The History of Robin Hood Stories

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Summary of the earliest sources : by 1300, the name "Robin Hood" (or some variant) was in common use as either a general term for outlaws, or some kind of local folk-hero, or both. During the 1400's, many rhymes, ballads, and "games" (town festivals and/or skits) about him became common and popular. Several of the earliest sources (whose accuracy is completely unknown) place him in the mid-to-late 1200's and/or associate him with a King Edward. King Edward I, II, and III ruled from 1272-1377 which doesn't help much, but a couple of the sources describe the king as "comely" (handsome), which Edward III (1327-1377) was also called.

The pre-1500 materials refer to Robin or Robert Hood, often mention Little John, and occasionally name Much, Will Scarlet (from "scarlock", which means he's good at breaking into places), and Friar Tuck (only once), always along with a local sheriff. Robin and his men are usually described as "outlaws", and are very good fighters with bows and swords, but Robin's excellence with a bow is only mentioned a few times, and he does not fight injustice for a greater good. Robin and his men often kill their opponents (including the sheriff), and are always described as "yeomen" (commoners – more than peasants, but less than knights or nobles – probably landholders or skilled workers). Robin is devout in general, and very dedicated to the Virgin Mary in particular. Many of the stories take place in a forest setting, and his place of operation is usually Barnsdale, Sherwood, or Nottingham. And yes, they are actually called "merry men", and dress in green.

No references to other components of the "modern" Robin Hood myth are present : no King Richard, Prince John, or Maid Marian, no steal-from-the-rich-to-give-to-the-poor, no Saxon/Norman conflicts, no "Robin, Earl of Loxley" or "Earl of Huntingdon". These start to get layered upon the existing stories from the 1500's on.

1200's

The oldest references to Robin Hood are names in court records. Around **1213** a Robert Hood killed Ralph of Cirencester in the Abbot of Cirencester's garden. A Robert Hood, or Robert Hod, or Hobbehod (all apparently the same man), referred to nine times in the Yorkshire Pipe Rolls between **1226-1234**, is declared a fugitive (and nicknamed Hobbehod) because of money owed to a church in York. Around the same time, the sheriff of Yorkshire, who had previously been the sheriff of Nottingham, tracked down and killed a Robert of Wetherby, an "outlaw and evildoer" (some speculate these two Roberts are the same man). The first known example of applying "Robin Hood" as standard name for an outlaw dates to **1262** in Berkshire where the surname "Robehod" was given to a man after he had been outlawed, and apparently <u>because</u> he had been outlawed (William Robehod, formerly William, son of Robert le Fevere). And between **1261-1300** there are at least eight references to "Rabunhod" in various regions across England, from Berkshire in the south to York in the north. This suggests two possibilities : either an early form of the Robin Hood legend was already well established in the mid-13th century; or the name "Robin Hood" (as the generic name for an outlaw) preceded the stories that we know, so that the man of the legend was given that name because it was considered appropriate.

Altho there is <u>no</u> connection between Robin Hood and Loxley in the stories until the early 1600's, there is one tantalizing coincidence : the published records of Huntingdon refer to land held by yeomans Robert-de-Lokesley in 1242, Thomas-de-Lockely in 1247, and Roger-de-Lovetot in 1247. It appears the Loxley land was dispossessed in **1247** and given to Roger de Lovetot who became the sheriff of Nottingham and Derbyshire from 1255-1258. Interestingly, betrayal <u>by</u> the sheriff is a theme that occurs twice more before 1600.

A "Robin" and "Marion" figured in 13th century French "pastourelles" (of which ***Jeu de Robin et Marion*** **c.1280** is a literary version, and is unrelated to the English legends) and presided over the French May festivities. "This Robin and Marion tended to preside, in the intervals between the attempted seduction of the latter by a series of knights, over a variety of rustic pastimes" (Dobson and Taylor). D&T regard it as "highly probable" that this French Robin's name and functions travelled to the English May Games where they fused with the Robin Hood legend.

1300's

A Robert Hood and his wife Matilda (not from the Fitzwater family–see Munday's 1598 plays, below) are recorded in the court rolls of Wakefield, England in **1316** and **1317**.

According to royal records, King Edward II was at Nottingham in November **1323**. And in Exchequer documents of royal household expenses, the name "Robyn Hode" is listed as a porter once in June **1323**, and several times as a valet, between March and November of **1324**. But within a year after that he was dismissed from the king's service (in good standing, because he received a large bonus) "because he was no longer able to work". Some of these elements are similar to those in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* ballad, below (1475).

Robin Hood's Bay in Yorkshire is mentioned in correspondence from the years **1324-1346**, between the Count of Flanders and King Edward [not confirmed].

The Tale of Gamelyn (**c.1360**) is the earliest known ballad about a "forest outlaw", and may have been inspired by now-lost tales of Robin Hood and/or contributed to the later ballads of him. Gamelyn is unjustly exiled by his brother the sheriff, and meets some outlaws in the forest who help him get revenge. (34 screens)

The first literary mention of any kind of Robin Hood tradition occurs in ***Piers Plowman*** (**c.1374**) by William Langland in which Sloth, the lazy priest, says:

> *I know not perfectly my Lord's Prayer as the priest sings it,*
> *But I know rhymes of Robyn Hood and Randolph, Earl of Chester.*

The last known Randolph Earl of Chester died around 1232 (the other two died in 1129 and 1153).

John Gower uses the names Robin and Marion (as generic names for a manservant and maid) in his ***Mirour de l'Homme*** (**c.1377**), probably taken from the French pastourelles.

The ***Scotichronicon*** (**c.1380**) by Scottish John of Fordun mentions Robert Hood under the year **1265**, and implies that Robert was a supporter of Simon-de-Montefort, who led a rebellion against King Henry III :

> *"In that year also the disinherited English barons and those loyal to the king clashed fiercely; amongst them Roger de Mortimer occupied the Welsh Marches and John-de-Eyville occupied the Isle of Ely; Robert Hood was an outlaw amongst the woodland briars and thorns. Between them they inflicted a vast amount of slaughter on the common and ordinary folk, cities and merchants. King Henry, however, along with his son Prince Edward and a huge army also besieged the very well fortified castle of Kenilworth, where almost all the nobles who were rebelling against the king had taken refuge. There the remnants of Simon-de-Montfort's following, seeing that the castle with its towers and protecting walls was impregnable, defended themselves steadily with all their might. At length, worn out by lack of food and starvation, they handed over the castle on the condition that they keep life and limb."*

Found in the "Public Records Office" is this pardon that reads, "*Robert Hode otherwise known as Robert Dore of Wadsley (West Riding) given the King's pardon on 22nd May **1382***" [not confirmed].

"Merry-man" has referred to the follower of an outlaw since at least **1386**.

1400's

The earliest recorded Robin Hood rhyme, from the **early 15th century** :

> *Robyn Hode in Scherewode stood*

In ***Orygynale Chronicle*** (**c.1420**) by Scottish Andrew of Wyntoun, listed under the year **1283** (Edward I) :

> *Little John and Robyne Hude*
> *Wayth-men* were commended good;* *men who lie in wait; robbers
> *In Inglewood and Barnsdale*

They practiced all this time their trade

The earliest existing reference to a Robin Hood game was in **1426** in Exeter.

"*Robin Hode in Barnsdale stood*" is recorded in **1429** as part of a legal formula.

In **1439** a petition was presented to Parliament concerning Piers Venables of Derbyshire. Piers had become an outlaw when he helped rescue a prisoner. The petition then says that "*having no other livelihood, he gathered and assembled unto him many misdoers, being of his clothing* [that is, wearing his colors], *and in manner of insurrection, went into the woods in that country, like it had be Robyn-hode and his men*."

The continuation of the ***Scotichronicon*** by John's Scottish pupil Walter Bower (**c.1440**) names Robert Hood, Little John, Barnsdale, and a sheriff who has tried to capture Robert many times, under the year **1266** :

> *Then arose the famous murderer* [siccarius = knifer = cut-throat], *Robert Hood, as well as Little John, together with their accomplices from among the disinherited, whom the foolish populace are so inordinately fond of celebrating both in tragedies and comedies, and about whom they are delighted to hear the jesters and minstrels sing above all other ballads. About whom also certain praiseworthy things are told, as appears in this -- that when once in Barnsdale, avoiding the anger of the king* [Henry] *and the threats of the prince* [Edward], *he was according to his custom most devoutly hearing Mass and had no wish on any account to interrupt the service -- on a certain day, when he was hearing Mass, having been discovered in that very secluded place in the woods when the Mass was taking place by a certain sheriff (viscount) and servant of the king, who had very often lain in wait for him previously, there came to him those who had found this out from their men to suggest that he should make every effort to flee. This, on account of his reverence for the sacrament in which he was then devoutly involved, he completely refused to do. But, the rest of his men trembling through fear of death, Robert, trusting in the one so great whom he worshipped, with the few who then bravely remained with him, confronted his enemies and easily overcame them, and enriched by the spoils he took from them and their ransom, ever afterward singled out the servants of the church and the Masses to be held in greater respect, bearing in mind what is commonly said: "God harkens to him who hears Mass frequently."*

The earliest surviving text of a Robin Hood ballad is ***Robin Hood and the Monk*** (**c.1450**). It names Robyn Hode, Little John (who calls himself a "merry man"), Much, Will Scathlok (Scarlet), refers to the sheriff of Nottingham, and says the unnamed King is "comely" (handsome). In the course of Robin's capture and escape, 15 men are killed (including a boy who was merely a witness) by Robin and his men. The original rhymes in Middle English have been sacrificed for clarity in places.

In summer, when the woods be bright,
And leaves be large and long,
It is full merry in fair forest
To hear the birds' song.

To see the deer draw to the dale,
And leave the hills high,
And shade them[selves] in the leaves green,
Under the green-wood trees.

It befell on Whitson* *late May
Early in a May morning,
The sun up fair did shine,
And the birds merry did sing.

"This is a merry morning," said Little John,
"By Him that died on [the] Cross;
A more merry man than I am one
Lives not in Christendom.

"Pluck up thy heart, my dear master,"
Little John did say,
"And think it is a full fair time
In a morning of May."

"Yes, [but] one thing grieves me," said Robyn,
"And does my heart much woe:
That I may not any solemn day
To Mass nor Matins* go. *sunrise prayer

"It is two weeks and more," said he,
"Since I my Savior see;
Today I will [go] to Notyngham," said Robyn,
"With the might of Virgin Mary."

Then spoke Much, the miller's son,
(Ever more [may good] fortune him befall!)
"Take twelve of thy strong yeomen,
Well weaponed, by thy side.
Such [a] one [that] would [try to] slay thee,

Those twelve [would] dare not abide."

"Of all my merry men," said Robyn,
"By my faith I will none have,
But [for] Little John [who] shall bear my bow,
Till that [time] I desire to draw."

"Thou shall bear thine own," said Little John,
"Master, and I will bear mine,
And we will shoot a penny[1]," said Little John,
Under the green-wood trees."

"I will not shoot a penny," said Robyn Hode,
"In faith, Little John, with thee,
But ever for one as thou shoots," said Robyn,
"In faith I hold thee three[2]."

Thus shot they forth, these yeomen two,
Both at bush and shrub,
Till Little John won off his master
Five shillings for socks and shoes.

A terrible argument fell between them,
As they went by the way;
Little John said he had won five shillings,
And Robyn Hode said, curtly, "nay".

With that Robyn Hode called Little John liar,
And struck him with his hand;
Little John grew angry therewith,
And pulled out his bright sword.

"Were thou not my master," said Little John,
"Thou should by my sword [be] very sore;
Get thee a man where thou will,
For thou has me no more."

Then Robyn went to Notyngham,
Himself mourning alone,
And Little John to merry Scherwode,
The paths he knew each one.

When Robyn came to Notyngham,
Certainly without lie,
He prayed to God and Virgin Mary
To bring him out safe again.

He went in to Saint Mary church,
And knelt down before the Cross;
All that ever were within the church
Beheld well Robyn Hode.

Beside him stood a great-headed monk,
I pray to God, woe he be!
At once he knew good Robyn,
As soon as he him see.

Out at the door he ran,
At once and immediately;
All the gates of Notyngham
He made to be barred every one.

"Rise up," he said, "thou proud sheriff,
Hurry thee and make thee ready;
I have spied the king's felon,
Truly he is in this town.

"I have spied the false felon,
As he stands at his mass;
It is long of thee*," said the monk, *your fault
"If ever from us he pass*. *escapes

"This traitor's name is Robyn Hode,
Under the green-wood trees;
He robbed me once of a hundred pound*, *about $50,000!
It shall never [be] out of my mind."

Up then rose this proud sheriff,
And quickly made him[self] ready;
Many was the mother's son
To the church with him did go.

In at the doors they fiercely thrust,
With staves full good wone
"Alas, alas!" said Robyn Hode,
"Now I miss Little John."

But Robyn took out a two-handed sword,
That hung down by his knee;
There as the sheriff and his men stood thickest
Towards them ran he.

Thrice through at them he ran then,
Truly as I you tell,
And wounded many a mother's son,
And twelve he slew that day.

His sword upon the sheriff's head
Certainly he broke in two;
"The smith that thee made," said Robyn,
"I pray to God, work him woe!

"For now am I weaponless," said Robyn,
"Alas! against my will;
Unless I may flee from these traitors,
I know they will me kill."

Robyn into their church ran,
Through out them each one,
<A page is missing in the manuscript, about 12 stanzas>
…
<Next, Robin's men hear of his capture and are greatly upset>

Some fell in swooning as [if] they were dead,
And lay still as any stone;
None of them were in their [right] mind
But only Little John.

"Cease your wailing," said Little John,
"For [the] love [of] Him that died on the Cross.
Ye that should be stouthearted men;

It is [a] great shame to see.

"Our master has been hard beset [before]
And yet escaped away;
Pluck up your hearts, and leave this lament,
And listen [to] what I shall say.

"He has served Our Lady many a day,
And yet will [again], surely;
Therefore I trust in her especially
No wicked death shall he die.

"Therefore be glad," said Little John,
"And let this mourning be;
And I shall be the monk's guide*, *take care of him
With the might of Virgin Mary,
If I meet him," said Little John.
"We will go, but [only] we two.

"Look that ye keep well our meeting-tree,
Under the leaves small,
And spare none of this venison,
That wanders in this vale."

Forth then went these yeomen two,
Little John and Much together,
And looked on [from] Much's uncle's house;
[Where] the highway lay full near .

Little John stood at a window in the morning,
And looked forth from an upper room;
He was watching when the monk came riding,
And with him a little Page.

"By my faith," said Little John to Much,
"I can tell thee tidings good;
I see where the monk comes riding,
I know him by his wide hood."

They went into the road, these yeomen both,
As courteous men and polite;
They asked tidings of the monk,
As [if] they had been his friend.

"From whence come ye?" said Little John,
"Tell us tidings, I you pray,
Of a false outlaw,
Was taken yesterday.

"He robbed me and my fellows both
Of twenty marks for certain;
If that false outlaw be taken,
Truly we would be glad."

"So did he me," said the monk,
Of a hundred pound and more;
I laid first hand upon him,
Ye may thank me therefore."

"I pray God thank you," said Little John,
"And we will, when we may;
We will go with you, with your leave,
And bring you on your way.

"For Robyn Hode has many a wild fellow,
I tell you for certain;
If they knew ye rode this way,
In faith ye should be slain."

As they went talking by the road,
The monk and Little John,
John took the monk's horse by the head,
At once and immediately.

John took the monk's horse by the head,
Truly as I you tell;
So did Much the little Page,
For he should not escape away.

By the throat of the hood
John pulled the monk down;
John was nothing of him afraid,
He let him fall on his crown.

Little John was so distressed,
And drew out his sword in haste;
The monk saw he should be dead,
Loud mercy did he cry.

"He was my master," said Little John,
"That thou has brought in misfortune;
Thou shall never come to our king,
For to tell him [the] tale."

John struck off the monk's head,
No longer would he dwell;
So did Much the little Page,
For fear lest he would tell.

There they buried them both,
In neither bog nor heath,
And Little John and Much together
Bore the letters to our king.

[Little John came in unto the king,]
He knelt down upon his knee :
"God save you, my leige lord,
Jesus save and watch over thee!

"God save you, my leige king!"
To speak John was full bold;
He gave him the letters in his hand,
The king did them unfold.

The king read the letters immediately,
And said, "As may I thrive!
There was never [a] yeoman in merry England
I longed so sore[ly] to see*. *as Robin Hood

"Where is the monk that these should have brought?"
Our king did say.
"By my pledge," said Little John,
"He died along the way."

The king gave Much and Little John
Twenty pound for certain,
And made them yeomen of the crown,
And bade them go again.

He gave John the seal in hand,
The sheriff for to bear,
To bring Robyn to him,
And no man do him harm.

John took his leave of our king,
The truth as I you tell;
The nearest way to Notyngham
To take, he went that way.

When John came to Notyngham
The gates were barred each one;
John called up the porter*, *jailer
He answered soon immediately.

"What is the cause," said Little John,
"Thou barred the gates so fast?"
"Because of Robyn Hode," said [the] porter,
"In deep prison is cast.

"John and Much and Will Scathlok,
Truly as I you tell,
They slew our men upon our walls,
And assaulted us every day."

Little John asked after the sheriff,
And soon he him found;
He opened the king's private seal,
And gave him in his hand.

When the sheriff saw the king's seal,
He did [take] off his hood immediately.
"Where is the monk that bore the letters?"
He said to Little John.

"The king is so fond of him," said Little John,
"Truly as I you tell,
He has made him abbot of Westmynster,
A lord of that abby."

The sheriff made John good cheer,
And gave him wine of the best;
At night they went to their beds,
And every man to his rest.

When the sheriff was on sleep,
Drunk of wine and ale,
Little John and Much truly
Took the way unto the jail.

Little John called up the jailer,
And bade him rise immediately;
He said Robyn Hode had broken the prison,
And out of it was gone.

The porter rose immediately [for] certain,
As soon as he heard John call;
Little John was ready with a sword,
And stabbed him through to the wall.

"Now will I be jailer," said Little John,
And took the keys in hand;
He took the way to Robyn Hode,
And soon he him unbound.

He gave him a good sword in his hand,
His head therewith to keep,
And there as the walls were lowest
Immediately down did they leap.

By [the time] that the cock began to crow,
[And] the day began to spring,
The sheriff found the jailer dead;
The town bell made he ring.

He made a decree throughout all the town;
Whether he be yeoman or knave
That could bring him Robyn Hode,
His reward he should have.

"For I dare never," said the sheriff,
"Come before our king;
For if I do, I know [for] certain
Truly he will me hang."

The sheriff made to search Notyngham,
Both by street and alley,
But Robyn was in merry Scherwode,
As carefree as [a] leaf on [a] tree.

Then spoke good Little John,
To Robyn Hode did he say,
"I have done thee a good turn for an ill,
Repay me when thou may.

"I have done thee a good turn," said Little John,
"Truly as I thee tell;
I have brought thee under the green-wood trees;
Farewell, and have good day."

"Nay, by my pledge," said Robyn,
"So shall it never be;
I make thee master," said Robyn,
"Of all my men and me."

"Nay, by my pledge," said Little John,
"So shall it never be;
But let me be a fellow," said Little John,
"No other heed(keep?) I be."

Thus John got Robyn Hode out of prison,
Certainly without lie;
When his men saw him whole and sound,
Truly they were full glad.

They filled in wine and made them glad,
Under the leaves small,

And ate pasties of venison,
That good was with ale.

Then word came to our king
How Robyn Hode was gone,
And how the sheriff of Notyngham
Dare never look him upon.

Then spoke our handsome king,
In an anger high :
"Little John has deceived the sheriff,
In faith so has he me.

"Little John has deceived us both,
And that full well I see;
Or else the sheriff of Notyngham
High hung should he be.

"I made them yeomen of the crown,
And gave them money with my hand;
I gave them pardon," said our king,
"Throughout all merry England.

"I gave them pardon," then said our king;
"I say, as may I thrive!
Truly such a yeoman as he is one
In all England are not three.

"He is true to his master," said our king;
"I say, by sweet Saint John,
He loves better Robyn Hode
Than he does us each one.

"Robyn Hode is [for]ever [honor-]bound to him,
Both in street and stable;
Speak no more of this matter," said our king,
"But John has deceived us all."

Thus ends the talking of the monk
And Robyn Hode indeed.
God, that is ever a crowned king,
Bring us all to His bliss!

1 : shooting arrows at targets for penny wagers
2 : "For every penny that you wager, I'll bet you three"

Also written **c.1450**, ***Robin and Gandelyn*** may or may not be referring to Robin Hood. In it, a man named Robyn (no "Hood") dies by the arrow of another, and is avenged by Gandelyn. The similarity between the names Gandelyn and Gamelyn (above) also offers a possible connection to Robin Hood. (3 screens)

In the margin of the ***Polychronicon*** (c.1420) written by a monk in Latin (**c.1460**) :

> *Around this time, according to popular opinion, a certain outlaw named Robin Hood, with his accomplices, infested Sherwood and other law-abiding areas of England with continuous robberies.*

The scholar who found this note says that it is referring to the time of King Edward I (**1272-1307**).

At some point in the 1400's, the long-standing May games became associated with Robin Hood – there are many entries in church records from all parts of England which show that the spring folk-festival had incorporated plays involving Robin Hood and his men. Later, Robin became the "king" of the festival, presiding over the events along with the May queen, who had probably already been named Marian from the French pastourelles. Eventually, thru the games, the two became associated with one another.

In ***The Wright's Chaste Wife, A Merry Tale*** (**c.1462**) by Adam of Cobsam :

> *He that made this song full good,*
> *Came of the northern and of the southern blood,*
> *And somewhat kin to Robyn Hode…*

Sir John II Paston (1442-1479) was apparently a big fan of Robin Hood, and in **1473** wrote to his brother about W. Woode departing for Barnsdale and leaving him without an actor "to play Saint John and Robyn Hod and the sheriff of Nottingham". Paston may be referring to, and indeed may have even had a hand in writing, the following entry…

The fragmentary, theatre-like ***Robyn Hode and the Shryff of Notyngham*** (**c.1475**) names Robyn Hode, Friar Tuck, and a sheriff who is willing to pay handsomely to have Robin caught or killed. Note : **all** speaker names, actions, and locations in the following are modern-day guesses! The original source has only what is spoken, with no explanations. There are many ways to arrange who is saying and doing what. Underlined names are

"certain", and dotted-underlined names are "probable". The original rhymes in Middle English have been sacrificed for clarity in places.

Scene One [*set in the forest*]

Knight : Sir Sheriff, for thy sake / Robyn Hode will I take.
Sheriff : I will give thee gold and fee[1] / If this promise thou keep for me.
[*The Sheriff exits, and Robin Hood enters*]
Knight : Robyn Hode, fair and free, / Under this tree shoot with me.
Robin : With thee, shoot I will / All thy wishes to fulfill.
Knight : Have at the target.
[*They shoot at the target*]
Robin : And I cleave the stick[2].
[*Robin wins*]
Knight : Let us cast the stone.
Robin : I am willing, by Saint John.
[*They throw stones*]
Knight : Let us cast the axle-tree.
[*They toss wooden axles-large, heavy things*]
Knight : Have a foot before thee[3].
[*They wrestle, and Robin throws the knight*]
Robin : Sir Knight, ye have a fall.
Knight : And I, thee Robyn, repay shall.
[*The Knight starts to attack Robin, intending to kill him*]
Robin : A curse on thee, I blow my horn.
[*Robin blows his horn to summon help*]
Knight : It were better to be un-born.
Robin : Let us fight to the death.
Knight : He that flees, God give him mischance.
[*They sword fight, and Robin wins*]
Robin : Now I have the mastery here, / Off I smite this sorry neck.
[*Robin decapitates the knight*]
Robin : This knight's clothes will I wear / And my hood his head will bear.
[*Robin dresses in the knight's clothing, and places the head in his hood*]

Could also be :
Robin
Knight
Knight

1 : a gift of land, on condition of service to a superior
2 : either the Knight's arrow, or a stick stuck in the ground in front of the bull's-eye
3 : presumably a challenge to wrestle, by naming the opening stance

Scene Two [*the "outlaws" could be any of Robin's men; one of them is probably Little John*]

Outlaw : Well met, fellow men. / What hearest thou of good Robyn?
Outlaw : Robyn Hode and his company / By the Sheriff taken be.
Outlaw : [Let's] set [out] on foot with good will, / And the sheriff will we kill.
[*The outlaws travel and come upon, or enter, a fight* :]
Outlaw : Behold well Friar Tuck / How he doth his bow pluck[4].
Sheriff : Yield you, sirs, to the Sheriff, / Or else shall your bows break.
[*The outlaws are captured*]
Outlaw : Now we be bound all the same. / Friar Tuck, this is no game.
[*The Sheriff calls to Robin* :]
Sheriff : Come thou forth, thou false outlaw. / Thou shall be hung and drawn.
[*Robin surrenders*]
Robin : Now alas, what shall we do? / We must to the prison go.
[*At the prison gate* :]
Sheriff : Open the gates without delay, / And let these thieves in straightaway.

Could be Friar Tuck

4 : as he shoots arrows

A Gest of Robyn Hode (**c.1475**) attempts to unite eight episodes into a single story ("gest" means stories or deeds). It names Robyn Hode, Little John, William Scarlok, and Much. The action takes place in Barnsdale and Nottingham, and the current king is "Edward" who is described as "comely" (handsome). This story is the source of the archery contest used to trap Robin, and describes the outlaws as "merry men" who dress themselves in green. This story apparently also started Robin's reputation as someone who helps the poor (he helps a temporarily poor knight, he says at one point that he will give the next man he meets some money if he is poor, and the story ends with "*For he was a good outlaw / And did poor men much good*"), but this is the only time his charity is mentioned in the existing pre-1500 materials. It also says that Robin "*Would never do a company harm / That any woman was in*". Finally, when instructing his men on who to rob, he says to leave the farmers, knights, and squires alone, but to target the bishops and archbishops (who carried large sums of church money), and the sheriff of Nottingham. While Robin does accept the king's pardon and enters into his service, he later rejects it and returns to the forest to live as an outlaw.

<u>Fight 1</u> – Robin refuses to eat unless he has a guest. Little John finds a poor knight with only 10 shillings. It turns out that the knight's son killed someone in a joust and the knight had to borrow 400 pounds [$200,000!] *from St. Mary's Abbey in York to pay the bail. Now, the loan is due, and the knight doesn't have the money and will lose his lands. Finding him to be honest, Robin loans him the money in St. Mary's name. Little John, Much the Miller's Son, and Scarlock insist on giving him fine clothing, a packhorse and a warhorse, and because a knight should have an attendant, Little John goes with him.*

<u>Fight 2</u> – The abbot of St. Mary's and others are eager to seize the knight's land. The knight pretends that he still doesn't have the gold and pleads with the abbot for mercy. The abbot insists on payment, so the knight reveals his deception and pays him, telling him that had he shown leniency the knight would have paid him more. The knight returns home, collects money, and has fine bows and arrows made to repay Robin. On his way to Robin in Barnsdale, he is delayed to help a yeoman in a wrestling match.

<u>Fight 3</u> – Little John goes to Nottingham, enters and wins an archery contest. The sheriff is impressed and drafts Little John into his service. After spending some months with the sheriff, one day Little John wakes late and wants to eat. The steward, the bottler, and finally the cook try to stop him, because it was not meal time. The cook puts up a good fight, and Little John proposes that he should come to the forest and join the band. The cook agrees and they make off with the sheriff's treasure. Later, Little John lures the sheriff into meeting Robin Hood, where they trap him. In exchange for his freedom, the sheriff promises not to harm Robin.

<u>Fight 4</u> – Robin again refuses to eat unless he has a guest. The men catch a monk from St. Mary's Abbey who is rude and dishonest, and so Robin robs him of 800 pounds, claiming the virgin Mary has sent this payment. When the knight shows up, he explains that he is late because he saved the yeoman at the wrestling. Robin tells him that whoever helps a yeoman is his friend, and refuses to accept repayment. When the knight gives him the bows, Robin gives him half of the 800 pounds.

<u>Fight 5</u> – The Sheriff of Nottingham holds an archery contest for a gold and silver arrow. All the band does well, but Robin wins the contest. His men are ambushed, Little John is wounded, and they take refuge at the castle of the knight (who is identified as "Sir Richard at the Lee" for the first time). The sheriff is unable to take Sir Richard's castle.

<u>Fight 6</u> – The sheriff goes to the king for help, who insists he must catch Robin, so the sheriff returns and takes Sir Richard prisoner. Sir Richard's wife goes to Robin for help, and Robin rescues the knight, kills the sheriff and flees to the forest.

<u>Fight 7</u> – The king comes to take Robin personally, and promises Sir Richard's land to whoever kills the knight, and is told that no one can hold the land while Robin Hood is at large. After months, he is persuaded to disguise himself and some men as monks, and get Robin to capture them. Robin does so and takes half of their forty pounds. The king, disguised as an abbot, hands him an invitation from the king to dine at Nottingham, and Robin says he will dine with him. After the meal, they set up an archery contest where whoever fails has to suffer a blow. Robin failed, and has the abbot deliver the blow. The king knocks him down and reveals himself. Robin, his men, and Sir Richard all kneel, and Robin and his 143 men enter the king's service.

<u>Fight 8</u> – The king and his men dress in Robin's "green cloth" to disguise themselves as outlaws and go to Nottingham to play a trick on the townspeople. Robin serves the king for 15 months, but broke and bored, he returns to Barnsdale, re-gathers his men, and they stay in the forest as outlaws for another 22 years. Robin is bled by his cruel cousin, the Prioress of Kirklees, and dies. (69 screens)

Robin Hood and the Potter (c.1503) is included here as it certainly originated in the **mid-to-late-1400's**. It names Robyn (or Roben) Hode, Little John, Wentbridge (in Barnsdale), Nottingham and its sheriff. It may be based on an earlier ballad about another outlaw, Hereward the Wake.

Summary : Robin Hood demands a toll of a potter. They fight, and the potter wins. Robin Hood buys his pots and trades clothing with him, then makes his way into Nottingham to sell the pots. He charges ridiculously low prices and so sells them all. He meets with the sheriff, shows him how well he can shoot, and tells him that he knows Robin Hood. The sheriff asks to be led to Robin. Robin agrees, and the sheriff is surrounded by Robin's men in the forest. But because of the hospitality that the sheriff's wife showed Robin while he was in Nottingham, Robin lets him go free. (13 screens)

Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne (c.1650) is also included here because it is mentioned in a play from the early 1500's, and it has a similar plot to a (non-Robin Hood) play from **c.1475**. It names Robin Hood, Little John, Scarlett, Barnsdale, Nottingham and its sheriff, and a new antagonist, Guy of Gisborne (who dies at the end). Guy is called both yeoman and "Sir" (indicating he is a knight), which appears to be a contradiction.

Summary : Robin Hood has a dream that he has been beaten and bound by two yeomen who have taken away his bow. He vows that he will have vengeance and sets out with Little John to find them, after donning their "gowns of green". Robin and John shoot as they go, until they see a yeoman leaning against a tree. John says he will go ask the yeoman his intentions, but Robin responds that this is too forward of John, speaking so harshly to his friend that John leaves and returns to Barnsdale. In Barnsdale John finds that the Sheriff of Nottingham has attacked Robin's band. Two have been killed, Will Scarlet is fleeing and the sheriff is in pursuit with 140 men. John tries to help, but his bow breaks so he is taken prisoner and tied to a tree. In the meantime, Robin learns from the yeoman in the forest that he is seeking the outlaw Robin Hood, but has lost his way. Robin offers to be his guide. As they make their way through the woods, Robin proposes a shooting match. Both shoot well, but Robin so much better that the other asks his name. Gisborne gives his name, then Robin reveals his identity. They fight for two hours, with Robin being the victor. He decapitates Gisborne, mutilates his face, sticks the head on the end of his bow, exchanges clothing with him, then blows Gisborne's horn. The sheriff hears the horn and assumes that Gisborne has killed Robin Hood. Thinking it is Guy he sees riding toward him, the Sheriff offers him anything, but Robin, disguised as Guy, refuses a reward. Robin then rushes to Little John, unties him and gives him Gisborne's bow. The sheriff flees, but cannot outrun John's arrow, which strikes him in the heart. (9 screens)

While the earliest manuscript for ***Robin Hood His Death*** or ***The Death of Robin Hood*** comes from the mid-1600's, it is dated to the **late 1400's** because the author of the *Gest* (c.1475) uses several details from the story, and its language and style are very much like that of *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

Summary : Robin feels ill and goes to Church Lees (Kirklees) to have his blood let by his cousin the Prioress. Will Scarlett warns Robin that his enemies are in the area and advises him to take fifty men with him. Robin ignores Scarlett's advice and just takes Little John. The Prioress lets blood until Robin is weak and close to death. Red Roger, who lives with the Prioress, tries to finish him off, but Robin manages to kill him first. As Robin lies dying, he shoots an arrow and makes Little John promise that he will bury him there with his sword, bow and arrows. (5 screens)

Again, the ballad of ***Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar*** was recorded in the 1600's, but it too appears to belong in the **late 1400's**. It names Robin Hood, Little John, Will Scadlock, and a nameless friar who may or may not be a version of Friar Tuck. Part of this story was used in the 1938 Errol Flynn movie to introduce Friar Tuck.

Summary : The outlaws have had a good hunt. Robin Hood says there is no match for Little John within a hundred miles, but Will Scadlock tells him that a friar at Fountains Abbey is, so Robin sets out to see

this monk. He finds him by a riverside and forces the monk to carry him over, except that the friar throws him in halfway across. They battle until Robin asks a favor: to let him blow on his horn. When the friar agrees, Robin's men appear, with bows in hand. The friar asks a favor: to let him whistle. When Robin agrees, many fierce dogs appear. In the earlier version, Robin Hood good-humoredly refuses further combat. In the later version, Little John shoots twenty of the dogs, and the Friar agrees to make peace with Robin; in both versions Robin invites him to join the band. (10 screens)

1500's

Alexander Barclay, writing **c.1500**, says "*Yet would I gladly hear some merry fight of Maid Marion or else of Robin Hood*".

In the ***Historia Maioris Britanniae*** (**1521**), Scottish John Major lists under the reign of Richard I (**1189-1199**) an entry about Robert Hood and Little John :

About this time it was, as I conceive, that there flourished those most famous [of] *robbers Robert Hood, an Englishman, and Little John, who lay in wait in the woods, but spoiled of their goods those only who were wealthy. They took the life of no man, unless he either attacked them or offered resistance in defence of his property. Robert supported by his plundering one hundred bowmen, ready fighters every one, with whom four hundred of the strongest would not dare to engage in combat. The feats of this Robert are told in song all over Britain. He would allow no woman to suffer injustice, nor would he spoil the poor, but rather enriched them from the plunder taken from the abbots. The robberies of this man I condemn, but of all robbers he was the most humane and the chief.*

Major is the first to place Robin Hood in King Richard's time, and apparently by extrapolating from a few lines in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* that aren't repeated in any of the other existing early materials, he made Robin more noble in spirit by saying that he robbed only from the rich and gave to the poor, he always defended women's honor, and only killed in self-defense (this one is in outright contradiction to the earlier stories!).

King Henry VIII (ruled **1509-1547**) was fascinated with Robin Hood, and this royal interest only increased Robin's popularity with the masses.

All thru the 1500's Robin Hood games proliferated all over southern and western England. Payments were made, usually by the local church, for costumes (presumably for the locals to use) or to pay wandering bands that performed and moved on. However, suppression of Robin Hood activities by local authorities also started to build thruout the 1500's, as plays, games, and processions were banned, most likely because of all the drinking, violence, and "lewd activities" they encouraged, not to mention Robin's anti-authoritative image.

Around **1540**, Bishop Hugh Latimer bitterly complained that the people in one town refused to hear him on a Sunday because it was Robin Hood's day, and they were too busy preparing for the festival.

In his ***Itinerary of Britain*** (**c.1540**), John Leland (also spelled Leyland) says that "*between Milburne and Feribridge I saw the woods and famous forest of Barnsdale, where they say Robyn Hudde lived like an outlaw*". He also mentions Robin Hood's Bay. In his ***Collectanea***, he describes the monastary of Kirkley (Kirklees) as the place "*where the noble outlaw Robin Hood is buried*". The Latin word he used, "nobilis", can mean either noble in character or class (or both).

In ***Grafton's Chronicle*** (**1569**), after a paraphrasing of all of John Major's comments, is added :

But in an old and ancient Pamphlet, I find this written of the said Robert Hood. This man (sayth he) descended of a nobel parentage: or rather being of a base stock and lineage, was for his manhood and chivalry advanced to the noble dignity of an Earl. Excelling principally in Archery, or shooting, his manly courage agreeing thereunto: But afterwards he so prodigally exceeded in charges and expenses, that he fell into great debt, by reason whereof, so many actions and [law]*suits were commenced against him, whereunto he answered not, that by order of law he was outlawed, and then for a lewde*[ignorant] *shift*[change?], *as his last refuge, gathered together a company of bullies and cut-throats, and practiced*

robberies and spoiling of the king's subjects, and occupied and frequented the Forests or wild Countries. The which being certified to the King, and he being greatly offended therewith, caused his proclamation to be made that whosoever would bring him quick or dead, the king would give him a great sum of money, as by the records in the Exchequer is to be seen: But of this promise, no man enjoyed any benefit. For the said Robert Hood, being afterwards troubled with sickness, came to a certain Nunnery in Yorkshire called Bircklies[Kirklees], *where desiring to be let blood, he was betrayed and bled to death. After whose death the Prioress of the same place caused him to be buried by the highway side, where he had used to rob and spoil those that passed that way. And upon his grave the said Prioress did lay a very fair stone, wherein the names of Robert Hood, William of Goldesborough and others were graven. And the reason why she buried him there was for that the common passengers and travellers knowing and seeing him there buried, might more safely and without fear take their journies that way, which they dared not do during the life of the said outlaws. And at either end of the said Tomb was erected a cross of stone, which is to be seen there at this present.*

Grafton was the first to make Robin Hood an Earl (but he does not say of where), and the first to give some kind of reason as to why he was an outlaw.

There are several plays from the late 1500's about Robin Hood, including the now-lost *Robin Hood and Little John* (**c.1594**) and *Robin Hood's Penn'orths* (**c.1599**). Robin appears as a secondary character in *George a Greene* (**c.1588**) and *Edward I* (**c.1590**).

William Shakespeare refers to Robin Hood in his **late 16th** century play ***The Two Gentlemen of Verona***. In it, the character Valentine is banished from Milan and driven out through the forest where he is approached by outlaws who, upon meeting him, desire him as their leader. They comment, "By the bare scalp of Robin Hood's fat friar, this fellow were a king for our wild faction!".

The plays ***The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*** and ***The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*** by Anthony Munday (**1598**) are set in King Richard's time, and names Robin as the Earl of Huntingdon, along with Little John, Scarlet, Scathlock (as two separate characters!), Friar Tuck, and Much. Both Marian and Prince John are also present, linked for the first time with Robin in an existing story. Robert, betrayed by his uncle and several others, is outlawed and flees to Sherwood forest accompanied by Matilda, daughter of Lord Fitzwater; and there he assumes the name of Robin Hood, and calls Matilda maid Marian. While one of Robert's betrayers is made sheriff of Nottingham as a reward, he is not the primary antagonist; and Prince John is not out to steal the throne, only Marian's heart. But by taking the new ideas of Major and Grafton, and portraying Robin as an unjustly outlawed gentleman fighting for what is truly right during King Richard's rule, and presenting them in a format seen by many (few people could read, but everyone could watch a play), these plays gave a new direction to the Robin Hood stories that would last until the present day.