

The Grim of St Mary's

Bungay, Suffolk — the Saturday before the storm of 4 August 1577.

BUNGAY, SUFFOLK, ENGLAND · 3-6 PLAYERS · ABOUT 4 HOURS ·
ELIZABETHAN (1577)

BUILT ON THE LEGEND OF: THE BLACK DOG OF BUNGAY (BLACK SHUCK), 4 AUGUST
1577

Spoiler-safe: everything in this pack may be read by players.

System-neutral. Difficulty is given in plain words (easy / hard / very hard) for you to map to the rules you play. The legend is real and cited; the adventure built on it is original fiction.

Why you are here

You are in Bungay for Saturday market — selling, buying, or waiting on the ferry across the Waveney. By noon the town is uneasy: a boy swears a black dog has watched the churchyard three nights running, a woman is being blamed for it, and the sky over the marshes has turned the colour of a bruise. The storm, everyone says, will break tomorrow at morning prayer.

What everyone in town knows

On Sunday the 4th of August 1577, while the people of Bungay were at morning prayer in St Mary's Church, a storm broke over the town so violent that the church went dark as night.

In the dark and the lightning, a black dog was seen running down the body of the church among the kneeling people. By the account printed that same year, it passed between two worshippers and wrung their necks where they knelt, and a third man it touched on the back was left shrunken 'like a piece of leather scorched in a hot fire' — yet he lived.

The same morning, a dozen miles away at Holy Trinity, Blythburgh, the dog was seen again: the steeple crashed through the roof, a man and a boy were killed, and the beast left by the north door. Marks on that door are still pointed out as its claw-burns.

East Anglia has long told of a great black hound that walks the lanes and causeways at night — Black Shuck. Bungay took the dog to heart: a black dog still rides the weathervane in the market place.

Where the legend comes from

Black Shuck — the East Anglian black dog; the 1577 Bungay and Blythburgh accounts

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Shuck

St Mary's Church, Bungay — the church where the dog appeared during the storm

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mary%27s_Church,_Bungay

Bungay — the town, its castle and its black-dog emblem

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bungay>

Church grim — the folk belief in a guardian dog tied to a churchyard, which this adventure's fiction borrows

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_grim

Abraham Fleming, A Straunge and Terrible Wunder (1577) — the pamphlet printed that year which recorded the event

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Fleming

Content notes

- Death of named townsfolk is possible (off-screen by default)
- A mob accusing a woman of witchcraft
- Grave disturbance and animal bones
- Storms, darkness, fear in a church

At this table

Bungay, the day before the storm of 4 August 1577. A boy has seen a black dog in the churchyard, a woman is being blamed for it, and the sky is turning. You have one day to find out what the town has done — and who will pay when the storm breaks at morning prayer.

SAFETY TOOLS

We use lines and veils and an X-card. Tap the card or say 'skip' and we move on, no questions asked.

Ready-made characters

Mercy Ashby

A carrier's widow selling eels at market

Tie to the legend: Her late husband drove the Blythburgh road and spoke of the dog on the causeway

Good at: Hagglng, knowing everyone

Flaw: Can't keep a secret

Hal Coote

A journeyman bell-founder passing through

Tie to the legend: He was hired to look at St Mary's cracked bell

Good at: Metal, fire, heavy lifting

Flaw: Proud and short-tempered

Dorothy Lane

A curate's sister who reads too much

Tie to the legend: Brame is her brother; she knows he's hiding something

Good at: Reading, Latin, noticing

Flaw: Terrified of dogs

Will Scarlett

A drover bringing cattle to market

Tie to the legend: His cattle wouldn't pass the churchyard wall

Good at: Animals, weather, walking all night

Flaw: Drinks when scared

Ellen Moor

A midwife from a village upriver

Tie to the legend: Joan Wetherby taught her herb-lore

Good at: Healing, calm in a crisis

Flaw: Distrusts the church

Jack Pell

A pedlar of cheap print and ballads

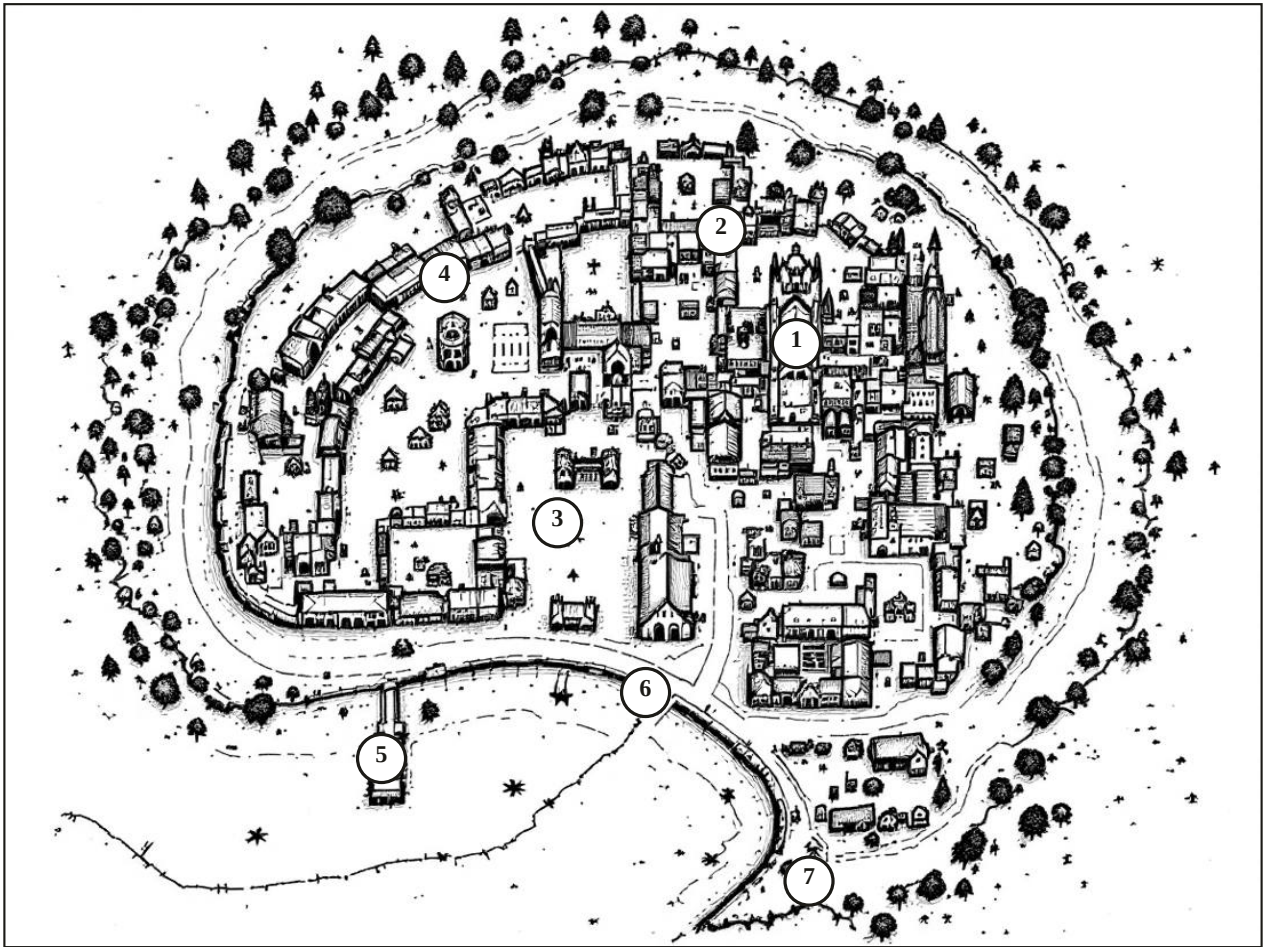
Tie to the legend: He sells the ballad sheet (Handout 1) and doesn't know where it came from

Good at: Talking, running, reading a crowd

Flaw: A liar by trade

Bungay in the river's loop

Town, churchyard, market and the roads out, drawn for play.



SCHEMATIC — NOT TO SCALE, NOT A SURVEY

1. **St Mary's Church** The big church with the square tower. Morning prayer on Sunday.
2. **The north door & hound-stone** An old side door few people use; the churchyard grass is long here.
3. **The market cross** Market place. Saturday crowds, ballad-sellers, the lock-up cage.
4. **The castle ruins** Old broken walls. Children dare each other to go in.
5. **The ferry landing** Agnes Tolly's ferry across the Waveney.
6. **The river ditch** A reedy drain running down to the river.
7. **The causeway to Blythburgh** The road south across the marshes.

A True Warning to the Folk of Waveney

Come hark, good folk of Bungay town, and mark what I do sing,
Of one that walks the causeway down when thunder's on the wing.
His coat is black as tanner's pit, his eyes are coals of red,
And iron about his neck is knit to keep him to his bed.

He keeps the ground where fathers lie, he keeps the northern door;
Let no man dig that ground, say I, or he'll keep it no more.
For loose him once, and storm will bring him prowling up the nave —
And he will know, when bells do ring, who robbed him of his grave.

Printed for the ballad-sellers of the Waveney fairs. Price one halfpenny.

To the Churchwardens of St Mary's

Friday. — Masters, I must set down that this morning I found the ground broke on the north side, hard by the old door, and the stone with the hound upon it pulled half aside, as if by some fellow seeking under it. There was a great hole and nothing in it but black water. In the earth I found a knife of the kind the tanners use for scraping hides, which I have kept. I pray you, say nothing of this to the town until the vicar's return, for folk are foolish about that door already. — N. B., curate.