel. The vaulted stone roof does not fair well under the noise and in the 1920s some of these roofs, and the buildings above, will be in danger of collapsing.

The archives, known here as “The Bones” (a nod to them being in a crypt), contains copies of all the newspapers produced in the past 200 years. It also holds, by agreement, copies of its rival The Chester Chronicle which has been in circulation since 1775.

3 **Chester General Station.** This is where the Investigators are likely to arrive in the city. It is a thoroughly modern station (in 1880) and has all the latest mod-cons. While trains through Thorston normally go from the Northgate station, they also have one or two from the General station which transfer lines further up the Wirral for ease-of-play. Remember, there is no service that stops at Thorston, only passing through it

It's worth noting that there are no railway guides which mention Thorston but plenty mention Chester, its grand station, and its historic features.

London to Chester Railway Prices

(Euston to Chester General)

- Single

1st class 29/-

2nd class 21s 9d

3rd class 16s 8d

Return – double the above.

Chester to Heswall Railway Prices

(The nearest stop to Thorston)

(Chester General to Heswall)

- Single

1st class 4/-

2nd class 3/-

3rd class 2/6d

Return – double the above.

Chester to West Kirkby* Railway Prices

(Further but a carriage to Thorston is more likely)

(Chester General to West Kirkby General)

- Single

1st class 5/-

2nd class 4/-

3rd class 3/2d

Return – double the above.

4 **Chester Free Library.** A small but grand and ornate building with a small records section on the ground floor through an arch which includes births and deaths for the county, files of an ‘unclassifiable

Chester Free Library on St. John Street



* Pronounced 'Kirby'. The second 'k' is silent.

nature', and land deeds. The upper floors are via a wide stone staircase that spirals around the centre of the building leading to the lending library and then up to the Reading Room (one dedicated to 'Ladies Matters' was opened in 1890). It backed onto the city walls although didn't have access to them, and the rooms at the very top were able to be reserved. The Theosophical Society held a room here for their meetings from 1880-1884.

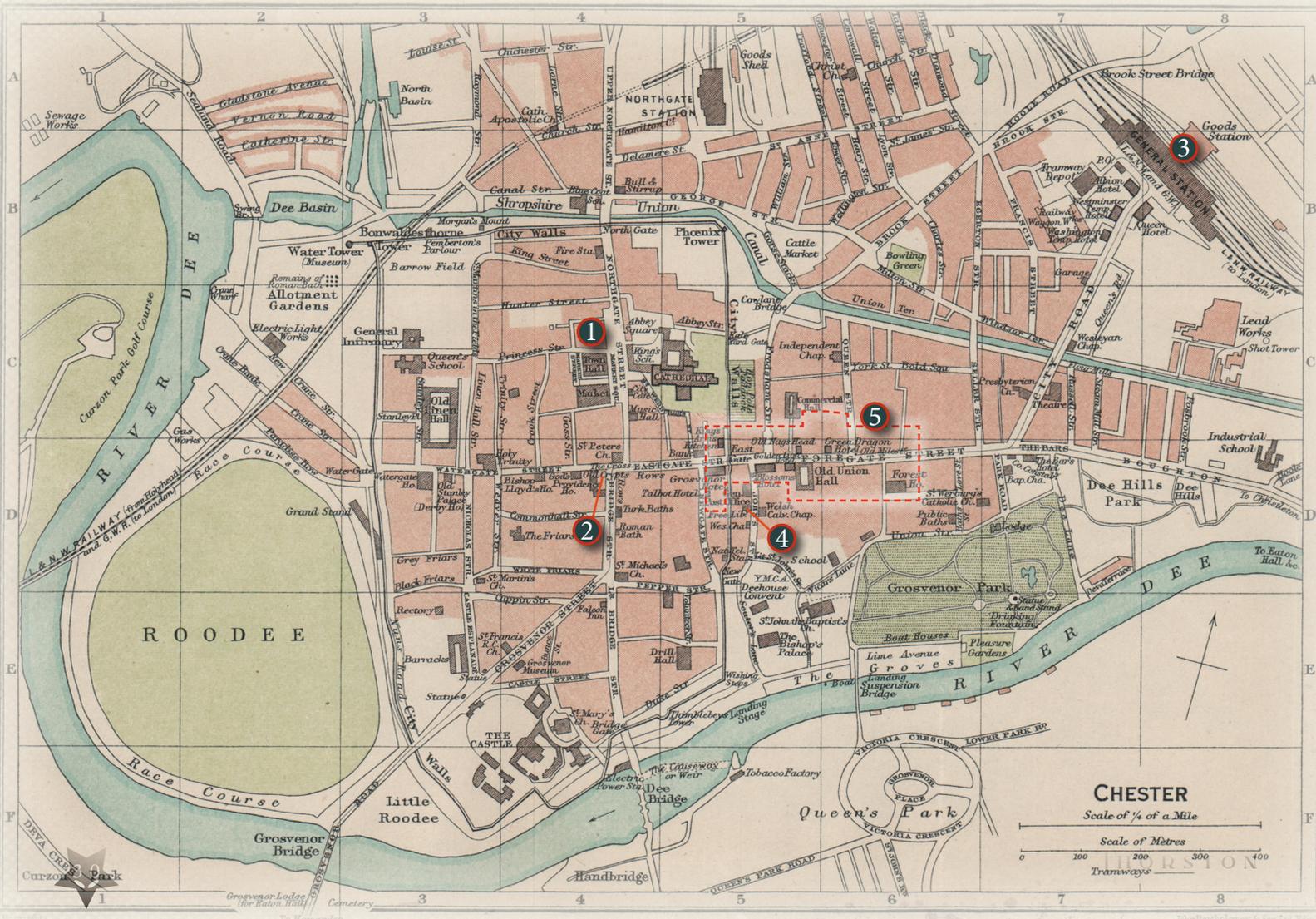
5 Central Chester's Hotel 'District'. Although not a district in the administrative sense it does hold more hotels and inns than almost any other part of the city and will probably will be where the investigators will choose to overnight. The hotels are too numerous to name here but they cater from modest to extravagant budgets. Those shown on the

map on page 28 are the most well known with the Queens Head being the cheapest and the Grosvenor Hotel being ridiculously expensive due to the fact that the Duke of Westminster overnights here when he enjoys the delights of the city at night (his home is at Eaton Hall some 5 miles south of the city by carriage).

A NOTE ON CHESTER & WIRRAL-FOLK

Although much like folk in the surrounding area, those from western Cheshire share a few peculiarities in terms of language and attitude.

"Ye" - Pronounced "Yay" is the plural of 'You'. In other parts of England or even the Western Marches



they may say “What are you lot doing?”, in this area they would say “What are ye lot doing?”

“If you don’t like the truth, keep a foot in the stirrup.” - Cheshire folk are farmers and cattle traders by nature and their frankness and abruptness shows. They are honest and don’t shy away from telling someone how they see things. Never rude, but more ‘to the point’. To visitors they may come across differently, of course.

“One City, Two Countries” - You will hear English in the city, naturally, as it is in England but you’ll also hear Welsh daily within the walls as traders and visitors come from over the border in Flintshire and Denbighshire. The border of Wales is a mere 2 miles away and words like “Cwtch” (pronounced ‘Kutch’ - meaning to cuddle as a grandparent or parent might snuggle a child) and “Cariad” (pronounced ‘KA-ree-ad’ - meaning ‘beloved’ or ‘sweetheart’) are often adopted by English traders within the city.

NOTE - The attitude of the establishment and some members of the public was quite negative and bigoted towards Welsh people at the time. The English school system, for example, would chastise any child speaking Welsh in the classroom and English teachers would physically assault any child who was brave enough to utter their native Celtic tongue. Those English who are prejudiced against the Welsh (more being outside the city in other counties than in the city) would see themselves as ‘civilising the hill people’.

Cestrians - Pronounced ‘SESS-tree-an’, this is the word the people from Chester give themselves and is a French/Norman corruption of the Roman name of the settlement; ‘Castra Legio’, or City of Legions’. Over time the city became known as Castra, then Legacester, then Chester so the appellation stuck. The Welsh word for Chester is ‘Caer’ meaning ‘Fortress’. Essentially the same thing as in English and Latin.



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SUPPING WITH THE DEVIL

WHEREIN THE INVESTIGATORS START TO FEAR THE NIGHT



The Sun Sets Over Heswall Hill.

INTRODUCTION

Thorston's derelict houses outnumber its occupied properties, which is something a developer would be keen to take advantage of. Although it may be somewhat dilapidated now, one such person who would like to take advantage of the old village is Joshua Armitage, who has recently made his fortune in shipping into Liverpool and now wants to expand his portfolio into a seaside resort – and he thinks Thorston may be just the prospective place to do so. After all, what dilapidated seaside town wouldn't jump at the opportunity he's offering?

This means he will need to employ some people to look over the place over and see what the locals think and how badly the place has fallen into disrepair. Why, maybe in time it could have a promenade, or even a pier, which could rival the likes of Black-

pool or Llandudno! But that's getting a little ahead of ourselves, for the time being some agents of Mr Armitage are needed to research the suitability of the area and that's where the Investigators come in.

This is a free-form, light-touch scenario which should allow the Investigators some leeway in pursuing their goals and is purposefully not designed to go down a single narrative route.

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

Joshua Armitage may seem like an eccentric old man who has hired the Investigators to help him establish a new New Brighton in his twilight years, but in actuality he is a ruthless and calculating monster who is using the Investigators as canaries in a mine with Thorston.

Joshua is in fact a would-be acolyte of **Mordiggian**, and intends to steal the Black Cauldron to secure eternal life for himself and resist the ravages of old age. The old businessman, who made his money in the railways, is terrified by the concept of his own mortality and after years of research around the globe, he has gathered occult and Mythos knowledge which he thinks will lead him to immortality.

Joshua Armitage, successful, driven, and eccentric.



The Investigators are being sent to Thorston both to be lures to the Cauldron Born, but also hopefully they will be able to report back. With his magical abilities Joshua is confident he can use spells to protect himself once he knows where in Thorston the Black Cauldron may be, but little does he know his spells will not work on the deaf Cauldron Born!

To Joshua Armitage, the Investigators are just pawns to expend in his quest to cheat death.

The Black Cauldron and *Ghoul's Manuscript (Thorston edition)* start the scenario in the Cave reached by the path under the church, but either may be used on the Investigators or moved around as the Keeper sees fit.

INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

There are several ways in which the Investigators could be involved, beyond the immediate 'hired by a shifty businessman to investigate a shady and isolated seaside town'.

It's quite possible that the reason Joshua Armitage approaches the Investigators in the first place is that one of their number is the beneficiary of a will through which they have inherited one of the neglected buildings of Thorston, which he discovers through word of mouth or possibly a notice posted in the newspaper. It would be quite reasonable for the Investigators to have to travel to Thorston in order to inspect their new property, to evaluate its state of repair and possibly to evict any squatters who may have taken up residence.

Another way is that the Investigators are seeking a missing friend or relative who was last seen in the vicinity of Thorston – they have already visited Thurstaston and Heswall, and their path has led them to the grim little seaside settlement. The windswept Dales are known to be a popular spot with walkers, but as the Investigators look into this case deeper they may uncover occasional disappearances and tales of unwholesome feasts after dark.

NOTE: Something to emphasise to the Investigators should be how awkward it is to visit Thorston even in favourable conditions. It is isolated due to its lack of connection to the railway, its road being in poor condition, and nobody ever seems to visit by boat. Anyone can make their way across the Dales, which are not hard going but do make it time-consuming to get anywhere else by foot. This is not to mention that it may come to the attention of the Investigators that some of the isolated houses still within

Thorston Parish but outside the main settlement's limits may be occupied by watching eyes. Having the Investigators also meet Old Peter the farmer patrolling the area with a healthy-looking hound and a shotgun in the crook of his arm along with some 'Wicker Man Gothic' vibes certainly would also not hurt. If the Investigators want to make a break for it away from Thorston in daylight because that keeps the Cauldron Born off their backs, they should very definitely consider how best to navigate the additional obstacle of any human interlopers – especially ones who have dogs which can chase them down, and Old Peter's 12 gauge shotgun!

SCOPING OUT THE TOWN

Joshua will ask the Investigators to make a thorough reconnaissance of the place – talk to the locals, investigate the buildings, see what the church and vicar are like, have a word with the local publican and so forth. He will also mention they should stay the night to get the feel for the place.

Knowledge on Thorston can be gleaned before Investigators even arrive in the town. The most obvious source would be the Chester archival records, held in **Chester Town Hall**, which will be accessible Monday-Friday from 10am – 3pm.

These are mostly fairly dry bits of information on local history, infrastructure, etc. which detail things around the construction of the railway line near the town, the Rows, the planned but aborted canal route from 1857, and some tidbits on the area's Viking past. Most of it will indicate that Thorston is not an area of commercial interest and is largely ignored in terms of infrastructure maintenance, to the point where it seems as though people have either forgotten it exists or are purposefully avoiding it. The other main source of information would be one

the local papers, such as the **Chester Courant**, which holds various back-copies in its archives which can be accessed either by a **Charm** test on the paper's clerk, or slipping them a small bribe (a shilling or two should do). Although it may take a while, there should be half a dozen mentions of Thorston in the last couple of decades although the most interesting/scandalous information will be two stories that were reported within the last five years;

1. The first of these notes the increase in vagrancy and similar types of undesirables who have been taking up residence in the run-down town of Thorston, causing awfulness tinged with undoubted criminal activity. Some of these down-and-outs must clearly have escaped from an asylum/are in need of charity because they have been ranting and raving about being abducted and hunted on the Dales or whilst they sleep in the abandoned properties of Thorston.

2. Three years ago a walker went missing, last sighted apparently in the **Ship & Bowl**. It turns out he was the nephew of a Liverpool shipping magnate, and this drew some attention. No body was ever found, but his hat was discovered by the brook bridge in Thorston.

This is alongside a missing person's announcement for one Philip Eddington, a student of Norse and Celtic history at Cambridge University, who was last seen in the vicinity of Thorston at the end of August 1848.

To uncover any of this information whether at Chester Town Hall, The Free Library, or the Chester Courant will require a **Library Use** test. If Investigators are struggling, Keepers should suggest they use **Charm**, **Persuade** or even **Intimidate** on a clerk at either location which should yield an extra rumour for them to follow up on.

RUMOURS AND LEGENDS

As well as information which can be gleaned about Thorston from official records, the place has something of a reputation in the local area. Asking in Caldby, Thurstaston or Heswall about their neighbours is as easy as wandering into one of the nearby pubs or joining a church service and engaging one or two of the more talkative locals.

“Bit of a hole, here’s hoping it slips into the Dee one day!”

“Odd folk there. Not safe at night, best that all upstanding folks stay away for their own safety.”

“Steer clear of the Dales near that place, especially after dark.”

“Ever since that Cambridge lad went missing it’s been trouble, so me Nan used to say.”

(This morsel of information is rare and would be revealed by a willing local using any charismatic skills such as **Charm** or **Persuade**),

A NIGHT TIME VISITOR

When the Investigators do visit Thorston, they will be faced with two lodging options; the Ship & Bowl or taking up in one of the abandoned houses. No doubt they will want to go and talk to locals and look around the place, but the issue of where they sleep for the night should come up sooner or later.

At some point during the night, the Investigators will be visited by one of the townspeople in league with the Cauldron Born. This will be a probing visit to see how easy it is to make entry; it is possible that some paranoid Investigators may seek to booby-trap

their accommodation which will be best left to the Keeper to decide as to how effective that may be.

The towns-person will try any doors and windows, and attempt to sabotage any vehicles the Investigators may have (horse cart, horse trap, etc.). They may also attempt to let the horses go free, but this will be after checking any doors and windows, and having a look around without going in too far. There may be a **Listen** test required for this, but modified depending on whether the Investigators are all sleeping or not.

Once this has been done (estimated to take about twenty minutes to half an hour), the towns-person will go and inform their Cauldron Born compatriots as to what they have discovered.

If discovered, the town-person will flee if able, and immediately try to rouse some Cauldron Born to their defence, of which there should be at least one lurking nearby.

THE NEXT MOVE

Arawn’s Crows will be eager to get their teeth into some fresh meat, and will have a human accomplice try to coax the Investigators out if at all possible.

Offering historical tidbits, or suggesting they can take them for a night time stroll down to the beach are all possible. Obviously this is a trap, and should make the Investigators at least a little wary. In truth, the Cauldron-Born would want the investigators to quietly leave but if they discover Thorston’s secret underground community or even a hint of it, they will want to chase them down, kill them, and leave their meat to cure on hooks in the Underworld or even the Dreamlands.

FEAR OR FOOD?

If the Investigators look to be competent and dangerous, with any firearms or martial ability, or if there are more than three of them, the Cauldron Born may decide it is better to scare them off. They will do this by leaving old body parts by their accommodation, and maybe leaping out on one of the Investigators who becomes isolated.

Another tactic is to take food prepared in the Black Cauldron and mix it with food to be eaten by the Investigators. This should make them suffer briefly the affects of the Black Cauldron, counting as though consuming from it for the first time followed by a maximum of one or two (Keeper decides) following rounds of **APP** and **SAN** damage.

INFORMING THE BOSS

Should the Investigators get word out to Joshua Armitage (either through a letter left at **Harris & Sons**, which will almost certainly be opened and read by Daniel, or perhaps if they meet Nathaniel Cosgrove he offers to pass the letter along when he puts in at a bigger harbour), if it is anything of a vaguely supernatural or Mythos nature he will immediately come to join them as he believes fully in his own magical abilities to protect himself.

When he arrives, he will do whatever he can to use the Investigators – offering to pay them double, grant them positions in his shipping company or to send them to far-off exotic locales – anything which will keep them at his side so he can use them as bait for the Cauldron Born.

TORMENT IN THORSTON

Should the Investigators successfully find someone who can point them in the right direction regarding the church or its well they will find their troubles just beginning. Depending on who they talk to, pub patron or business owner, the Cauldron-Born have a 50% chance of being tipped off as to their snooping. However, the ghouls are not stupid. They will give the investigators a wide berth if they seem to be just looking for a lost soul as long as that soul isn't one of their human thralls or a Cauldron-Born.

If the ghouls see the investigators as a credible threat they will wait until night and attack. Humans abroad in the night better be cult thralls or the Cauldron-Born will viciously attack and take their corpses below. The 'normal' residents all know to shut up their ground and cellar properties and barricade off any stairs (just in case the ghouls are hungry). They will go to their Row or First Floor properties (and above) to wait out the night. This has led to an odd sleeping cycle for many residents who sleep in safety during the day but stay awake throughout the night. Maud and any other local will not explain why the stairs are barricaded. They will just say "local superstition" and investigators who like to drink may not want to question the landlady of a pub that serves throughout the night.

Besides Sally's Crumbly White Cheshire Cheese and Leek on Farmhouse Bread with Worcestershire Sauce is a delight...

THEY COME AT NIGHT... MOSTLY

Whatever the actions of the investigators there will come a time in the night (on day two or three) when the ghouls will tire of the investigators presence



The Cauldron-Born would like nothing more than to make the investigators panic and run down dead end alleys where they can rip them to shreds suitable for curing for the winter.

and take the gamble that it is in their interest to dispatch these foolish outsiders who are poking their noses in. If they mention the word “*Cauldron*” to any allies of the ghouls then they are as good as dead as far as the ghouls are concerned.

They decide as a group to attack their location be it indoors or out. It will be in the depths of night and investigators will have normal Listen rolls to detect the nearby approach of the ghouls as the creatures have become complacent in their little town and rarely sneak about. Maybe hooves are heard on the roof? The clatter of too many hooves on nearby cobbles to be horses.

Street level is not the most dangerous place to be. If the investigators happen to be staying at the Ship & Bowl and the ghouls decide to throw caution to the wind and attack above street level Maud, her staff (except Sally who will protest), and the locals will scream and push the investigators out of the pub, with violence if necessary. They are frightened of the ghouls and do not want to upset the status quo.

Watch ‘Dog Soldiers’, ‘The Ritual’, or read ‘The Shadow Over Innsmouth’. If you can implement an aura of blind panic while in a fight for your life into your players then you will have hit the spot where terror, confusion, horror, and fear collide.

At street level the investigators can fight but the Keeper should impress upon them the strength of numbers the ghouls enjoy, that they don’t know the town like they do, and that they only have so much ammunition.

Run.

WITHOUT HOPE

All is not lost for the investigators, however. Daniel Harris may be a curmudgeon but he is no cultist. Not only will he assist in helping the investigators in hiding atop his Row level property via his secret door, but he can also sneak them to the Brook if needed (although this should be suicidal). He intends to hide the investigators in his attic (providing they weren’t seen by the ghouls or cultists) and in the morning leave with them via the Thurstaston road. Running if they have to. He, along with Nathaniel Cosgrove, know that there are rumours of hauntings surrounding the well and St Hilda’s, but they are unaware they lead to an underground temple or the Black Cauldron. The human thralls of the ghouls will try to capture or kill any escapees and Daniel Harris as long they don’t near Thurstaston. They don’t want further attention.

If they leave by land then they will have one last encounter with one of the Cauldron-Born. Philip Eddington, in his ghoul form, will attempt to follow the players back to where they’re staying. If it’s a very public place like a hotel then Eddington will turn away and go back to Thorston. If they are staying in a cottage or house on the edge of a town then the remaining Cauldron-Born may make a final attempt on their lives. As they leave Thorston by land the investigators can make a **Hard Listen** roll to uncover their stalker. If they do then they will have to resolve the situation with violence because Eddington is not going to let the investigators make a getaway. If they have seen a picture, painting, or other such likeness of Eddington then they may recognise him and he may play on their sympathies and ask for help but he is really just angling for a clear opportunity to kill as many investigators as possible.

Another possible escape route is the sea. The Caul-

dron-Born hate the water and the local cultists may not have their firearms ready. Swimming out to Nathaniel Cosgrove's fishing smack will provide relief as he then moves away and heads back to his mooring at Edgar's Field, Handbridge, in Chester. Of course, the investigators will need to make a **Hard Swim** roll as the Dee has treacherous tides and bores here in order to be safe.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The investigators primary concern now is survival. As soon as the attack happens both the Cauldron-Born and their human minions will do everything in their power to keep their secrets by killing the investigators. If the investigators escape they should be lauded. This scenario is meant to be thrilling and challenging. What they tell the authorities, or if they return to finish the job or hasten the town's demise is out of the scope of this brief adventure and this humble tome.

Should the Investigators slay any Cauldron Born they gain **+1d3 SAN** for their troubles. (Just once,

not per Cauldron Born slain) For destroying the Black Cauldron they also gain **+1d6 SAN** – and will now be marked out by Mordiggian as enemies of the Charnel God, whose servants will do all in their power to chase the Investigators down and ritually (and messily) devour them whilst they still live.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

If the investigators do successfully retrieve the Black Cauldron and hand it over to Joshua, it will ultimately lead to him becoming a new Cauldron Born – possibly after having a new reclusive manor house built for himself in the nearby area, modeled after nearby Dawpool.

One of the possibly worst-case scenarios is that the investigators imbibe from the Black Cauldron themselves, which if they only do it once may be life-scarring but survivable if they manage to get away from the cravings that accompany being in its vicinity, otherwise they will become one of the Cauldron-Born and doomed to a life of mad cannibalism.



There may be other threads to follow, such as finding out why Philip Eddington was so keen to visit the area in the first place those decades earlier, and whether he had any accomplices or left any notes.

ARTIFACTS AND ESOTERICA

The Black Cauldron

This is a decorated cooking vessel which is actually crafted from silver, although in appearance it is now tarnished and less likely to be taken for the precious metal. Around its edges are engraved simple images of distorted faces eating, pointed teeth bared and tearing at what looks to be meat. It costs 0/1 SAN to examine the Black Cauldron whilst touching it as the examiner's nose fills with the stench of blood and their ears fill with an oppressive silent roar that drowns out all other noise.

On an **Archaeology** or **History** test of **Hard** difficulty it can be ascertained the cauldron is similar in design to some ancient Celtic examples, such as the richly decorated Gundestrup Cauldron or the far less embellished Battersea Cauldron. It would have been a prestige item used by an elite figure as a visual aid to help establish their pre-eminence. It cannot be pinpointed where exactly in Europe it is from, but it is pre-Christian and could be from as far back as 300BC.

The Black Cauldron has the power to grant immortality to those that sup from it, but at a terrible cost. It will slowly send those that use it mad and transform them into demons that hunger for flesh – otherwise known as ghouls or Cauldron Born. This is exactly what drew the student Philip Eddington to it, and its rumoured existence is much sought-after by followers of forbidden lore.

The first time someone eats or drinks anything

placed in it they need to make a **POW** test or must keep consuming until nothing is left.

For every round they eat/drink after the first (going so far as to up-end the cauldron over their heads if necessary, and running their tongues hungrily over its dull metal rim), they lose 1d6 SAN and 1 APP until their SAN reaches 0 and they have become a Cauldron Born. For every '6' rolled when losing SAN, they gain +1 **Cthulhu Mythos**. After they have become a ghoul they collapse, exhausted.

If someone interrupts this process, it will require a hard **POW** Test for the cauldron-drinker not to attack them. If they are kept from consuming from the Black Cauldron for a whole minute, they may take a **POW** test to snap out of it and return to their senses, and again every minute after that for ten minutes, after which they are no longer compelled to drink from the Black Cauldron but must test again as soon as they touch it with bare skin.

Anyone who becomes a Cauldron Born through this process loses their hearing and becomes totally deaf, with those who have consumed but been saved treating all listen tests as hard or extreme, depending on the Keeper's judgement.

The Cauldron Born of Thorston seem to have found a way to compensate for this, using a complex set of signals sent with their misshapen hands which they teach the newcomers amongst them, as well as also becoming more sensitive to vibrations. Townspeople who are in league with Arawn's Children will also know this sign language, which a Keeper may have them use in front of Investigators to pique their interest.

If anyone wishes to cause damage to the Black Cauldron, it is an ancient pot made of silver. It will not

be hard to damage, or break apart (at which point it loses its bottomless quality), but will invoke the wrath of the followers of Mordiggian who will go to any length to ritually devour the hated despoiler of their sacred artifact.

The Ghoul's Manuscript (Thorston Edition)

English, copied by an unknown hand at an unknown date

A sacred book to the followers of Mordiggian, the version found in Thorston is a poor copy of the original book. Yellowed pages are crudely bound in what appears to be some kind of leather (with a sailor-style anchor tattoo on the back – how odd!), and it has been handwritten by someone to whom penmanship was more of a half-heard concept than a confirmed reality. The book goes into detail about Mordiggian, the Charnel God, and its debased cannibalistic worshippers.



This copy was in fact made by someone undergoing their transformation into 'ghoulhood' after reading the original Ghoul's Manuscript, and has made its way to Thorston at the hand of the Charnel God's followers where it has been extensively annotated with local notes.

There are some additional notes at the end, written

in a different hand but still difficult to comprehend, concerning the Black Cauldron. These notes reveal that all who partake of its bounty shall be blessed with *Quiet Eternity* and that those who bring harm to the Black Cauldron shall suffer the wrath of Arawn, Feaster of Flesh.

Sanity Loss: **1D6**

Cthulhu Mythos: **+1/+2**

Mythos Rating: **18**

Study: **4 weeks**

Suggested Spells: **Contact Cauldron Born**

Special: Reading the Ghoul's Manuscript (Thorston edition)

For anyone who spends time trying to read the Ghoul's Manuscript, it will require a **POW** test for every week of study. If failed, the reader loses **1 SAN** and starts to have awful nightmares where they rend the flesh of their closest friends and family with their teeth, devouring them as they scream for mercy.

If a second **POW** test is failed, the reader begins to transform into a Cauldron Born ghoul as part of a cursed and irreversible process. Every week they lose **1 APP** and **1D10 SAN**. Once they reach **0 APP** they have transformed fully into a ghoul. If they reach **0 SAN** before this point they flee into the night to join their Cauldron Born cousins in macabre feasts.

If they reach **0 APP** with any **SAN** remaining however, they are able to keep a hold of their mind and may act as a normal investigator – albeit one who will need to be careful in disguising their appearance as well as their eating habits. As any normal ghoul would, they will need to feed on raw human flesh to sustain themselves, ideally partially-rotten but in a pinch fresh will suffice. No other meat may substitute for this grisly meal.



The Final Confrontation with the ghoul Eddington.



Any companions of the reader must still test **SAN** for encountering a ghoul, and must test every time they encounter them eating. It costs **0/1 SAN** to witness the ghoul's eating habit, or **1/1d6** if the meal was particularly well-known to the companion.

Spell – *Contact Cauldron Born*

Cost 5 Magic Points

Sanity Loss 1D3 + amount from encountering Cauldron Born

Casting Time 1D6 + 3 rounds

As with other spells of this type, it contacts but does not bind its targets, which are free to act in whatever manner they deem appropriate. Unless there are no Cauldron Born nearby, it succeeds automatically. Around Thorston this is likely to yield **1D3+1** Cauldron Born at any one time. Cold and dark places, such as underground or on a winter's night, are the best time to perform this spell as Mordiggian appreciates these both of these conditions.

See p. 250 of the Call of Cthulhu rulebook for further details on these types of spells.

Mordiggian, the Charnel God

A Great Old One which dwells in Earth's far future, Mordiggian is an eater of the dead. Worshiped as a master of death, in appearance the Charnel God seems to be a mass of seething, swirling, serrated shadow which can strip a person's essence away in a few heartbeats, leaving no trace but a pile of the clothes they were wearing or equipment they were carrying.

Deathly cold, dark, stillness are hallmarks of Mordiggian's presence or influence, and it is known to be anathema to light and heat. Any fires or lights in the nearby vicinity will immediately die at its presence, and the age-old stench of crypts and cadavers will fill the nostrils of those present.

Although (most likely) not appearing personally in this adventure, Mordiggian's presence is still felt throughout. It is the Charnel God's worshipers who stalk the streets of Thorston, and its favour which permeates the cursed Black Cauldron.



Be Warned, while the Heswall Dales and the Wirral Forest are not dangerous in terms of terrain, it is what hides there that is dangerous.



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

VILLAINS AND ALLIES



Thorston resident, typically forgotten wretches

The population of Thorston is made up of vagrants and drifters drawn to its empty properties which they can shelter in, as well as the few townspeople who stubbornly refuse to leave their homes. Due to the deprivation and general air of misery which seems to infect everyone, it can sometimes be hard to tell the one type from the other.

Str 45 Con 45 Siz 45
 Pow 40 Dex 50 Int 50
 Build 0 HP 9 Dam. Bonus None
 Move 7

Attacks per round: 1
 Fighting (brawling) 25% (12/5), damage 1D3
 Dodge 25% (12/5)
 Armour: None
 Skills: Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Stealth 40%

Cauldron Born

Cursed inhabitants of Thorston, these damned souls got more than they bargained for when their thirst for immortality became greater than their will to stay human. Now they are twisted things, with misshapen flesh, long yellowing teeth, and dark beady eyes which dart hungrily about them, seeking the next victim.

Str 80 Con 65 Siz 65
 Pow 50 Dex 65 Int 50
 Build 0 HP 13 Dam. Bonus 1D4
 Move 9

Attacks per round: 3
 Fighting attacks: Cauldron Born will perform unarmed attacks in the same way as most humanoids, eschewing weapons as their filthy fingers turn to claws with which to tear flesh. It is quite probable

untreated wounds will become infected if not seen to.

Bite and hold (mnvr): If the Cauldron Born's bite strikes home it hangs on instead of using claw attacks, and worries the victim with its fangs, continuing to do **1D4** damage automatically per round. An opposed **STR** roll is required to dislodge the Cauldron Born, breaking the hold and ending the bite damage.

Fighting 60% (30/12), damage **1D6** + damage bonus

Bite and hold (mnvr) damage **1D4** per round

Dodge 40% (20/8)

Armour: Firearms and projectiles only do half of rolled damage; rounding down.

Skills: Climb 70%, Stealth 60%, Jump 70%, Read Lips 50%, Sign Language (Cauldron Born) 50%, Spot Hidden 50%

Sanity Loss: 0/1D6 to encounter a Cauldron Born

Note: Cauldron Born are all deaf and communicate mainly through their unique sign language, and see the note earlier about Cauldron Born and seawater.

Joshua Armitage, deceitful businessman and dabbler in what he doesn't understand

Beneath the friendly and sometimes jovial exterior is a man terrified by his own mortality and fully prepared to do anything to extend his existence past its natural limitations. He may already have slipped into the cold grip of insanity and not even noticed.

Str 40 Con 40 Siz 50
Pow 85 Dex 40 Int 75 Magic Points **17**
Build 0 HP 9 Dam. Bonus None Move **6**

Attacks per round: 1
Fighting (brawling) 25% (12/5), damage **1D3**
Dodge 20% (10/4)
Armour: None

Skills: Accounting 50%, Botany 45%, Credit Rating 80%, Cthulhu Mythos 15%, History 70%, English 75%, French 40%, Occult 60%, Persuade 50%, Sleight of Hand 50%

Spells: Dominate, Mental Suggestion



Daniel Harris, miserly and hateful proprietor

Not one for many words, Dan is more prone to the 'stare wide-eyed at the customers until they leave' school of retail service. He is bitter against practically everyone else for ever achieving anything in their life, and has a chip on his shoulder the size of Liverpool Town Hall. He is probably the investigators' best ally in Thorston, although he would never expose himself as such.

Str 55 Con 55 Siz 50
Pow 45 Dex 60 Int 40
Build 0 HP 10 Dam. Bonus None Move **7**

Attacks per round: 1

Fighting (brawling) 40% (20/10), damage 1D3 or cricket bat 1D8 + DB

Dodge 30% (15/6)

Armour: None

Skills: Accounting 30%, Appraise 50%,

Intimidate 50%, Listen 40%, Locksmith 50%,

Stealth 60%.



Maud, severe landlady of the Ship & Bowl

Known for rarely blinking and never smiling, Maud is the tireless proprietor of Thorston's only pub.

She's no cultist but will remain neutral if danger comes to the investigators or residents if the ghouls or the cult come to her door.

Str 40 Con 40 Siz 50

Pow 60 Dex 40 Int 50

Build 0 HP 9 Dam. Bonus None

Move 6

Attacks per round: 1

Fighting (brawling) 25% (12/5), damage 1D3

Dodge 20% (10/4)

Armour: None

Skills: Accounting 70%, Cook 60%, First Aid 40%,

Intimidate 40%, Listen 60%, Spot Hidden 60%,

Sleight of Hand 60%, Stealth 50%



Old Peter, shifty farmer and Cauldron Born collaborator

A tall and wiry man with steel grey hair and mean eyes that always seem to be narrowed in suspicion. He is customarily found stalking the Dales with his dogs, and is rarely ever seen without his double-barrelled shotgun tucked into the crook of his arm. He has a farmhouse just off the edge of the map but he's almost never there and has an undying zeal that keeps him stalking the Dales and the edges of Thorston for interlopers.

Str 50 Con 50 Siz 65

Pow 50 Dex 50 Int 55

Build 0 HP 11 Dam. Bonus None

Move 6

Attacks per round: 1

Fighting (brawling) 60% (30/12), damage 1D3



Firearms (12-gauge shotgun) 65% (32/13) damage
4D6/2D6/1D6 (10/20/50 yards)

Dodge 35% (17/7)

Armour: None

Skills: Animal Handling 60%, Climb 40%, Intimidate 60%, Listen 40%, Natural World 50%, Spot Hidden 40%, Track 60%

See page 337 of the Cthulhu core rulebook for dog stats, of which Old Peter is normally accompanied by two.

Nathaniel Cosgrove,
Old skipper and stubborn fisherman

There used to be more activity on the Thorston seafront but Nathaniel is one of the few who still heads out for a catch. Two fingers on his left hand end at the first knuckle, and he looks as though his face has been beaten into its craggy shape by a lifetime of saltwater and storms.

Str 50 Con 50 Siz 40

Pow 70 Dex 55 Int 50

Build 0 HP 9 Dam. Bonus: None

Move 6

Attacks per round: 1

Fighting (brawling) 45% (22/11), damage 1D3 or
knife damage 1D6

Dodge 27% (11/5)

Armour: None

Skills: Art and Craft (Sea shanties & folk songs)
50%, Astronomy 40%, First Aid 50%, Navigate
70%, Pilot (boat) 75%, Swim 50%



**Sally, vagabond and sometime-resident of
Thorston**

Bedraggled hair is stuffed beneath a stained cap which Sally wears pulled firmly down on her head while at work at the Ship & Bowl. She is fluent in Welsh, Mandarin, and English, and clearly knows her Bible well. She is a kindly soul who is given to bouts of suspicion after the hard life she has led, but she is fundamentally a compassionate person and has something of a mothering role within

the ‘invisible’ community of Thorston. She is only marginally aware of the cult and thinks the ghouls at night are “a hidden demonic entity” but she is the most sympathetic of all of Thorston’s residents to the investigators. She is also the most obvious and is liable to end up as cured meats along with the investigators.

Str 40 Con 40 Siz 40
 Pow 70 Dex 50 Int 60
 Build -1 HP 8 Dam. Bonus -1 Move 7

Attacks per round: 1
 Fighting (brawling) 25% (12/5), damage 1D3
 Dodge 26% (13/5)
 Armour: None
 Skills: First Aid 50%, English 60%, Mandarin 70%, History 55%, Persuade 55%, Welsh 60%



Quick towns-person name generator

Because there’s nothing worse than your Investigators questioning someone and you having to fumble around for a name!

1d10 roll	Male	Female
1	John	Mary

2	William Anna
3	Edward Emma
4	George Elizabeth
5	Charles Margaret
6	Frank Grace
7	Joseph Anne
8	Henry Bertha
9	Robert Clara
10	Thomas Alice

The Ravens of Thorston

One thing the Keeper can use as an ever-present threat with which to spook their players are the watching black birds of Thorston (Ravens, Crows, and other large dark avian life). While crowds of them hang about, squawking and flapping about on the eaves of buildings, they are never actually a threat. The Britons never paid them any mind as they saw them as the spirit of their dead king Bendigeidfran (see below) and the Norse invaders saw them as Odin watching over them. They are merely a spooky distraction and in times past they appeared on the town’s coat of arms (black raven on a light blue field).

The current thinking of the Thorston is that the birds are Odin or King Brân watching over the residents. The view of the birds outside Thorston is that of a pest.



The Great Giant King Brân

Brân the Blessed (Welsh: Bendigeidfran or Brân Fendigaid, literally “Blessed Crow”) is a giant and king of Britain in British mythology. He appears in several of the Welsh Triads, but his most significant role is in the Second Branch of the Mabinogi, *Branwen ferch Llŷr*. He is a son of Llŷr and Penarddun, and the brother of Brânwen, Manawydan, Nisien and Efnysien. The name “Brân” in Welsh is usually translated as crow or raven.

Brân in the Mabinogion

The Gael king Matholwch sails to Harlech from Eirann (Ireland) to speak with Brân the Blessed high king of the Island of the Mighty (Isle of the Mighty translates as ‘Ynys Prydeini’ and is the root of the word Britain) and to ask for the hand of his sister Branwen in marriage, thus forging an alliance between the two high kings. Bran concedes to Matholwch’s request, but the revelries are ended when Efnysien, a half-brother of Bran and Branwen, brutally mutilates Matholwch’s horses in petulance, angry that his permission was not sought in regard to the match.

Matholwch is deeply offended until Brân offers him compensation in the form of a magic cauldron that can restore the dead to life. Pleased with the gift, Matholwch and Branwen sail back to Ireland to reign.

Once in Matholwch’s kingdom, Branwen gives birth to a son, Gwern, but Efnysien’s insult continues to grieve the Gaels and, eventually, Branwen is mistreated, banished to the kitchen and beaten every day (a shocking punishment at the time... For a princess). She tames a starling and sends it across the Irish Sea with a message to her brother Bendigeidfran, who sails from Gwaelod (Under Tremadoc Bay in modern day Wales) to Ireland to rescue her

with his brother, Manawydan and a huge host of warriors, mustered from the 154 cantrefs (‘Hundreds’. An archaic form of land measurement similar to small counties) of Britain.

The Irish offer to make peace and build a house big enough to entertain Bendigeidfran but hang a hundred bags inside, supposedly containing flour but actually containing armed warriors. Efnysien, suspecting treachery, reconnoiters the hall and kills the warriors by crushing their skulls. Later, at the feast, Efnysien, again feeling insulted, murders Gwern by burning him alive, and, as a result, a vicious battle breaks out.

Seeing that the Irish are using the cauldron to revive their dead, he hides among the Irish corpses and is thrown into the cauldron by the unwitting enemy. He destroys the cauldron from within, sacrificing himself in the process.

Only seven men survive the conflict, among them Manawydan, Taliesin, (the great bard and ancestor of Merlin) and Pryderi mab Pwyll, prince of Dyfed, Branwen having herself died of a broken heart (although more likely executed as a hostage and the news was ‘softened’ for her relatives and subjects back home).

The survivors are told by a mortally wounded Brân to cut off his head and to return it to Britain. For seven years the seven survivors stay in Harlech, where they are entertained by Brân’s head, which continues to speak. They later move on to Gwales (often identified with Grassholm Island off Dyfed) where they live for eighty years without perceiving the passing of time. This story of ‘fey-time’ on an holy island would lead to the legend of a mortally wounded “Arthur” being taken to the isle of Afallan/Avalon (‘The Berth/Mathrafal’ in Shropshire). Eventually, Heilyn mab Gwyn opens the door of the

hall facing Cornwall and the sorrow of what had befallen them returns. As instructed they take the now silent head to the Gwynfryn, the “White Hill” (thought to be the location where the Tower of London now stands), where they bury it facing Europe so as to ward off invasion. The imagery of the talking head is widely considered to derive from the ancient Celtic “cult of the head”; the head was considered the home of the soul.

-Paraphrased, with additions, from Wikipedia.

It was King Brân who brought the cauldron back with from Ireland, along with his dead sister. He

knew that the cauldron would ever be sought by the Gaels so deigned that the cauldron should be buried near Pentref Glannau, a small settlement along the Dyfyrdwy (Dee) that belonged to a lord which owed fealty to Brân. Over time, that village of Celtic Britons became Chester and the hiding place of the cauldron, Thorston. With Brân’s final death the cauldron was forgotten by all except those who keep the tales of legend in their word-board. The last person to know of its true location before the Mordiggian cult was Emrys (Merlin) in AD485.





FOR
ADULT GAMERS



I Want To Play

Next Month

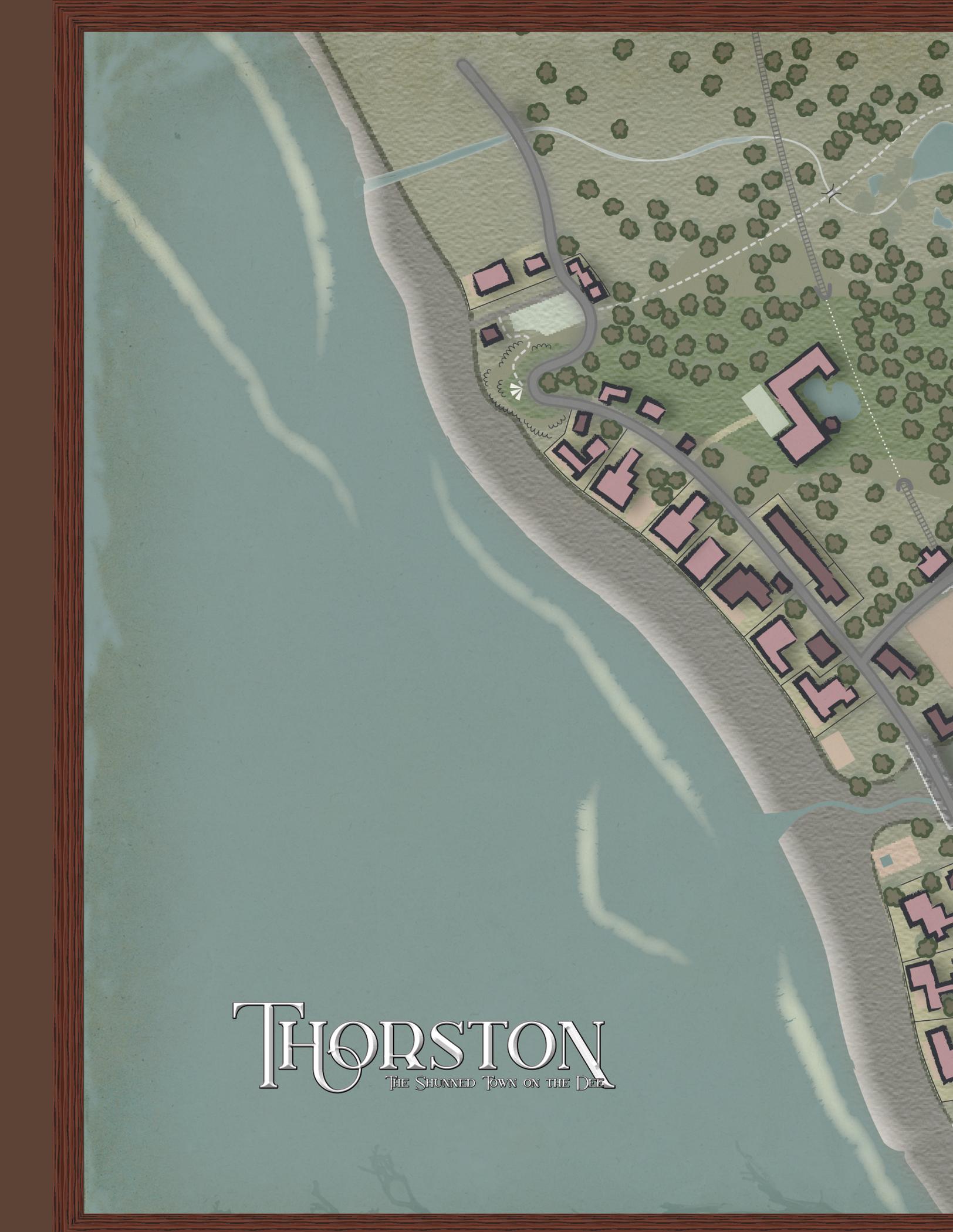


FOX
COUNTRY

7

**ADAM GAUNTLETT
& FRIENDS**

for 7th Edition
CALL of CTHULHU
MODERN DAY



THORSTON

THE SHUNNED TOWN ON THE DEE



PLAYER'S MAP

Dee estuary



The Town Of

Chorston

viking outpost & home to pagans

THORSTON DURING THE DANELAW



Legend

- 1 road to chester
- 2 stone bridge
- 3 the 'thing rock'
- 4 chief thornvald's hall
- 5 the mead hall
- 6 inn & stables
- 7 st bartholemew's (rummy)
- 8 the costermonger
- 9 the seer's house
- 10 road to osthaim
- 11 blacksmith
- 12 fish trader
- 13 road to caldy
- 14 tidal marshes
- 15 sand bank
- 16 old roman lookout



STYRIAN FOX

