

ROBIN HOOD

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2. ROBIN HOOD

(early 15th century)

Robin Hood was a heroic outlaw in English folklore. A highly skilled archer and swordsman, he is known for *robbing from the rich and giving to the poor*, assisted by a group of fellow outlaws known as his “Merry Men”. He became a popular folk figure in the medieval period continuing through to modern literature, films and television.



2. ROBIN HOOD: the LEGEND (1)



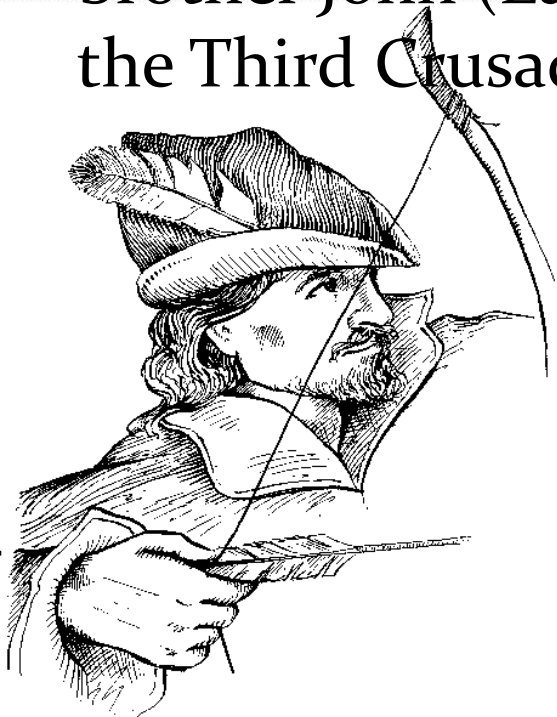
- In popular culture, Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men are usually portrayed as living in Sherwood Forest, in **Nottinghamshire**, where much of the action in the early ballads takes place.
- Records show a man named Robin Hood lived in Nottingham



in the 13th and 14th c.: his grave has been claimed to be at Kirklees Priory in West Yorkshire, as implied by the 18th -c. version of *Robin Hood's Death*, where we find a **headstone** of dubious authenticity for his friend **Little John**.

2. ROBIN HOOD: the LEGEND (2)

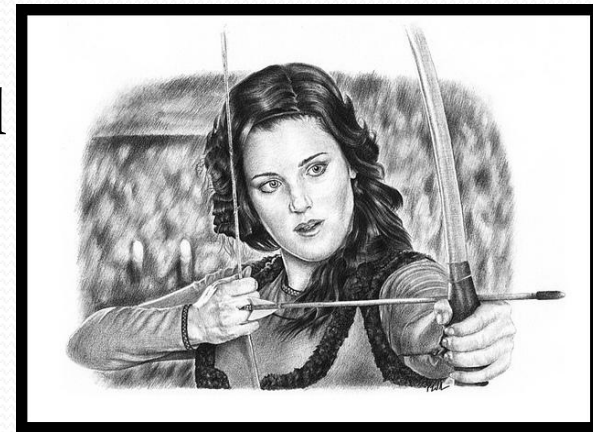
- According to other popular culture he was a contemporary and supporter of **Richard the Lionheart**, king of England from 1189 to 1199, driven to outlawry during the misrule of his brother John (Lackland) while he was away at the Third Crusade.



- His social status was that of a yeoman, that is to say *neither a knight nor a peasant but something in between*.
- The origin of the legend is claimed by some to have stemmed from actual outlaws, or from tales of outlaws, though we really don't know if he truly existed!⁴

2. ROBIN HOOD: the BALLADS (1)

- The earliest surviving text on Robin Hood is a ballad, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, written shortly after 1450: like the many ballads composed over hundreds of years around this figure it contains many of the elements still associated with the legend like
 - the Nottingham setting;
 - Robin's bitter enmity towards the local sheriff;
 - his partisanship of the lower classes;
 - his outstanding skill as an archer;
 - his anti-clericalism.
 - his *Marianism* and his special regard for women.
- The 19th century ballad scholar **Francis Child** collected 38 separate Robin Hood ballads, scenes from which have been used in many novels, movies and television shows.



2. ROBIN HOOD: the BALLADS (2)

- A ballad is a **narrative poem**, often of folk origin, intended to be sung: it is characterized by **simple four-line stanzas**, **frequent repetitions** and usually a **refrain**.
- Its name probably derives from medieval French dance songs or “ballares” (from which we also get the word *ballet*).
- In all traditions most ballads present a self-contained story, often concise, relying on imagery, rather than description: according to their subject matter they can be grouped into ballads about
 1. love and jealousy;
 2. religious subjects;
 3. supernatural events;
 4. the rivalry between the English and the Scots (*border ballads*);
 5. outlaws like Robin Hood.

Robin Hood Rescuing Three Squires

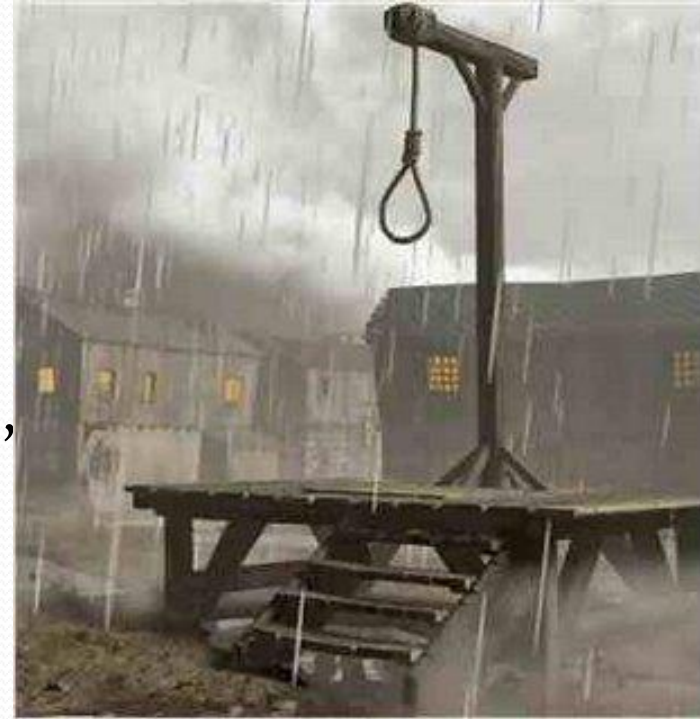
(Child No. 140 B)



- It is one of many stories where Robin uses a disguise to trick his enemies and it isn't the only one where the **Sheriff of Nottingham** meets a bad end.
- Robin meets an old woman lamenting that her sons will hang for poaching the king's deer...
 - **Poaching** had been illegal for hundreds of years, but it was during the Late Middle Ages that it became a punishable offense: during this time, the right to hunt was limited to landowners and nobility.
 - Peasants usually did not have weapons or skills to hunt so in order to provide food for their families they devised other ways to bring meat to their tables, including snares. If they were caught their hands were cut off or they were hanged.

The Ballad (stanzas 1 – 3)

1. There are twelve months in all the year,
As I hear many men say,
But the **merriest** month in all the year
Is the **merry** month of May.
2. Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,
With a link a down and a day,
And there he met a **silly old woman**,
Was weeping on the way.
3. “What news? what news, thou **silly old woman**?
What news hast thou for me?”
Said she, “There's three squires in Nottingham town
To-day is condemned to die.”



The Ballad (stanzas 4 – 6)



4. “O **have they parishes burnt**?” he said,
“Or **have they ministers slain**?
Or **have they robbed any virgin**,
Nor **with other men’s wives have lain**?”

5. “They have no parishes burnt, good sir,
Nor yet have ministers slain,
Nor have they robbed any virgin,
Nor with other men’s wives have lain.”

6. “O what have they done?” said bold Robin Hood,
“I pray thee tell to me.”
“It’s for slaying of the king’s fallow deer,
Bearing their long bows with thee.” [...]

The Ballad (st.25 – 26)



- Robin decides to help the poor widow: thus he persuades an **old man** to trade his **ragged clothing** for his fine clothes, and in this disguise, offers to be the sheriff's hangman.
- Before revealing his identity he threatens to blow on a horn that he says he was given by Robin Hood but the sheriff is unimpressed...

25. “O wind thy horn, thou proud fellow,
Of thee I have no doubt;
I wish that thou give such a blast
Till both thy eyes fall out.”

26. The first **loud blast** that he did blow,
He blew **both loud** and shrill;
A hundred and fifty of Robin Hood's men
Came riding over the hill.

The Ballad (stanzas 27 – 29)

27. The next **loud blast** that he *did give*,
He blew **both loud** and amain,
And quickly sixty of Robin Hood's men
Came shining over the plain.

28. "O who are you," the sheriff he said,
"Come tripping over the lee?"
"They're my attendants," brave Robin did say,
"They'll pay a visit to thee."

29. They took the gallows from the slack,
They set it in the glen,
They hanged the proud sheriff on that,
Released their own three men.

