

## **"The Devil's Fingers"**

Able Jakeman, the tinker, returned home to his cottage at Tadmarton on Christmas Eve, after travelling all over Banburyshire, using his skills to sharpen the knives at farms and large houses. The gathered family celebrated with much cheer and gusto, but just down the lane, the mood was much more sombre.

For Tudor Tustian lay on his death-bed, with his family in attendance. Over the night, in the quiet, apart from the rasping breath of old man Tustian, a thrumming sound could be heard. At that time, many thought this was the sound of the Devil, impatiently tapping his fingers, waiting for the person to pass away, so the Devil could grab the soul. We now know, however, that is the sound made by a death watch beetle, banging his head on the beams in the hope of attracting a mate. The beetle has spent two years as a grub, munching through the wood, but for the two or three weeks as an adult, all the male concentrates on is passing on his DNA. He is not helped by his poor eyesight so relies on head-banging to draw in a female. And even then he has to impress her, with a little dance, if he is to succeed.

So, should you be in a old cottage, attending the last hours of a friend or family member, listen closely.

If you hear a drumming sound, is it the poor beetle, or is it the Devil's Fingers?