

## Sticks and Stones and Christmas Tones - The Giants of Brimham

### *Starting at the Dancing Bear*

“Long, long ago”. Stories always seem to start with ‘long, long ago’ don’t they? But any story concerning Brimham Rocks is really, properly long ago. How long can you stretch your arms?

### *Encourage them to try stretching their arms*

Well, it’s longer than that! How long can you say the word ‘long’ for in one breath?

### *Encourage them to try*

That’s impressive, but it’s longer than that. How long is a piece of string? Well, that depends of course. But even the longest string, holding up all the Christmas cards ever received by the most popular person in the world isn’t anywhere near as long as the ‘long ago’ that this story concerns.

For this story, we have to go back long before our lifetime (even yours, madam), long before Christmas was even called Christmas, long before there were even dinosaurs roaming the land. Back to the origins of this site, the creation of Brimham Rocks.

Now scientists will tell you that these rocks were created over 300 million years ago by millstone grit washing down from a huge mountain range and compacting under a giant river delta and then eroding during, and following, the last ice age some 18,000 years ago down to the rocks that we see today.

But what do scientists know?! And why let our understanding of the truth get in the way of a good story? You see, we humans only tend to believe what we can see, but really, we know that there is magic that we can neither see, nor explain. And just because we can’t see it, it doesn’t mean it’s not there.

To quote a famous Christmas article from the New York Sun newspaper in 1897:

“The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.”

I’m prepared to guess that nobody here has actually seen Father Christmas dropping down chimneys on Christmas Eve, but that’s no reason not to believe.

We are gathered here by a bear. Not a scary bear, but a Dancing Bear. That’s the name that has been given to the rock behind you. But who’s to say that wasn’t once a real bear, turned to stone by an evil sorcerer. Or sorceress? Follow me to find out more about the sticks and the stones surrounding us.

### *(New Location – Druid’s Writing Desk)*

Now, you may well say that these aren’t stones, they are rocks. These aren’t sticks, they are trees, but then it depends on your sense of proportion.

Once, there were two Giants. Let’s call them.....what shall we call them? *(children name the giants and we use those names for the rest of the story. For now, they shall be A and B)*

This rock beside us has been called the Druid's Writing Desk, after the Victorians believed that these rocks could have been carved by ancient human druids. But that's ridiculous. No human could reach a table of that size. A Giant, on the other hand, could happily use that as a writing desk. If only he could write. Instead, it was a fine place to sit and rest his head in his hands.

A&B were good friends. They had come down from the huge mountain range that stretched all the way from Scotland to Norway; to live, and rule, over Brimham. (Those mountains, by the way, were created when what is now North America collided with what is now Europe. Grown-ups might want to hold onto your brains in case they explode!)

A&B didn't worry themselves about these things. They would spend their days stomping around in a giant kind of way and looking after the land around them. The spirits of the weather and the spirits of the heather, that surround us to this day, loved these giants as they made the area safe. The sun always shone, and the birds and insects made homes in the giants' beards. As they stomped around, A&B took care not to flatten too many trees, but it's true that some of the rocky ground broke up into boulders under the weight of their feet. Shall we all try to be giants for a moment and stomp around a bit (if only to warm ourselves up!).

You see, everything was harmonious at Brimham and that was because A&B had agreed to share the ruling of the land. They had made themselves the Kings of Brimham – one was the Holly King and the other was the Oak King, named after their favourite trees. They had agreed that (A) the Holly King would rule the land for half the year from the Summer Solstice (21st June) until the Winter Solstice (21<sup>st</sup> December), when (B) the Oak King would take over. One year, however, all that changed.

*(Move to Idol)*

One year, around Christmas time, B the Oak King came to claim his crown to rule the land, but A refused to surrender his Holly Crown. He had become greedy with power, and he actually liked the feeling of the prickly crown on his huge head. He refused to hand over power. Well for the first time in their lives the two Giants began to argue. A called B a.....what do you think he called him? *(suggestions from the children)* and in return B called A a *(suggestions)*. As they argued something very strange happened. The sun went behind a cloud and the clouds became bigger and blacker. The birds all fled from the giants' beards and the ground began to rumble beneath them. Soon the heavens had opened, and the rains fell, bringing huge rivers down from the mountains to the North. The lovely land around them began to flood. The spirits of the weather and the spirits of the heather began to panic. The heather spirits fled from this area and spread themselves out across the peaty earth to hide, while the weather spirits whizzed round and round the bottom of the rocks frantically, wearing away the some of the rocks like this one you can see here *(Idol)*. As the water rose the Giants strode off in different directions to find high ground to perch on, but we're all going to stride in the same direction along here. As you walk, perhaps you will hear the whisperings of the spirits. Perhaps you could even add to the whispering by repeating this rhyme as we walk:

*Spirits of the heather  
And spirits of the weather  
We must stop this argument  
and bring them back together*

*(New location –Smartie Tube)*

The rain continued to fall, and the ground continued to flood, bringing with it more grit from the mountains, which compounded under the giant's feet as they ran for higher ground, to make more

rock. A&B were now stranded on separate islands, but they were still mad. They grabbed handfuls of rocks and clumps of trees from under the rising water to hurl at one another. The rocks landed in the broken forms that you can see all around you, slowly creating stepping stones between the giants. The trees were thrown as spears at one another. You may have heard of the saying “Sticks and stones may break my bones” and that’s exactly what they were trying to do. From the distance that they were apart, neither giant could manage that killer blow, but one spear was thrown with such force that it even pierced through a rock, as you can see here (*Smartie tube*).

Soon the thrown rocks would create enough stepping stones for the Giants to be able to cross the rising water and eventually kill one another. The weather spirits and the heather spirits had to do something. Soon, by working their magic together, they came up with a plan.

*Spirits of the heather  
And spirits of the weather  
Work your magic on these giants  
Bring them back together*

*(Move to the split rock)*

One evening, B the Oak King decided there were enough stepping stones for him to be able to jump across to where the A, the Holly King, lay. He planned to strike him as he slept and then he could take his rightful place as the King of Brimham – not just until the next solstice, but for the whole year. He quietly leapt from rock to rock (well, as quietly as you can when you’re a giant) and found A lying on top of this very rock. He raised his big club, which he had made out of a particularly heavy tree trunk, and struck it down to the rock where A’s head lay. However, A was already alert to this and rolled aside just as the club cleaved this rock in two, as you can see here. Now they were both mad. Surely this was going to be the end of one of the giants. But just at that moment they noticed something hanging from a tree that had sprouted up from within a crack in the rocks. It was one of A’s socks. A was confused. He didn’t make a habit of taking off his socks and he couldn’t recall having hung it in the tree, but there it was. What’s more, it had writing on it. In magical embroidered writing it said “To B, the Oak King”. B looked at the sock, then at the Holly King stood beside him.

“For me?” he said, reaching out his massive hand to pluck the sock from the tree. A didn’t want to admit that he hadn’t put the sock there, or that he couldn’t have written the message because, as we know, giants can’t write. Instead, he just grunted.

Inside the sock, B found the most beautiful sprig of holly that he had ever seen. It immediately lifted his heart and he remembered how they had once been such good friends. He put down his club. “Thank you, my friend” he muttered. And A instantly knew what he had to do. He removed his holly crown and offered it to the Oak King. The rain stopped. The waters receded. The Giants were friends once more. But this isn’t quite the end. Follow me, my friends, through the scattered boulders that the Giants left in place as a reminder that they must never fall out ever again, to the finest Oak tree on this site.

*(Oak Tree near the upper car park)*

So, it’s worth remembering that sticks and stones can break your bones, but we will always overcome upset with the help of our spirits.

Obviously, the giants are long gone from Brimham. It's a shame really - we could use them today to help flatten down the invasive bracken and to uproot some of the pesky birch trees that spread and prevent the greater diversity of plants and wildlife that can be found here. Thankfully, we've got the nice people at the National Trust to look after this site and to encourage us not to further erode the rocks too quickly. The spirits of the weather will still do as they wish, but the human spirit will try to look after these rocks so that we can still enjoy them a long, long, long time from now, into the future. And as for Spirit; well, the spirit of Christmas came to Brimham that year. The Holly King and the Oak King vowed to never argue again, and B, the Oak King, was so touched by his gift that he left a sock, or you could say a stocking, with a little gift in it for his friend every Winter solstice from thereon. If you look closely in this oak tree, you might find one of his gifts for you to take home with you. Thank you for joining me and have a truly magical Christmas.

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