

# Did Robin Hood Exist?

by Garry Victor Hill



*Robin Hood. This statue stands outside Nottingham Castle. The arrow has to be continually replaced as tourists love thieving a souvenir. Robin would have appreciated the irony. Photo: David Teleford. Wikimedia*

## *Did Robin Hood Exist?*

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## *Copyright and Sources*

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## Introduction

What! More writing on the existence of Robin Hood! That would be a reader's initial response considering how much has been written since the eighteenth century. However there are good reasons for writing more now.

First, much of what has been written is outdated by later discoveries. This is still happening. The 1993 find of the collected ballads which became published as *The Forrester's Manuscript*, K.J. Stringe's 1985 biography *Earl David of Huntingdon 1152-1219: A Study in Anglo Scottish History* and Doctor Julian Luxford's 2009 discovery all change the picture, making writings before this time outdated to some extent. Other writings are boring and time wasting. Both of these problems are caused because the writers pile up facts that are, at best, not very relevant to create evidence for their theories. Do we really need comparisons between Robin Hood rituals and those of the Maya of Mexico to supposedly prove that he was a myth? Others have their favoured candidate and assemble or ignore evidence to suit their case. Several writers have valid points, and have written whole books on their point. One amateur historian spent forty years on the topic, presumably much of his life went on such works.

The arguments for Robin Hood being a mythic figure are summarised in this text from the works of Francis Child, J.C. Holt, P. Valentine Harris, Stephen Knight, Lord Raglan and Allen W. Wright. All of these writers not only give sources, but frequently quote extensively from them. The first reason the originals have not always been used is that the quotes used by the above writers succinctly present the case of the earlier writers. The second is that several of these texts are extremely difficult to find and from what quotations have been found are clearly mistaken and therefore not worth the time and effort. This also applies to several texts arguing the opposite.

There are many worthwhile texts that argue for and against a real Robin Hood. Other scholarly works focus on some cultural or historic aspect of the stories and related topics. An overview of such writings and media presentations can be found in 'The Search For a Real Robin Hood.' This is part of Allen W. Wright's website *Robin Hood: Bold Outlaw of Barnsdale and Sherwood. 1997-2013*. <https://www.boldoutlaw.com/> Wright has assembled a treasure trove of information, texts and cultural productions that are fascinating for anyone interested in the topic.

## *The Appeal*

Wherever people speak English Robin Hood is a known name and personality. Few others have such instant recognition, either pictorial or nomenclatural in popular culture. Jesus, King Arthur, Buddha, Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Hitler, Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln, Florence Nightingale, Stalin, Gandhi, Elvis, Marilyn Munroe, Mao, Shakespeare... who else? All a figure has to do is appear in a Lincoln green jacket, tights and knee high leather boots, carrying a bow and everyone from the age of five upwards knows that there stands Robin Hood. As children know of Jesus and Robin Hood, but are unlikely to know of the others well into adolescence, it may well be that these are the two most famous names in the English speaking world. This leads to two obvious questions.

Did he exist and why he has become such a celebrity? The latter comes first.

Robin Hood emerges as a cultural figure in varied ways and has myriad imitators, so that the character has become a genre in himself. His appeal needs no great astuteness to find or appreciate. This outlaw has been freed from the unvarying drudgery, servility and responsibility that characterises existence for most of us. Even the dangers he faces have an excitement - and how often does he fail? How often do the dangers bring catastrophe? Except at his treacherous death in advanced old age, his few catastrophes turn out to be merely trials overcome. His death does not act as a focus in most Robin Hood narratives and he dies old and sick. Most stories have him winning against tyranny. Authority figures usually have to be obeyed in reality or negative consequences follow: Robin defies or destroys them without consequences. Similarly the depiction of living in the beautiful, verdant, spacious Sherwood Forest would appeal to medieval peasants in their hovels. The same appeal still applies to executives in their luxurious, but soulless twenty-first century high rises and to those in the overcrowded dreary shanty towns of developing nations. Those living in the western world's noisy, polluted industrialised cities or urban sprawl also need an escape. Whatever our real locale, the fresh air, quiet and spacious verdant world of the forest exists as a dream, to be enjoyed vicariously in Robin Hood stories.

Some of his audiences may in reality be worrying about mortgages, power bills, pollution, saturation levels of advertising and media induced stress, litigation or retrenchments: none of those things exist in Sherwood Forest. Others worry about where the next meal will come from: Robin merely has to shoot an arrow and his venison will be cooked soon. The appeal to starving medieval peasants



appears obvious, but obviously does not end there. Similar needs are revealed when people recreate Robin Hood through the prism of their needs. In the 1938 film version Robin (Errol Flynn) tells Maid Marian (Olivia De Havilland) to look at the starving beggars and peasants laughing and enjoying the abundant food he has provided. For audiences at the end of the Great Depression that scene would have a deeper, more personally relevant and appealing meaning. This provides one example of how Robin Hood becomes a vehicle for each era. In the 1950s English television series *The Adventures of Robin Hood* everybody appears as neat and clean with 1950s haircuts and no robberies are committed. Robin embodies decency with his decisions reasonably explained and goodness always triumphs. This depiction was ably satirised in *Time Bandits* (1981). In this Sherwood Forest the camera tracks a long line of snarling, dirty, thuggish, and hunched over ragamuffins. John Cleese as Robin appears at the top of the line, immaculately dressed in Hollywood Robin Hood style, politely requesting order and obedience in the most reasonable upper class voice as he issues rationed charity. In the 1976 film *Robin and Marion*, made after the turbulence of the 1960s and the aging of the disillusioned hippie generation, Robin appears as a troubled veteran soldier, returning from a prolonged unwinnable war, he feels alienated from his supposed celebrity hero king, who turns out to be selfish, tyrannical and self-indulgent, frequently resembling rock stars, movie people, gurus and political leaders of the 1960s. Aging, disillusioned and wiser, Robin now returns from war and only wants to settle down, unobtrusively, just like sixties/seventies radicals and returning Vietnam veterans. Just like them he wearily finds that there can be no escaping problems.

Two versions emerged in 1991 both concerned with 1990s issues. The *Robin Hood* with Patrick Bergin in the title role went against Robin's traditional Catholicism: the church is the enemy. These pagan outlaws are pantheistic proto-ecologists savouring forest life, which was their protection against the encroaching town. *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves* was made against the background of the Iraqi War. In this version Robin is much concerned with the disastrous crusade and the effect it has on England. The twenty-first century versions in film and television all have Maid Marion as assertive women and usually cinematic Robins from this time on are alienated from a manipulating society, expressing a sullen cynicism suitable for traumatised, disillusioned veterans of wars in the Middle East, albeit a thousand years earlier. Even those who are not such veterans distrust their own society and form peer groups hiding out in the forest.

This transformation of Robin Hood into current outlooks does not always happen. Particularly in book versions and in song narrators stay true to the adventure story. They do not so much reinterpret Robin Hood as represent him as

he appears in early ballads or in the first episodic collection, the late fifteenth century *The Geste of Robin Hood*. The most commonly known, chronologically ordered and more complete version which shows Robert Earl of Huntington being dispossessed, romancing Maid Marian and having just order restored by Richard the Lionheart is *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington, Afterwards Called Robin Hood of merrie Sherwood*. (sic) This play did not emerge in the earlier folk tradition, although it took much from it. This version was commissioned by an aristocrat for five pounds in 1598. The printed version came in 1601 and is much concerned with the aristocrat's world. It had early references to Robin as the Earl of Huntington and Friar Tuck as a character. Despite its influence in popular culture over hundreds of years influencing hundreds of millions through myriad adaptations, Munday's original play remains little known. Has one person in a million ever read through *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington, Afterwards Called Robin Hood of merrie Sherwood*?

Modern versions of the story of Sherwood update the language and perhaps slightly bowdlerise the violence, but the essential narrative, outlook and focus on escapist adventure remains little changed. Robin starts in the early stories as a Saxon yeoman and by Elizabethan times became an earl. This change gentrifies him, but does not diminish his adventurous, generous and merrily anarchic spirit or his skill and luck. The process was developed by such diverse figures such as the anonymous balladeers of the broadsheet era, Tudor playwrights (particularly Munday) and antiquaries and historians. Joseph Ritson, who collected Robin Hood ballads and stories to publish them late in the eighteenth century, was also an extremely influential person in this process. In the twentieth century this focus on adventure and staying true to the original image was maintained by Paul Creswick in *Robin Hood and His Merry Outlaws* (1917), Rose Yeatman Woolfe in *Robin Hood and His Life in the Merry Greenwood* (1929), Rosemary Sutcliffe in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1950), Roger Lancelyn Green in his 1956 book of the same name and the makers of the popular English ITC television series of 1955-1960. In cinema the 1938 version, and the 1960 film *Sword of Sherwood Forest* would not deviate far or interpret the story very differently from a combination of *The Geste*, the ballads or Munday's play, which comes close to being a template. Even the Robin Hood ballads stand apart from their contemporary other ballads, due to their theme, setting and ethics - or rather the lack of them. Excitement, victory against tyranny, adventure, abundance, space, freedom, Robin offers them all - vicariously. No wonder he remains the most popular folk hero in the English speaking world.



*The illustration here of 'Robyn Hode' shows the typical style, spelling and presentation in broadsheets. Note the gentrification of the figure. A sixteenth century representation now in the Library of Scotland. Wikipedia*  
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/Here\\_begynneþ\\_a\\_geste\\_of\\_Robyn\\_Hode.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/Here_begynneþ_a_geste_of_Robyn_Hode.png)



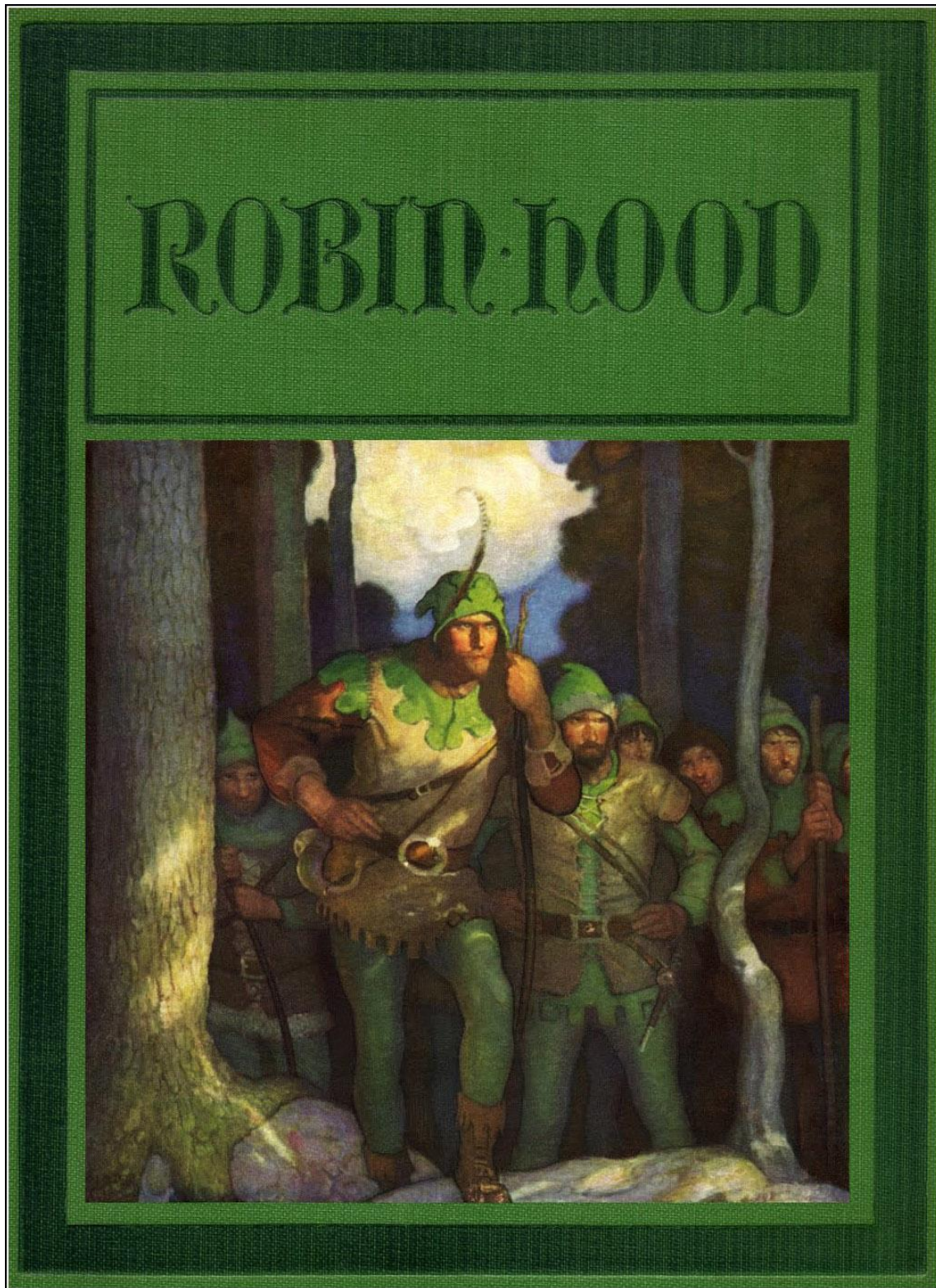
In Francis Child's collection of 305 British ballads twenty are about Robin Hood.<sup>1</sup> Law abiding royalist King Arthur does not come close to double figures. Frank Sidgwick's three volume collection of old British folk songs he has one volume dedicated to Robin and other outlaws. Arthurian stories get an occasional listing in Sidgwick's other two volumes.

Robin's appeal and reshaping once he became a cultural icon are obvious, more problematic are the two questions already mentioned, did he exist and if so, who was he? In summary a more accurate way to phrase the question would be 'Did several once living men become part of the Robin Hood legend and how did they contribute to it?'



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<sup>1</sup> See the Contents page of Volume Five of Child's collection. *The English and Scottish Border Ballads (1882-1898)* Boston; Little and Brown, 1860. A facsimile of an expanded computer edition has been used Ann Arbor; University of Michigan, 2005.



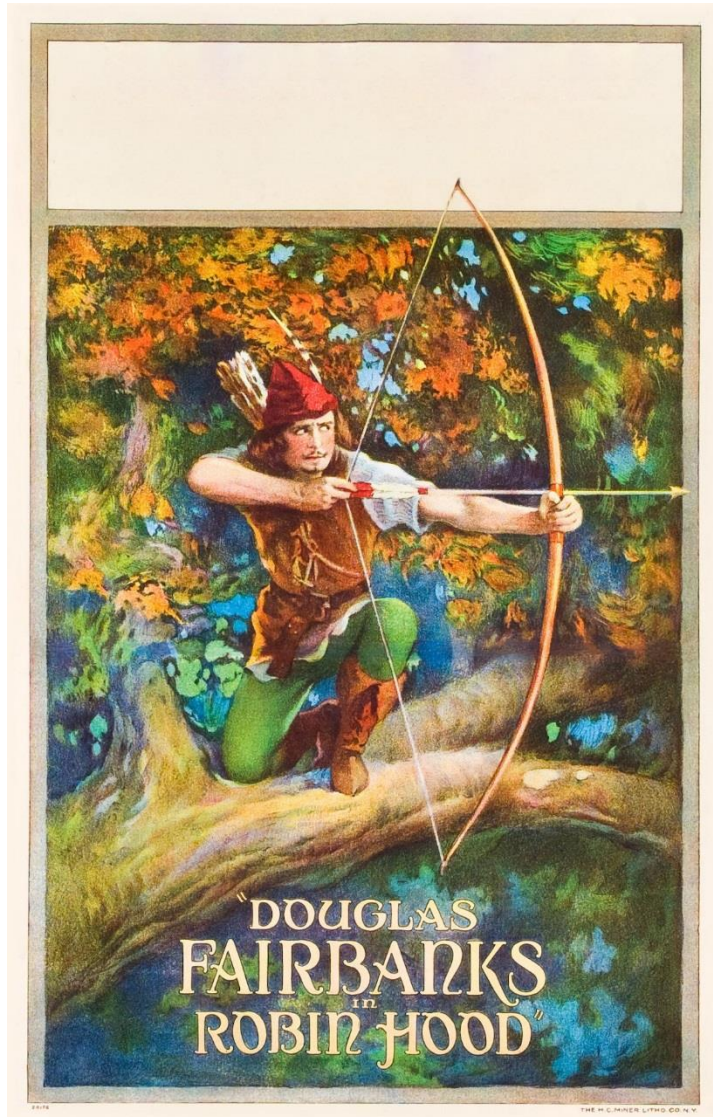
*Paul Creswick's Robin Hood. The Gutenberg Press edition. Public Domain.*





*The Passing of Robin Hood* by N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945) The Gutenberg Press edition of Paul Creswick's *Robin Hood*. (1917) Wikimedia/Public Domain.

*Hollywood perpetuates the legend in different ways, albeit with bows and arrows as a prop.*



*Douglas Fairbanks Senior 1922*



*Patrick Bergin 1991*

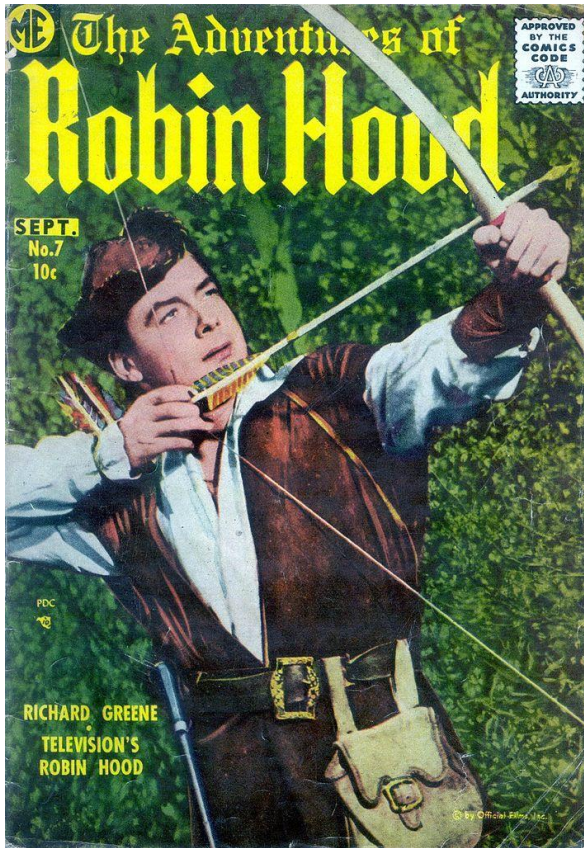
*Both images courtesy of Wikipedia*





*Errol Flynn and Olivia De Havilland, setting the images of Robin and Marion for a generation. They would make nine more films together, frequently film makers would essentially have them repeat the Robin Hood and Maid Marion personas in different locales eras and costumes Above: Public Domain.*

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Olivia de Havilland and Errol Flynn in The Adventures of Robin Hood trailer.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Olivia_de_Havilland_and_Errol_Flynn_in_The_Adventures_of_Robin_Hood_trailer.JPG) Wikipedia/ Warner Brothers/ Creative Commons.



*Richard Greene 1957 Wikimedia above and Wikipedia below. Clean cut and scruffy*



*Russell Crowe 2010*

## Looking for the Myth

The idea that Robin Hood did not exist at all is an old one. As his fame ascended in the late medieval era cynics coined a proverb “Many men speak of a Robin Hood who never drew his bow.”<sup>2</sup> This seems a modernised rephrasing of a verse which went into print around 1401 in *Reply of Friar Daw Topias to Jack Upland*.<sup>3</sup>

As early as 1584 Reginald Scot noted the similarities between Robin Hood and Robin Goodfellow, an elfin creature.<sup>4</sup> Both Robins are forest creatures drawn to mischief and merriment. Scot also noted how both Robins connect to the German goblin Hodekin or Hudgin through more than nomenclatural similarities. All three are anarchic, mischievous forest creatures outside society. By wearing green and living in the forest outside society’s laws Robin connects to the pantheistic and pagan ‘green man’ god, a spirit of the forest. His hood is supposedly a sign of paganism and Robert and Robyn are monikers for the devil. In the middle of the nineteenth century at least five respected writers, all in separate writings, stated that Robin Hood never existed.<sup>5</sup> These five are the German mythologists Franz Kuhn and Richard Fricke, the English historian Sydney Lee, the English folklore collector Thomas Wright and Francis Child, the American folksong and folklore collector whose main focus was on British culture.

Child, who found and published scores of Robin Hood ballads, would later modify his opinions and criticize Kuhn and Wright in his introduction to the fifth volume of his *The English and Scottish Border Ballads (1882-1898)*. Unfortunately these later writings gain less notice than the earlier version.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Thomas Knight & Thomas H. Ohlgren, editors, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*. Portland, Oregon; Medieval Institute Publishers, 2000. p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> P. Valentine Harris, *The Truth About Robin Hood*. 1951. Mansfield; Revised and Expanded 1973. p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Robin Hood’ *Wikipedia*.

<sup>5</sup> Francis J. Child, Introduction to Volume Five of *The English and Scottish Border Ballads (1882-1898)*. p. ix. Child presents evidence and his arguments against verification of a real Robin Hood in the subsequent introductory pages. These are mentioned above. Harris, p. 54 p. 75. pp. 46-53. Wright is quoted several times and extensively in these pages.



Lord Raglan also repeated and then developed these ideas further as part of his influential *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* (1936). Those who argue against the reality of Robin Hood are essentially still following the arguments put forward by Scot, Kuhn, Fricke, Lee, Wright, Child and Raglan. The latter's work was important for two reasons: it summarised the arguments for a mythic Robin Hood and he defined the ritual hero and how he was developed to serve society. Despite still not being outdated and having its revealing theoretical importance, this study has flaws. In the 1956 edition Raglan admits this, albeit in a generalised way.<sup>7</sup> Amongst these unmentioned flaws are several astounding generalisations, some of which are obviously not true: 'Illiterates never speculate.' (p. 124) "the real facts of history are never preserved by local tradition" (p. 37) 'Folk never compose for themselves' (p. 139) "the savage can have no history" (p. 8) and 'We judge every event by its consequences.' (p. 3) Raglan applies his dogmatic and simple outlook to prove the non-existence of a handful of heroes, at least to himself and those who uncritically accept what is said by aristocrats in dogmatic simplistic tones. These not existing include Robin Hood. Before going on to that difficult question, in *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* Raglan has been definitely been proved wrong about other heroes. Archaeology has proven that Leif Ericson's Vinland and Homer's Troy did exist and nobody now disputes these facts. Even in 1936 this was so for Troy and the Norse sagas gave staid descriptions of landscapes, climate and Amerindians which matched the reality exactly. This alone should have given Raglan some caution about denying the essential veracity of the sagas and Homer's tales, but amazingly it did not. These dogmatic, almost reckless errors about the obvious make his statements concerning Robin Hood doubtful, even if he does present interesting information.

Raglan lists Robin Hood amongst the best known ancient and medieval western Europeans who are sometimes presented as historic personages, but are really mythic heroes tied to the world of folk ritual derived from paganism. Before examining those claims he presents his factual basis for rejecting a real Robin Hood. Raglan argues incorrectly that no documents seem to give a date to Robin Hood before the sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Amazingly on the same page he then states that "the fact" that "by the beginning of the thirteenth century Robin Hood's name seems to be already proverbial." (47) This is wrong. While some among the

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<sup>6</sup> Harris, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Lord Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama.* New York; 1956. Preface, p. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Raglan, p. 47.



earliest stories and historic accounts place Robin being an outlaw in the 1190s he was not proverbial at that time. Raglan places this development too early by at least a hundred years. Several mentions “before the sixteenth century” of a medieval Robin or Robert Hood or Hod were known of at the time *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* was published in 1936. In that the same year Medieval court records were found mentioning Robertus Hood, a fugitive.<sup>9</sup> Although Raglan’s work was republished in 1956 with a new preface, he did not include the 1936 find or other evidence. Arthur Robin in his chronology of all known medieval mentions of a Robin Hood (or someone with a slight variation of his name) listed dozens of medieval references.<sup>10</sup>

Raglan sees the use of the longbow by Robin as his band as proof of the falsity of the stories. His logic is that the longbow features prominently in the Robin Hood stories and as the longbow was not in use until the last quarter of the thirteenth century the stories must be false.<sup>11</sup> First the early use of the longbow is disputed. In the 1951 edition of *The Truth About Robin Hood* Harris similarly states that “the longbow did not come into prominence in England” until 1272, but then in a 1973 appendix mentions that the Danes and Saxons used this weapon even before they came to England.<sup>12</sup> Both Harris and Raglan date the use of the longbow not from it being invented or being used by peasants and hunters, but from when it was first listed in inventories for use by detachments in England’s royal armies. Felix Holt presents strong evidence for its existence over two hundred years before Raglan’s claims. The longbow appears in the decorations for the Bayeux Tapestry and in drawings of the battles of Bovines in 1214 and Sandwich in 1217.<sup>13</sup> The longbow, surely a most valued possession in yeoman’s and peasants houses, also appears as a common English household possession in legal documents from the early thirteenth century, when it was often used by robbers and for assault.<sup>14</sup> Holt describes how in medieval times there was really no

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<sup>9</sup> J.C. Holt, *Robin Hood*. 1982. London; 1983. p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Robin, ‘Historical Robin Hood Search.’ The Nottingham Forums @ [Nottstalgia. Com](https://nottstalgia.com) Posted July 20<sup>th</sup> 2015. The quoted chronology was posted December 21<sup>st</sup> 2016. <https://nottstalgia.com>... [General Chat about Nottingham](#). accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Raglan, pp. 46-47.

<sup>12</sup> Harris, p. 97 p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Holt, pp. 79-80. He reproduced medieval illustrations from the battles of 1214 and 1217 which show longbows in use.

<sup>14</sup> Holt, p. 79

distinguishing between what would later mistakenly be called a longbow and a short bow: both were made to fit a person's height; the term "short bow" was used to describe crossbows.<sup>15</sup> This error was developed by a nineteenth century historian and became a fallacy.<sup>16</sup>

When the longbow was first used by forest outlaws can only be uncertain, but Holt's work shows that they were used much earlier than the dates Raglan gives. Even assuming for the sake of making a point here that Raglan is right about longbows and Harris and Holt are wrong, all he has proved is that after the last quarter of the thirteenth century the original Robin Hood story gained an additional detail – longbows. Should his enough to discredit the whole idea of his existence? This example appears typical of so much scholarship concerning Robin Hood.

Raglan also states that Locksley does not exist and therefore there can be no Robin of Locksley.<sup>17</sup> Harris points out that the village of Loxley exists near Sheffield.<sup>18</sup> A court record of 1245 even mentions a Robert de Lockesley.<sup>19</sup> Raglan and several others point out that from Somerset to Scotland myriad places and unusual landmarks bear the outlaw's name that he could only be a fiction, especially as some have supernatural elements or demonstrably untrue traditions and stories attached to them.<sup>20</sup> This is a stronger point for his conclusions.

Raglan himself gives an interesting example earlier in his work that shows how this process can develop from a supposition into a tradition – and yet be about a real person.<sup>21</sup> He uses the 'Queen Elizabeth I slept here' fallacy. As queen she did travel and stayed as a guest at castles and manors. Therefore if a castle or a manor was near a major road or on the way to where she was known to be going locals say that she may possibly have stayed overnight at that particular nearby castle. 'Possibly' soon becomes perhaps and then probably. This becomes a

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79-80.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>17</sup> Raglan, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Harris, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Robin, Chronology December, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Raglan, pp. 47-48.

<sup>21</sup> Raglan, pp.30-31.

tradition which often becomes history. Therefore Elizabeth stayed at many a manor, so many that it becomes ridiculous. Outside Raglan's given example is one English cinematic comedy had great fun with this, showing a manor bedroom with an aged guide emphatically and amazingly insisting with protruding jaw, glaring eyes and forceful body language that it was definitely proven "that Elizabeth the Second did *not* sleep in this bed!" Raglan has established how traditions can develop, but then should we use his valid logic about bedding to say that Elizabeth I did not exist?

Raglan does raise the interesting point that Robin is a diminutive of Robert and both names are of Norman-French origin.<sup>22</sup> Other names amongst the outlaws of Sherwood are also Norman. This raises the puzzling question of why do Saxon peasants have names originating with their hated Norman overlords? That question raises two possibilities. First the men who do appear in Medieval records with variations of Robin Hood's name were Norman descended. Given that unlike most Saxon peasants they had money, rank and possessions worth seizing this is likely. Second, in the generations after the 1066 conquest Norman and Saxon words would move from one ethnic group to another – so why after nearly two hundred years, why not names?

One point in the stories that does sound like the miraculous luck given to heroes rather than a reality is that Robin sometimes gets into Nottingham, his arch enemy the Sherriff of Nottingham's stronghold – and then gets out again – on more than one occasion. Yet oddly the geography of the city gives a plausible explanation. The city of Nottingham still has over 850 caves, some having obvious traces of human habitation going back at least to the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>23</sup> These caves were sometimes workshops. Some were right under the sheriff's castle and included dungeons. Others were for clandestine purposes. After the reformation Catholics escaped persecution by hiding in some of these caves, leaving carvings and writings on the walls which revealed their faith.<sup>24</sup> One of the earliest Robin Hood Ballads 'Robin and the Monk' has a scene set in one such cave.<sup>25</sup> Clearly any criminal or outlaw within the city had a wide range of difficult

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<sup>22</sup> Raglan, p. 46; Allen W. Wright, 'The Earl of Huntington.'

<sup>23</sup> David Waters, (Producer and Director) An episode about Nottingham in the series *Songs of Praise*. ABC Australia Presenter Aled Jones. Avanti/9Lives for the BBC. 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., The camera and narration show these images.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

to police options for clandestine hiding. This makes the stories of Robin hiding out in Nottingham and escaping from there less far-fetched, if not proven. What must be proven is that whoever had a part in composing 'Robin and the Monk' was not somebody remote from the locale, but someone who knew much about Nottingham. Other little bits of supposed fantasy within the stories also fall apart upon examination.

The way Hood's name was sometimes spelt Robin Wood supposedly derived from Woden. The German scholars and those who subsequently used their argument also remarked on the nomenclatural similarity between a German forest sprite named Hodeken or Hod and Robin Hood. Both the English outlaw and the German goblin-like creatures were central to May Day games and were pantheistic figures in pagan or pagan derived May Day celebrations. Beyond alliteration and assonance and both being forest dwellers where is the evidence of connections? The story may have travelled from Germany to Sherwood Forest the way the folk song about a witch 'Alison Gross' was carried by seafarers from Norway to Aberdeen, but without evidence showing how the story travelled; linking the Teutonic myth and the English legend looks unproven.

Raglan and his predecessors accept this evidence and similarities between Robin and ritual mythic heroes. They have Robin as a pagan god and also because he is king of the May Day, a pantheistic pagan celebration of the coming of spring.<sup>26</sup> This idea was one of the main arguments advanced from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards by those arguing against the existence of the outlaw. This evidence supposedly proves that he was only a myth, a forest pixie, a fairy tale creature, not a person.

On a first reading this all looks likely, but this viewpoint falls apart rapidly on other evidence. Pixies, sprites, forest gods, elves and goblins are not taken to court and written up in records after having their hard cash seized. Their names do not appear on lists of fugitives and chroniclers do not write of such creatures as real people, expect them to pay rent or unless living in delusions, list them as vassals.

Other claims and theories are extremely eccentric and are presented without linking evidence beyond alliteration and assonance and sometimes not even that. 'Robin of the Wood' proves nothing really. Where is the evidence that this is the name of a pagan God? Or that Robert and Robyn are code names for the devil or that hoods were worn by pagans? Perhaps hoods were - because they were worn by

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<sup>26</sup> Raglan, pp. 49-53.



bishops, clergy, peasants and nearly everybody else in the medieval era. This type of supposed evidence can only be ridiculous.

Another rarely mentioned, yet vital point must be that these references predate the appearance of Robin Goodfellow and the known pagan May Day celebrations which supposedly included Robin. The earliest known such celebration including him dates to 1518.<sup>27</sup> Even Child in his notes to the ballads stated that these May Day rituals were not known to exist before the early sixteenth century. This is over three hundred years after the first mention by name of the forest outlaw. Surely the known development of these games and celebrations centuries after uncontested, staid documentary evidence for a real outlaw with obvious variations of the name Robin Hood proves the point.

Echoes of pagan elements have been grafted on to what may be a real if shadowy figure – or figures. Valentine Harris presents some evidence that this happened. Harris reproduces two late sixteenth century documents which were used to supposedly prove that Robin Hood was King of the May and therefore a pagan God. He shows that the references had commas which those quoting for evidence of a pagan god-outlaw missed.<sup>28</sup> The church wanted plays banned about Robin Hood *and also* about the King of the May, not about Robin Hood King of the May. To reproduce Harris's find: "The king and council were supplicated to discharge all kind of insolent plays, as King of May, Robin Hood, and such others in the moyneth of May." The plays that were once echoes of paganism were becoming secularised. Rather than seeing them as a pagan rite, what could be more natural than to celebrate spring after a dreary winter? Across the world people do this without any religious meaning. Harris also reproduces documents that show the church and sometimes the nobility wanted the plays banned for reasons that had little if anything to do with paganism.

Individual reasons indicate class hostility between the people's defender and the ruling class. The most obvious is when in 1441 a disgruntled mob blocked a road with threats of murder, chanting "We are Robynhod's men, war war war."<sup>29</sup> Several outlaws mixed robbery and rebellion, comparing themselves to or being compared by chroniclers to Robin Hood. In 1473 Sir John Paxton lost a "a good horse" when his keeper got inspired by being the eponymous hero in a Robin Hood

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<sup>27</sup> 'Robin Hood' *Wikipedia*.

<sup>28</sup> Harris, pp. 53-54.

<sup>29</sup> Allen W. Wright, 'The Search for a Real Robin Hood.'

play and deserted to live out the role in real life in Barnsdale.<sup>30</sup> This probably means the nearby forest, not the village. The forest featured prominently as one of Robin Hood's domains in the early stories. During Edward VI's reign (1547-1553) Bishop Latimer arrived to find the church he was going to attend empty and locked, as it was Robin Hood Day, everybody was off celebrating and he was begged by locals not to interfere.<sup>31</sup> This was wise advice. In Edinburgh in 1561 "the mob were so enraged at being disappointed at making a Robin Hood that they rose in mutiny."<sup>32</sup> This rebellion led to the jail and gibbet being destroyed, prisoners freed, strangers robbed and magistrates fleeing mob justice.<sup>33</sup>

Overall the case for Robin Hood being mythic is even weaker than the case for his being real. That "real person" argument also comes with problems.




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<sup>30</sup> Harris, p. 15. Quoting Sir John Paxton in *The Paxton Letters*.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, p. 39. Quoting from a sermon by Bishop Latimer.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, p. 41. Reproducing a section of Arnot's *History of Edinburgh* (1816).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*,

## Looking for the Man

Just as mistakes are made in proving Robin Hood mythic, mistakes rapidly emerge in the search for the real Robin Hood. Many of these concern a Hood family near Wakefield, ten miles from Barnsdale. This locale frequently gains mentions in the stories and songs, but Wakefield does not. This family show up in medieval documents from 1202 onwards. These documents connected to this family and several others not apparently connected to them, reveal several men with combinations of Robert, Robin, Hood, Hod, and Hode.<sup>34</sup> Nothing found so far shows them to be outlaws. They reveal little beyond land ownership, taxes and marriages, yet the need to find ‘the real Robin Hood’ appears so strong that those claims are made on these names. What this family does show is that the name was common near the locale of the legends.

Sincere but incorrect claims are still made for Robert Fitzooth. In the eighteenth century an antiquarian keen to prove his case for this being the real Robin Hood developed and to some extent added false information to a badly constructed genealogy to prove that Robert Fitzooth, (1160-1247) supposedly a Northern English medieval lord, was Robin Hood.<sup>35</sup> Claims made for his burial at Kirklees Priory, the site of his murder, were supposedly substantiated by a tombstone with his name and those of two others unconnected to the legend carved into it.<sup>36</sup> Too many writers referred to this object for it to be a fabrication. Several historians and antiquarians writing separately and apparently with varying degrees of veracity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries described or drew this supposed tombstone.<sup>37</sup> Before the nineteenth century the inscription was too worn

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<sup>34</sup> Holt, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Anon, *The many Robin Hoods 6: The facts and the Fiction*. [www.robinhoodlegend.com/the-many-robin-hoods-6/](http://www.robinhoodlegend.com/the-many-robin-hoods-6/) accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018; ‘Robert Fitzooth’ *Wikipedia*; Holt, pp. 42-43.

<sup>36</sup> Holt, p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pp.41-44. A 1665 drawing of the tombstone is reproduced.

to read and soon railway workers, believing in Robin in a superstitious way, had broken off bits to cure toothache.<sup>38</sup> Was this even a real tombstone? Evacuations under it revealed no remains.<sup>39</sup> This may have been a cenotaph for the three men named, with one of them being a namesake. The location remains problematic as Kirklees Priory, does link to the legend, but where, apart from in tampered documents, does any evidence for this exist to even tentatively link to Robert Fitzooth? The bigger problem that nobody has solved must be proving that this claimant ever existed. Whatever this thing was it may have been a money spinner for the church; an attraction for the large and lucrative pilgrim trade. This frequently happened with supposed saints' relics. To the south the supposed tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, found, excavated and refurbished in 1190/1191 in Glastonbury Cathedral gained that cathedral royal attention and status.<sup>40</sup> Did Kirklees Priory staff imitate?

With historic references to Robin Hood their differing dates and locales show that they are extremely unlikely to all apply to one man. Those writers from the 1190s, 1220s and the 1260s may have personally knew a man with the name or at least saw him in court or during property assessments, but as J.C. Holt remarks, nobody says that they met him, saw him or that they knew what he looked like.<sup>41</sup> Some of these references to him are several decades later than the dates the chroniclers narrate for the forest outlaw's existence in their brief and unsubstantiated references to him. Despite their failings, these references to Robin Hood take him out of the world of myth. They take him into history and if not into solid detailed history then at least into legend.

In his 1995 essay 'Robin Hood: Reality or Myth?' Stephen Knight gives much needed comments on the confusion between myth and history in dealing with Robin Hood.<sup>42</sup> He refers to the way this has been caused by a combination of scant and conflicting historic material and local enthusiasts wishing to prove their theory, Robin Hood's popularity and what Raglan also describes as writers not

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>39</sup> Holt, p. 44 reproducing the sceptical comments of Richard Gough in 1786.

<sup>40</sup> C.A. Raleigh Radford, 'Glastonbury Abbey.' In *The Quest for Arthur's Britain*. Edited by Geoffrey Ashe. 1968. Saint Albans; 1973. pp. 97-101.

<sup>41</sup> Holt, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> This essay is reproduced in Ian Pindar's *The Folio Book of Historical Mysteries*. London; 2008. pp. 69-83.



being aware of the difference between history and myth. Raglan had a very relevant point which has become more important since he wrote that in 1936. Since the 1980s the word myth has been used in a popular, but incorrect way to mean either not existing, fakery, impossible, or a lie. The true meaning of the adjective mythic is of something that does not literally exist, but functions in a story that may be entertainment, but more often works to preserve and teach lessons needed to be learned in a particular ethnic culture. They do this by embodying wisdom, good and evil and emotions in archetypes and natural forces embedded in a narrative. These virtues and faults and forces appear in narratives which show paths to the desired realisation about actions having consequences that can be ultimately harmful or rewarding. They also do this in incarnations that are usually physically impossible or have never existed. To some extent Robin Hood in the ballads and stories does function this way and like other myths, does entertain.

Legend comes closest to the reality of the Sherwood Forest stories and Rosemary Sutcliff's 1965 description of an archetypal legendary hero in her beginning of *Heroes and History* is apt. Here she states that the legendary hero often has something a little larger than life about him that attracts people. He has the hero light and so his deeds become stories which are remembered and similar stories from other men are gathered round the story of his life and merge with it, becoming accredited to him, while the similar if lesser men become anonymous. This is legend and we can see with a similar modern forest outlaw how legend unfolds.

Nestor Makhno features as a villainous bandit in Soviet history. In reality he led tens of thousands of cavalry and had the support of hundreds of thousands as he led the Ukrainian people's attempt to establish an anarchist society in the Ukraine. For a time they succeeded against the Kaiser's armies, then against White guards, Ukrainian nationalists, and eventually the Soviets, who after four years, crushed the Makhnovite movement in late 1921. Until then they fought victorious campaigns where Makhno led from the front, had the support of the peasantry and frequently lived in the forest. Like many a fictional hero (but rarely like a real one) he repeatedly won victories against much larger forces. Incapacitated with six bullet wounds, he was evacuated to Eastern Europe, where he was imprisoned twice and escaped twice. He eventually became a cobbler in Paris, drinking too much and suffering ill health from his times in prison and from his wounds. He died in Paris in 1934 aged about forty-five. Some credit should go to his able lieutenants, particularly Fedor Schloss and Kurilenko and his wife and co-worker Galina, a teacher. This real life Maid Marion returned to Russia and died there in 1978, aged eighty-six.

In the lifetimes of some older people reading this, a real Robin Hood and a real maid Marion existed. Makhno was courage, generosity, determination and loyalty incarnate. Like Robin he could also be merciful; being one of the few commanders to take or pardon prisoners in Russia's Civil War, but even those major eyewitnesses on his side, Voline and Pytor Arshinov, reveal the dark side to this forest outlaw.<sup>43</sup> He was a lecherous bully when drunk, which was his frequent state. Women had to take part in his orgies. He once ordered a woman to be punched in the face for refusing sexual involvement with him. That order may or may not have been carried out. He may have been involved in anti-Semitic activities, including a possible massacre of Jews taken into the forest and shot on his orders.<sup>44</sup> At times he tended to rule with a clique rather than democratically. In the Makhnovite movement the discontented considered replacing him with the



*Nestor Makhno (centre) Pictured during the Russian Civil War. Wikipedia*

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<sup>43</sup> Pytor Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918-1921*. Detroit; Red & Black, 1974; Voline, *The Unknown Revolution*. Detroit; Red & Black, 1974 pp. 541-712. These overviews are both by an eyewitness. See also Paul Avrich, (editor) *the Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*. London; 1973.pp. 128-137 reproduced Makhnovite documents.

<sup>44</sup> This was narrated to me by a Russian dissident in Melbourne in 1980. He stated that he had been told this some years before by an old woman who saw the Jews in her village rounded up under Makhno's personal orders, led into a nearby forest and shot. Makhno's strong critic Voline, (who was Jewish) investigated such stories in 1919 and found nothing.

more restrained Kurilenko and this probably led to his self-rehabilitation. He became a legend amongst the oppressed Ukrainians and as late as the 1940s anyone known to have been part of the Makhnovite movement was quickly arrested and vanished.<sup>45</sup> He also went into folk memory: songs were sung about him at weddings as late as the 1950s.

Was Robin Hood something like this? Are the medieval records as inaccurate and as biased as the Soviet accounts of their enemy Makhno? The Medieval accounts are the records of the law abiding written about an outlaw. With Robin Hood we have no accounts from him, and no equivalent to Voline or Arshinov emerges from Sherwood Forest to bring us closer to a complete picture. So what do the scant records on Robin Hood say? How do we interpret them?

Writings about both the legend and the supposed reality are scarce in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but they suddenly come in clusters between about 1400 and 1460. Before that first date very little was written about Robin an outlaw and they were in passing references or a sentence or two – which revealed little. As Arthur Robin's chronology shows, in medieval times a large number with his name resided in the north, few lived elsewhere. His main source where his name is usually found, the pipe rolls, reveal little. Those records were kept for concerns about service, position, required taxes, owed wealth, loans and property. Reference types change after around the first two or three decades of the fifteenth century, when the outlaw was England's most popular cultural hero, and on the way to becoming a ubiquitous one.

The earliest, most common and popular representation of Robin Hood place him as active during the reigns of Richard the Lionheart (1189-1199) and then John I (1199-1216). This accreditation rests on little verifiable evidence. A Robin Hood was listed on the exchequer roll for 1198 and royal court rolls for 1198 and 1199.<sup>46</sup> This meant he held some important position, paid taxes or was classified as owing some type of expected service. Did he appear recorded in these years because he was a young man coming of age into inherited positions? Or was this because he was loyal to Richard I and perhaps an active rebel against John or even an outlaw? If so he could only appear in the records of a law-abiding society after Richard returned to kingship in England in 1194. The way these records stop in

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<sup>45</sup> A 1977 interview by the author with a Ukrainian, born in 1921 who personally witnessed this in the early 1940s.

<sup>46</sup> Robin, 2016 chronology.

1199 the year of Richard's death suggests he may have fled, retired or became an outlaw with John succeeding Richard to the crown in that year. This would fit in to the broad pattern of the stories where Robin Hood returns to the greenwood and opposing King John after Richard's death. Until more primary sources emerge these are no more than tantalising possibilities which fit the legend. These staid records and accounts do not contradict the much later colourful legends. They can be used as a base for them and as thin evidence for later commentaries and in passing mentions which put Robin in the late twelfth century.

Major, a Scottish historian writing in 1521, was apparently the first to place the outlaw Robin Hood in these years, but he offered no proof. Frank Sidgwick reproduced some of Major's comments from his *Historia Maioris Britanniae* and they are worth examining. In reference to the reign of Richard the Lionheart Major states:

‘About this time it was, as I conceive, that there flourished those most famous 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 either he attacked them or offered resistance in defence of his property. Robert supported by his plundering a 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 abbots. The robberies of this man I condemn, but of all thieves he was the prince and the most gentle thief.’ Sidgwick, Introduction to *Ballads of Robin Hood and Other Outlaws*. p. xv.

In this short passage, which influenced various writers, scholars and possibly balladeers and bards coming after, much of the basis of the legend which would be developed gets a definite start: the ties to Richard the Lionheart, the robber band of archers hiding in the forest, robbing the rich to pay the poor – and the merciful, chivalrous prince amongst outlaws, a champion of justice. Much of what is in this passage reveals a mass of contradictions. If he is so gentle, why does he have a hundred feared archers, “ready fighters every one”? Killing people for trying to defend their property can only be gentle in comparison to merciless cutthroats. The murderous Robin of the early ballads and histories reads very differently to Major's description. What reads very similarly is in Fit 1 of *The Geste of Robin Hood* where Robin advises Little John not to kill those they rob and to leave the poor alone; instead target prelates. They should also never cause harm to any group

that contains women. Even if the last possible date for the publication of *The Geste of Robin Hood* of 1508 is accepted as the first, this means these lines were written at least thirteen years before Major's passage of 1521. Nearly thirty years before must be more likely and the matches in presented facts may be coincidence, but what has to be more likely must be that Major used the fiction as a source for his history - or that both *The Geste of Robin Hood* and Major's writings were based on earlier unknown or uncredited works, for King Richard does not appear in *The Geste of Robin Hood*.

In the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) the king's printer gave the same era for Robin as Major did, claiming it was based on exchequer records which are probably those previously mentioned and also ancient pamphlets, which have never been found.<sup>47</sup> Others among their contemporaries followed these two sources. No evidence for this dating exists in the earliest songs, but two references in manuscripts allow for this early possibility. Between 1189 and 1194 Prince John, acting as Richard's regent during his long absence in the Holy Land, allowed his forester for Sherwood the hereditary right to the chattels of all robbers and poachers taken within the forest.<sup>48</sup> This is precisely the time of Major's Robin hiding within Sherwood during the absence of Richard the Lionheart. It also links the villainous Prince John of the popular version to the locale and the situation. Unfortunately it does not link Robin by name. For a regent to concern himself with robber's chattels suggests that they were much more than what peasants subsisting near or in a forest probably took, venison and firewood. Had they been plundering wealthy abbots perhaps?

More evidence for the legend originating in the reigns of Richard and John exists in the life of a historical personage Fulk Fitz Warine. This is not to say that he was that most elusive forest creature "the real Robin Hood" but they have too much in common to be coincidental and much of what he did, both in history and legend, fits as a perfect match with many of the Robin Hood stories. Much about him remains uncertain, even his lifespan. He may have been born as early as around 1160 or as late as 1178. He was known to be still alive in 1250 and may have lived to 1256 or to 1258.<sup>49</sup> Much of the confusion comes through a

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<sup>47</sup> Holt, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97.

<sup>49</sup> 'Fulk Fitz Warine' *Wikipedia*; John P. Ravilous, 'CP Correction: Fulk III and his descendants.' Posted 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2003.  
<https://groups.google.com/topic/soc.genealogy.medieval/GER8CAPFECDIED8Oct1250> and *Pows Igobe Ancestry*. 'Fulk III Fitzwarrin.' Posted 12<sup>th</sup> February 2005



combination of a paucity of documentation and the way five conterminous generations were headed by his namesakes; of the five relatives entitled Fulk Fitz Warrine came third and all five were a border lord in that locale, the Shropshire border with Wales.<sup>50</sup> In modern references he frequently gets the moniker Fulk III.

A border lord close to royalty seems very different to a yeoman outlaw, but even his scant history reveals strong similarities between the men and an anonymous medieval manuscript. *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine: An Outlaw Baron in the Reign of King John* reveals many more. These become important as due to its date, this work cannot be derivative from even the roughly datable ballads: indeed even the earliest known Robin Hood ballads may derive from it. Louis Brandin in his 2001 introduction to the new translation said Thomas Wright's 1855 introduction to this work could not be bettered.<sup>51</sup> Wright gave indications to the manuscript's origins, noting that the handwriting dated it to the reign of Edward II with indications that it was before 1320.<sup>52</sup> The manuscript was roughly translated and probably copied from a much earlier version, with the prose being a paraphrasing of a lost poem: fragments of the original poetry remain. The original was composed before 1300, perhaps before 1264, with a likely date just past the middle of the thirteenth century. Wright does not mention it, but on page 56 the narration refers to King Edward as ruler, then three pages later to King Henry as ruler. Henry ascended to the throne in 1216, died in 1272 and his son and successor was the first English King named Edward. Either the existent copy or the original made an incredible mistake, showing the existent copy Wright used was written after 1272 and written either by a foreigner or by a very ignorant person. Was this king's name also in the original? If so it must also be dated later than Thomas Wright claimed. This mistake is typical of historical realities in *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine*. Wright's notes list a large number of certain historical errors and dubious statements. The work now has a general consensus of being more romance than reality.<sup>53</sup>

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[www.timukpubnet/pltree//379676html](http://www.timukpubnet/pltree//379676html) In both sources John P. Ravilous uses several medieval rolls, estate and legal documents and genealogies.

<sup>50</sup> Ravilous, both previous citations; Thomas Wright, Introduction to *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine: An Outlaw Baron in the Reign of King John*. London; 1855. pp. xiv-xv. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record006139826> accessed 1st - 3rd February 2018. Wright mentions the confusion over names.

<sup>51</sup> Brandin, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Wright, p. v.

And what was that reality? Fulk III was probably born in the 1170s and lived some of his life in the North.<sup>54</sup> In or before 1197 his father died and after he lost a disputed case in 1200 John gave the lands Fulk should have inherited to Mory (who is sometimes translated as Moris or Maurice) Fulk then killed Mory, was outlawed for it and fled to the forest. His rebellion against John's misrule became open warfare in April 1201 and continued until he was pardoned in November 1203. In 1215 he supported the rebellion of the Magna Carta rebels; clearly he was a fighter for justice against misrule. He returned to his lands and died old, sometime after October 1250, but before 1260. Stories of him were popular; by around 1325-1340 he became the hero of an epic poem named after him which depicted his forest exploits.<sup>55</sup> This may have been the poetic original of *The History of Fulk Fitz Warin*, but not necessarily. Edward II had an extensive collection of plays, but of these only a fragment of one survives.<sup>56</sup> This was in a royal collection, where even more than in monasteries, we could expect manuscripts and books to be safe from destruction. Like the wide and repeated gaps in the lives men of such prominence as Fulk and his son and namesake, these disappearances suggest that only a small proportion of England's written documents have survived.

In *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine* much of the plot to Robin Hood's story appears and in the same sequence. A lucky, high energy hero once part of the aristocratic establishment, fearlessly fights its villains when they attack him. Amazingly in his introduction Wright either did not see the similarities to the outlaw of Sherwood or ignored them, staying one of the major defenders of the idea of Robin being mythic.

*The History of Fulk Fitz Warine* reads like a pastiche of three different works; the epic poem, a phantasy and a sober history. These three come in segments which jar. As a mercy fantasy elements are frequently easily distinguishable. Fire breathing dragons menacing a damsel in distress, a giant twelve feet taller than any man, ogres, Merlin, Brutus the legendary founder of Britain and demonic boars do not gain believers over six. That cannot be said about the plausible chess fight or King John (depicted here in line with his known

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<sup>53</sup> Brandin, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Doctor Mike Ibej, 'Robin Hood and the Historical Context' [www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle\\_ages/robin](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/robin) 2014 pre-update source; Holt, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> Holt, p. 64; Thomas Wright, p. xii.

<sup>56</sup> Weir, pp. 37-38

personality) being in England when all contemporary medieval accounts have him in Normandy.<sup>57</sup> The chess fight was supposedly between Prince John and Fulk, who apparently was fostered to the Plantagenets, growing up with King Henry's four turbulent sons.<sup>58</sup> He got on well with them all except John. While playing chess with him petulant John smashed the board on Fulk's head and Fulk gave him the worst of the fight. Complaining to his father King Henry II, he got another blow from the king for complaining.<sup>59</sup>

This incident gives an idea of Fulk's penchant for violence and John's villainous character. It is also in line with the personalities and actions of Henry II and John. Unfortunately the story also matches an earlier story about Charlemagne and his son.<sup>60</sup> As one of the fantasy stories retells Saint George and the dragon with the names changed, is this also what happened here? Or was it real, with princes and royalty behaving in very similar ways while playing a popular game? While *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine* cannot be taken as history, it can be taken as a prototype for many of the Robin Hood stories. The similarities unfolded here easily match.

Fulk is part of England's aristocracy but unlike most in that ruling class elite he is not a Norman. His grandfather came from Metz. There are some hostile references to Normans. (p. 150)

Robin is part of England's aristocracy but unlike most in that ruling class elite he is also not a Norman. He is a Saxon. In *The Geste of Robin Hood* the stories and ballads reveal hostile references to Normans.

Fulk grew up with Richard and stays an adherent to his cause after John takes power.

Robin stays an adherent to Richard's cause after John takes power. He only meets Richard on his return to England after being ransomed.

John confiscates the estates of both men and declares them outlaws. Both men flee to the forest with a band of adherents.

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<sup>57</sup> Wright, p. xiii.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>60</sup> Brandin, p. 4.

Robin flees to the forests of Barnsdale and Sherwood.

Fulk flees to “a forest near Windsor” and Bradene Forest where he “dwells there secretly.” (p. 75) He and his knights live in “the thick of the forest” (p. 78) and “reposed themselves in woods and moors.” (p. 71) Fulk is well acquainted with the New Forest and has other refuges.

Fulk has his brothers and cousins as lieutenants. The brothers are named John, Wiliam, Allan and Phillip. (pp. 79-80)

Robin’s lieutenants include Little John, Will Scarlet and Alan A-Dale.

Both men have other lieutenants who do not have similar names.

Fulk only raids the adherents of King John. In the forest he “takes rich merchants into the forest where they eat well.” (p. 75)

Robin also raids only the exploitative rich. He also takes those he robs into the forest where they eat well.

Fulk “clothed all those who were with him.” (p. 77)

In *The Gest* Robin gives away cloth to his followers and friends.

Fulk is told of a rich, extremely beautiful heiress named Maud, who is a target of King John’s lustful intentions. The Archbishop of Canterbury encourages John to marry her and take her away into hiding by. She joins Fulk in hiding, presumably in the forest. Their son “is born on a mountain” (p. 114) presumably while they are in hiding.

Maid Marian is a rich, extremely beautiful heiress who lives in fear of John’s adherents. In Munday’s play Robin marries her and they live together in the forest.

Fulk has a man who raises the hue and cry against him struck down with an arrow. As knights and lords, Fulk and his brothers use swords and lances. Archers were usually in the lower orders.

Robin’s outlaws frequently use arrows. Robin duels with a sword.

Fulk’s brother William is captured in battle and kept in a Norman castle. Fulk rescues him.

Will Scarlet is captured in battle and kept in a Norman castle. Robin rescues him.

Fulk and Robin are both masters of disguise, frequently getting into their enemies' headquarters. Fulk gulls Prince John. Robin gulls the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Disguised as a humble collier Fulk lures King John deep into the forest with the news that he has seen a magnificent stag worth hunting. Deep in the forest Fulk gives a signal and his outlaws ambush and seize King John and his three accompanying knights and only release him after he makes solemn oaths witnessed by his three knights to make restitution of estates, stop the persecutions and restore peace. Fulk takes the King's fine palfrey and the sheriff breaks his word.

This story is exactly the same for Robin except that King John is replaced by the sheriff of Nottingham, the forest is specifically Sherwood, the disguise, while making Robin also seem humble, is different and there are no accompanying knights. In *The Gest* Little John does the luring.

Fulk in disguise and with a pseudonym goes to a knightly tournament in Paris, wins and chats with the king who only finds out at the end his real identity.

Robin in disguise and with a pseudonym goes to an archery tournament in Nottingham, wins and chats with the Sheriff who only finds out at the end his real identity.

The major difference between these two tales is that on finding out the heroes' identities the French king welcomes Fulk and offers him a home while the Sheriff tries to capture Robin.

Both stories wind down with the restitution of lands and order restored. Marian and Maud both die of illness soon after this. Robyn and Fulk both live into old age but both find themselves in further conflicts with King John after he suddenly succeeds Richard.

Like Robin, Fulk had a sense of social justice, being amongst the rebellious barons who forced John to sign Magna Carta. Did oral retellings transform this into the legend of Robin Hood, champion of the poor and unjustly treated?

Wide differences exist between the legends of the two heroes. Fulk goes on a long wide ranging voyage where he has fantastic adventures. In Scotland he tracks down Piers de Bruville, a murderous robber chieftain who was using his name. For this he captures the gang while dining, forces Piers to behead his eight gang members and then beheads Piers. While Robin stays in Northern England Fulk roams nearly everywhere known in medieval times, from the Arctic to Tunis. Nearly everywhere - except Sherwood Forest. He has no equivalent to Friar Tuck



and his peaceful death is very different to Robin's treacherous death by false bleeding.

Despite the differences, so many identical or similar points obviously match that many later collections of Sherwood Forest stories, ballads and poems. They must owe much to the earlier *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine*. The similarities between Maud and Marian are puzzling as scholars usually consider Maid Marian a later addition to the legend. Did some anonymous author read of Fulk, extract the sections on Maud and adapt them slightly? The manuscript was known to exist during the reign of Henry VIII.<sup>61</sup> This was around the time Maid Marion became a figure in the spring celebrations.

Another aristocrat with links and similarities to the legendary Robin Hood is Earl David of Huntington (1152-1219). As Allen W. Wright notes on *The Search for a Real Robin Hood* (a segment of his website) he bases his work on K.J. Stringe's 1985 biography *Earl David of Huntington 1152-1219: A Study in Anglo Scottish History*.<sup>\*</sup> The first linking of an Earl of Huntington with Robin Hood came in 1599 when the playwright Anthony Munday gave Robin Hood the aristocratic title and background.<sup>62</sup> This seems fiction, not evidence, but Munday must have found connections somewhere because links are there. Huntington's lifespan, placing and relations with King Richard I and John I make a perfect fit. He was present at the coronation of Richard I and was a loyalist to his cause. In 1194 he was actively engaged in siege warfare against John's supporters. During John's reign he was fined a massive 1,100 pounds "for forest offences." In 1215-1216 he was a rebel against the king, which meant backing the Magna Carta, seen as a defence of the people's rights against royal tyranny. His brother in law was Ranulf Earl of Chester, who was a character in *The History of Fulk Fitz Warine* and would gain mention as connected to Robin Hood in *Piers Plowman*, which gives the earliest distinct reference to the cultural hero:

I kan noght parfityly my paternoster as the preest it syngeth

But I kan rymes of Robin hood (sic) and Randolf Earl of Chestre.

These lines are dated to around 1362 by Child and to around 1377 by more recent scholars. Did somebody muddle or the characters of Fulk and Ranulf and omit the

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Wright, pp. v-vi.

<sup>62</sup> Child, p. xxxv

\*Almost all the facts used for assessment here are based on Allen W. Wright's work, but unless otherwise stated the conjectures and opinions are those of this writer.

central character? Years later the Earldoms of Huntington and Chester would be combined and named that way. A village in that area would be renamed Barnsdale, which is one of Robin Hood's legendary locales. As with Fulk, all this appears thin as evidence for being Robin Hood, but thick as a connection, albeit with missing pieces. The similar accounts of both men show that past historians and investigators should not be too quick to insist that Robin was a fourteenth century yeoman and his stories could not have originated in those of an aristocrat living in the reigns of Richard and John.

Their different names and locales however, go against their best evidence and there are others with the right name in the medieval records. Robert, rather than its diminutive Robin, frequently appears.

The existence of all these namesake forest outlaws cannot be so much because one man was a forest outlaw and he attracted stories that mixed pagan and pantheistic ideas into local settings. There are too many Medieval accounts of outlaws in England's forests for their presence in such locales to be either an entertaining fiction or working as enactors of some pagan myth. There were good practical reasons for fleeing to the forest for those who were outcasts, outlaws or the destitute. Outlaws were attracted to the forest as a survival tactic. The massive forests provided refuge, food, fuel, cover from detection and paths to retreat and relocate for forest denizens when threatened. Barren, windswept moors and mountains could not provide such advantages - or even survival for long. Villages, towns and farms were everyone knew everyone else were places where informers could flourish and gain rewards for helping kill or capture outlaws. These forest outlaw stories tie in with periods of war, turmoil and the political instability that came with troubled reigns. Richard I's absent years, King John's later years, Simon De Montfort's rebellion, the troubled, violent reign of Edward II and the first outbreak of the Black Death, when law and order and even England's all lead to periods when the law could be broken with impunity.

There were others similar to Robin Hood. Hereward the Wake (c1035-1072?) fought the Normans after their 1066 conquest. Having his stronghold on the Isle of Ely made him invulnerable for years. He frequently hid in the nearby fen country and in his frequent escapes, raids and use of disguise he sometimes closely resembles Robin Hood.<sup>63</sup> Charles Kingsley's 1863 novel *Herward the Wake, Last of the English* uses known history to read like another Robin Hood story, until the last chapters when lust combines with unfaithfulness leads to him losing the hero light. Other known Medieval English forest outlaws include Adam Bell, William

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<sup>63</sup> 'Hereward the Wake.' *Wikipedia*.

of Cloudsdale and Clim of the Clough. Scotland's Robert the Bruce and William Wallace and Wales's Owen Glyndower also had times of defeat and virtual outlawry, hiding out in the forest – and yet none of these figures, despite their dramas and their heroic ways caught the popular imagination the way Robin Hood would.

The earliest plausible historical reference to the named character as an outlaw applies to a servant, Robert Hood, who slew Ralph of Cirencester in the Abbott of Cirencester's garden, sometime between 1213 and 1216.<sup>64</sup> While this suggests the violence and hostility the legendary Robin showed to the church, it provides no other links. Cirencester is located in South West England, hundreds of miles from Nottingham. Perhaps two namesakes in the same era shared a penchant for trouble. Then a reference to the York assizes list of 1225/1226, found by L.V.D. Owen in 1936, provides a more plausible candidate – if it is a namesake and not the same person as the Cirencester killer. Listed as a fugitive, this Robert Hood has penalties for his chattels coming to thirty-two shillings and sixpence in 1226.<sup>65</sup> This amount must be too large for a peasant or someone of the lower classes, such as a servant, tradesman or soldier, but not enough for a highly graded aristocrat, such as an earl, such as an Earl of Huntington. The amount does suggest a yeoman, a knight, or a lord of the manor, a minor noble, all roles Robin had in assorted ballads. This man was a tenant of the Archbishopric of York, which like the Cirencester records suggests both a subservient connection to the church and the hostility to prelates in the later ballads. He may or may not be the namesake who was recorded in the 1190s records.

In the next year's record his name is given as the colloquial Hobbehod. When the case continues he has fled the jurisdiction of the court and he becomes a declared outlaw. His records list him variously as Robertus Hood, Robert Hood Hobbehod and Hod.<sup>66</sup> These various names start with the 1225 pipe roll of the sheriff of Nottingham and continue in the pipe rolls till 1234.<sup>67</sup> Why did the records stop? Are they complete? Was he killed or had he fled so successfully that

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<sup>64</sup> The presented facts here are based on Holt's work with various Medieval sources. pp. 53-54. The linking of the two men is my opinion, not Holt's.

<sup>65</sup> Holt, pp. 53-54.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Robin, 2016 chronology.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*,

the officials gave up chasing him for the money? Once a fugitive hiding in the wilds living off game and surviving by robbery or the gifts of the peasants are the only options. The way this man survived at least seven years without capture suggests he must have either done this, died without their knowledge or fled far from their jurisdiction.

This long successful evasion suggests Robin's invulnerability and his long battle with the sheriff. The linking to the legend's chief villain looks promising for this being the real Robin Hood. No mention of Little John, Sherwood or other aspects of the tale emerge in this brief account. He may have been the man from the south and found to be the murderer years after. Much time passed as cases in chancery can drag on. He may have successfully defended himself against a murder charge and then got into more trouble years later.

In the 1850s Reverend Joseph Hunter, an antiquarian, found a 1323 list of valets and porters for Edward II. This list included a Robyn Hod.<sup>68</sup> This was just after the King had spent two weeks in Nottingham and much time in the second half of the year in nearby areas in the north as he was fighting a border war with both the Scots and the Earls of Lancaster and Hereford.<sup>69</sup> Another reference has Hod listed in 1322.<sup>70</sup>

Edward also took a special interest in the state of the forests, which according to Hunter were infested by defeated Earl of Lancaster's surviving followers who turned to banditry in 1322 and 1323.<sup>71</sup> In the next year Hod is in full service but is docked pay for absence and is dismissed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1324 with a payment of five shillings.<sup>72</sup> Harris assumes that this was because he was no longer able to work and missed the forest life.<sup>73</sup> It is more likely that with the rebellious earls defeated and the Scots making a treaty, the king had no further reason to stay in the north or to need their services. There are problems with this

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<sup>68</sup> Harris, quoting the medieval list and details. p. 67.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Hallam, *Chronicles of the Age of Chivalry*. London, 1995. p. 202 pp. 204-205. Hallam reproduces entries concerning this campaign from 'The Lanercost Chronicle.'

<sup>70</sup> Weir, p. 150.

<sup>71</sup> Harris, pp. 66-67 quoting Hunter, who used the writs of King Edward II for his travels; Hallam reproduces entries concerning this in *The Lanercost Chronicle*. p. 202 p. 204.

<sup>72</sup> Harris, pp. 66-67.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*,

man being the outlaw of Sherwood. The same records also show that Simon Hood is listed next to him, surely a relative, but not one who appears elsewhere in the stories. No mention of a royal pardon, outlawry or anything else connects to this man. For a king to have a known outlaw and killer having regular access to his bedchamber must be bizarre and foolish, even for such a disastrously reckless monarch as Edward II. This king stunned his court with his fondness for ditch digging, thatching and other manual labour.<sup>74</sup> His favourite companions were men from the lower classes; blacksmiths, seamen, coachmen, ditch diggers and also those connected to assorted entertainments.<sup>75</sup> Hiring Robin and the others was perhaps to help him play at being a blacksmith and have fun digging ditches seems more likely, considering Edward's eccentricities, but as bedchamber valets? As Alison Weir suggests, the phrase from the list "in his company" reads ambiguously and can mean this, but as Edward II was bisexual or homosexual and there are ambiguous references to employment in the bedchamber.<sup>76</sup> Going against this is the large number listed as so employed, over twenty. A more prosaic and likely explanation is that on a prolonged campaign he probably found himself short of staff and hired locals. The strongest evidence that this was not the original Robin Hood is that five namesakes preceded him, all with some obvious documented connection to outlawry - which this man did not have.

Even so, what *The Lanercost Chronicle* says in the 1320s and what *The Gest* repeats emerges as a match thrice. In Fit 6 the unnamed comely king stays in Nottingham for half a year. As in *The Lanercost Chronicle* he also shows concern over the forest and his deer. In Fit 7 when captured by Robin, the king wryly comments that Robin's men do his bidding better than his men do. This aptly describes Edward's rule and the baron's contempt for him. Someone might have found the references to Robin Hod around five hundred years before Joseph Hunter did and inspired by the name, muddled them and related episodes into an episode that became part of *The Gest*. In 1354 another forest robber called Robin Hood was known to be awaiting trial.<sup>77</sup> However this comes so late that his existence

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<sup>74</sup> Harris, p. 83; Hallam, *Chronicles of the Age of Chivalry*. pp. 170-171.

<sup>75</sup> Harris, p. 83; Alison Weir, *Isabella: She-Wolf of France, Queen of England*. London; 2005. p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> Weir, p. 150.

<sup>77</sup> Holt, p. 54.





*The real Sherwood Forest. Both pictures Wikimedia/ Commons/ Public Domain. Below: Author: Immanuel Giel  
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/Sherwood\\_Forest05.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/Sherwood_Forest05.jpg)*



suggests both a non de plume and a life in imitation of the now legendary figure. Taking the legendary outlaw's name may have been more than hero worship. Those outlawed often left families and friends behind and if their real names were known those connected were often punished.

Scottish historian Andrew de Wyntoun located a more likely candidate, in Barnsdale and Inglewood. In his four line account written not long before 1420 he states that Robin and Little John, these "renowned" pair of "forest outlaws" in the years 1283-1285 were "plying their trade" of robbery.<sup>78</sup> Abbot Bower referred to the outlaw's cultural popularity amongst "rough commoners."<sup>79</sup> More sourly, Bower gives his opinion of popular taste and the likely reality behind the Robin Hood legend:

Then arose the famous murderer, Robert Hod as well as Little John, together with their accomplices from among the dispossessed, whom the foolish populace are so inordinately fond of celebrating both in tragedy and comedy. Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*.

Bower wrote these lines around 1440 under a heading for events of the year 1266. Both Francis Child and Stephen Knight separately reproduce a longer passage from the same writer in the same document in which "certain praiseworthy things are told."<sup>80</sup> These praiseworthy things being Robin's refusal to flee from a mass being conducted in a very secluded part of Barnsdale forest as his enemies approach, his trust in God and his singling out the servants of the church and masses to be held in greater respect. Presumably his subsequent overcoming of his enemies, his plundering of them and then ransoming them after mass are not among the praiseworthy deeds. This passage contradicts the previously quoted passage written by Bower. It also contradicts those documents in which he shows hostility to the church – or the church to him.

Another reference, almost certainly to the same man, dates from 1262 in the King's Rembrancers Memoranda roll. Here the King pardons the Prior of Sandleford for seizing without warrant the chattels of William Robehod. Being

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<sup>78</sup> Holt, p. 40. He reproduces Wyntoun's quote.

<sup>79</sup> A.L. Lloyd, p. 136. Quoting from *Scotichronicon*; David Laing identifies Bower as a Scottish abbot.

<sup>80</sup> Knight, p. 76. The whole passage is reproduced. Child also reproduces this passage in his Introduction to Volume Five.



listed as William Son of Robert of Lefevere in 1261, 'Robehod' must be using a non-deplume, again.<sup>81</sup> The continuing use of non de plumes, the hostility to the church, the sense of being cast out of society and then finding refuge in the forest almost always emerge in these brief references to Robin Hood figures. This reference does show an aristocratic link: the surname Lefevere derives from Norman French, the ruling aristocracy's language and therefore would be unused by peasants or yeomen. Kings plunder wealth: they do not concern themselves with the chattels of the lower orders and priors would not bother with a peasant's paltry possessions. These years were the time of political upheaval when nobles were in a losing rebellion against royalty. This led to aristocrats and minor nobility frequently becoming fugitives or leaders of dwindling forces hiding out in forests or the wilder parts of the countryside. The meagre evidence here, like the connections Fulk and the Earl of Huntington had, and the fine for Robertus Hood suggests that the later descriptions of Robin as a displaced noble may have a historic basis – or have been added to one of lesser rank to give his deeds and persona lustre. The much declared, well-trodden path that Robin was a Saxon peasant or yeoman who was gentrified by being made the Norman Earl of Huntington or a lord, could easily be reversed on this evidence. The gentrification happened much later and was in fiction, not history.

It is just possible that several of these thirteenth century references apply to one person. Hypothetically born around 1180 this man would be the registered in the rolls of the late 1190s. In 1213 as a man in his early thirties he kills in southern England, migrates north to avoid trouble, but trouble finds him a decade later and he becomes outlawed in 1226-1227. He survives into his late eighties as an outlaw or returns to that occupation during the Baron's War of the 1260s and its troubled, lawless aftermath. If this sounds far-fetched so does the alternative: five separate late twelfth century to mid thirteenth century individual Robin or Robert Hoods; all outside the law, four of them living in northern England. The similarities suggest that even as early as the second half of the thirteenth century he had become a pseudonym, a legend and perhaps a role imitators enacted. Were early manuscripts lost? Was he an oral tradition among the illiterate long before their usual enemies, the priests, wrote his stories?

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<sup>81</sup> Ibej,

Assuming that all these Robins existed and that the minstrels who picked up stories heard them, they probably avoided reciting those of Sherwood's outlaws as they would have been taking a tremendous risk with singing about a real bandit before aristocrats of those who defied and robbed nobility. Hood's popularity was not among the well off for centuries. He was the people's hero and this seems to have developed against the background, of the peasant rebellion of 1381. Here the ordinary people marched on London and came close to overthrowing aristocracy's grip on England. One of their chants "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" was not only a defiant and sarcastic affront to the hierarchical feudal order, it was an expression of the mentality that Robin Hood stories appealed to.

From around the middle third of the fifteenth century onwards cultural works, fragmentary mentions in court transcripts, references in chronicles and manuscript versions of ballads start to appear more frequently, but they referred to someone who even then was in the long ago past. In Lincoln Cathedral somebody carved a 'Robin Hood was here' in 1410. The graffiti may have had something to do with the first song and rhymes about the outlaw appearing in cathedral documents around 1410 to 1420.<sup>82</sup> A 1432 acrostic mentions his name and that of the best known in his gang and a 1439 complaint against robbers in Derbyshire compares them to Robin Hood and his company.<sup>83</sup> The leader, Peter Venables certainly deserved the comparison. After rescuing prisoners he fled to the woods.<sup>84</sup> By 1438 an Aberdeen ship was named after Robin.<sup>85</sup>

Allen W. Wright gives other similar examples in his website *Robin Hood: Bold Outlaw of Barnsdale and Sherwood*. In 1498 Roger Marshal led a rebellion of around a hundred people and in court admitted to using Robyn Hood as an alias. He gave his defence as being that he acted with typical Robyn Hood practices. In 1500 a Scottish writer compared the national hero William Wallace to Robyn Hood. He had a point: both had been popular outlaws fighting for freedom against

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<sup>82</sup> Robin, 2016 chronology.

<sup>83</sup> Holt, p. 58 p. 69; Child reproduces the original statement in his introduction to Volume Five.

<sup>84</sup> Allen W. Wright 'The Search for a real Robin Hood.'

<sup>85</sup> Robin, 2016 chronology.



royal authority. In 2009 Doctor Julian Luxford discovered a similar comment, which for the first time from a medieval source definitely links the shadowy historical figure and his band to Sherwood Forest. While needing more substantiation such a mention of this locale in a primary source vitiates all those secondary accounts whose writers insist that stories placing Robin in Sherwood are fabrications of some kind and therefore cannot be history. This document also implicitly gives support to the idea that he indeed robbed the rich, even if there no mention of giving to the poor. This find, while brief, gives some substantiation for two elements within the later stories and songs. This comment was written around 1460, on a manuscript from about forty years earlier. This was itself a later copy of the Medieval history, the *Polychronicon*, which dated from the late 1340s.<sup>86</sup> Doctor Luxford's translation of the Latin reads:

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

Writer and scholar Paul Booth claims this is a mistranslation. The Latin "regio" does not mean regions or areas here, but royalty.<sup>87</sup> He translates Doctor Luxford's find as:

Around this time, according to popular opinion, a certain Robin Hood, with his accomplices attacked and stole constantly from the faithful (servants) of the King of England at Sherwood and elsewhere.

While both translations show that the early stories and popular images of Robin Hood now have a stronger basis in fact, the second translation lifts him above the idea of a rapacious cut throat.

He may have even given to the poor, albeit as rural guerrillas often do, not from altruism, but from self-preservation. They know that local informers can be of immense benefit to them - or to their enemies. Gratitude for food, money or

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<sup>86</sup> Paul Sims, *Daily Mail. Australia*. 14<sup>th</sup> March 2004. Online Front Page. This is credited to [Medieval News. Net](#). *Medieval News*. Posted 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009. Doctor Luxford is interviewed.

<sup>87</sup> Paul Booth, 'A comment on Julian Luxford's Discovery of an Unpopular Robin Hood.' Posted March 25<sup>th</sup> 2009.

supplies leads to passive alignment. Robin is an enemy of the king and his servants and followers, but of which King?

Abbot Bower makes him a rebel with Simon De Montfort, in the 1260s. After that baron's defeat, did some among those of De Montfort's surviving followers hide in the forests of Sherwood or Barnsdale and continue an intermittent guerrilla warfare that gradually deteriorated into selective robberies? There was a continuing rebellion in the north after Montfort's defeat in 1265.<sup>88</sup> Doctor Luxford believes that the note he found places Robin Hood in the reign of Edward I (1272-1307). The one reference to a named king in the ballads and stories names Edward, but which one? Three kings of that name ruled conterminously between 1272 and 1377 and no hard evidence for identifying which one applies emerges.

Trying to date the stories by either secondary or major characters proves equally unwise. One person who can be traced is the real Friar Tuck. A former chaplain, his real name, was Robert Stafford. In 1417 he had begun a career in arson, illegal hunting in the forests and robbery in southern England and was still active in 1429.<sup>89</sup> Like Maid Marion he does not appear in the early ballads and only starts to make appearances in the sixteenth century. Although there are thirteenth-century French stories of a Robin and a Marion meeting in the greenwood, this Robin appears as a knight, not an outlaw and none of the usual characters emerge.<sup>90</sup> The first mention of her specifically tied to Robin Hood dates from 1513/1514.<sup>91</sup> Maid Marion was originally a figure in May Day celebrations – and the two became partnered, either by writers or the celebrating populace.<sup>92</sup>

The Robin Hood of legend must be a composite figure, made of name sakes, with the later figures probably taking the famous name to avoid punishment

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<sup>88</sup> Holt, p. 40.

<sup>89</sup> Holt, pp. 58-59.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Fortunaso, 'The Later Legend.' *Robin Hood: The Facts and the Legend*. [www.robinhoodlegend.com/](http://www.robinhoodlegend.com/)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> 'Maid Marian' *Wikipedia*; Fortunaso.

for their family and friends who did not escape to the forest with them. It may well be that one or possibly two name sakes were the originals. Perhaps the first two were really one person, the enemy of King John from the 1190s on and then he was also the declared outlaw of 1226-1234. He - or they did very little, fleeing by himself to the forest and getting his name on a fugitive's list. The references to Robin returning to his battles with King John years after the vigour of youth have passed may echo this possibility. Those references to namesakes from the 1250s and 1260s may have been derived from one individual resembling the first. Or did this character take a non de plume because he imitated or emulated the first? Sutcliff's idea of one charismatic man originally being at the core of a hero figure who gathers others tales in folk memory seems the most likely explanation.

The deeds of near contemporaries such as Fulk and the Earl of Huntington accumulated around a name that several very different men took in subsequent decades. Murderous outlaws, hunted minor criminals wanted by debtors and law abiding, low level nobility all had one thing in common – their famous name, if nothing else. By taking that name and living in a similar way they also added to the legend and by doing so made the reality more difficult to discern. Other later deeds are pure inventions by bards, minstrels and then broadsheet balladeers. As J.C. Holt remarks, the legends and ballads do have a composite character, with Robin sharing adventures and situations similar to other forest outlaws, real, legendary and unreal.<sup>93</sup>

The cultural industry also began early. From 1294 onwards one Robynhod even had a London inn named after himself.<sup>94</sup> Or was this the first known money spinner in the industry already devoted to the outlaw of Sherwood? The earliest known datable ballad mentioning him 'Robin Hood and the Monk' gets an attributive rough date for being around fifty to seventy years before the lines dating from about 1362-1377 in *Piers Plowman*.<sup>95</sup> The earliest copy of 'Robyn and

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, pp. 62-75.

<sup>94</sup> Holt, p.52.

<sup>95</sup> See the introductory notes for the song 'Robin Hood and the Monk' in Child's collection.

Gamelyn,' being from the Sloane Manuscript, dates from around 1450.<sup>96</sup> Here the troubled lover talks of becoming 'an outlaw' in 'the greenwood' where he will live by his archery to get venison. She wants to come with him. It turns out to be a test as his true love turns out to be nobly born and he merely poses as a poor squire. She retains her loyalty to him and he turns out to be an earl in disguise. He has lands in Westmoreland. The similarities to Robin Hood and Maid Marian are clear, but their names are not used, but then none are. Is this an early case of the richer classes moving in on the successful culture of the poorer? An early example of rich kids slumming? Or were Robin Hood types common and the popularity of the legend overshadowed similar characters?

The first publishing of *The Geste of Robin Hood*' may date from around 1489 or 1492.<sup>97</sup> This book was a collection of early stories put together into one patchy narrative. It was printed in Edinburgh around 1500-1508 and then in Europe in 1510 and again in 1534. Those later editions came with some changes. How much earlier the stories that made up the compiled geste date from remains uncertain. One source dates them from around 1400.<sup>98</sup> In printed form 'Robin Hood and the Potter' one of the first complete ballads, dates from around 1500 or very soon after, perhaps 1503. But that song usually is described as originating much earlier.<sup>99</sup> The Percy Folio which contains what was probably a balladeer's collection of works dating to the first half of the seventeenth century contains fragmentary versions of 'Robin Hood's Death' as well as an incomplete 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne.' A fragment of that same ballad was found on the back of a receipt book dated 1475/76.<sup>100</sup> Another collection of Robin Hood ballads was found at a sale in 1993 and published in 1998 as *Robin Hood: The Forrester's*

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas H. Ohlgren and Stephen Knight, (editors) 'Robin and Gandelyn: An Introduction.' From *Robin Hood and Other Outlaws*. 1997. As these writers make clear here scholars dispute to what extent this ballad should be considered to be about Robin Hood.  
[d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/tex/trobinandgandelyn](http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/tex/trobinandgandelyn).

<sup>97</sup> Child, Volume Five. p. 43; Robert Fortunaso; Ibej.

<sup>98</sup> Ibej,

<sup>99</sup> Child gives the date 1500. See his notes to the song his Volume Five. Holt states 1503 or a little later. p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Holt, p. 33.



*Collection* they date from around 1670, when they were copied, edited and expanded from much earlier works. How much earlier remains a question.

*The Geste of Robin Hood* supplies incidents used in retellings in novels, plays and screens, but it would be 1601 before they were put together in Munday's play. This became the story's essential form. Minstrels, broadsheet balladeers, romancers and performers added tales, characters, enactments, ballads and songs to this play's essential structure. This continued amongst those who originate folk songs three decades into the eighteenth century. In 1795 Joseph Ritson also added to this process, not so much by changing what Munday had done or adding his own inventions, but by compiling what existed concerning Sherwood and Robin into one volume. This was a goldmine for the retellers, especially as Munday's play did not become a classic, the ballads were usually concerned with one incident and *The Gest* had massive holes in its narrative. Eventually novelists, directors of films, plays, television shows and computer gamers would follow, adding to the process. Two songs, the theme from the British television series of the 1950s and the love song from *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves* have gone from screens to oral communication. Balladry traditions live on.

And what would the original Robin Hood, who was perhaps an aristocrat, but was more likely to have been an obscure Nottinghamshire man, only different from millions like him by escaping from the law for a trivial crime, have thought of all this? With his then unknown name and few real achievements, he became more famous than any English king and amongst the most recognisable people in a world much bigger than he dared imagine. What would he have made of it?





*Robin shooting with Guy of Gisborne, a 1912 illustration by Louis Reade.  
Commons/Wikimedia .*

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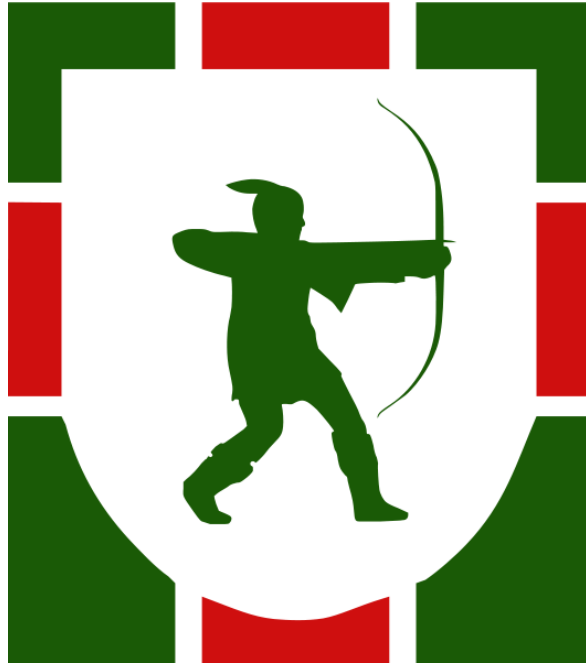
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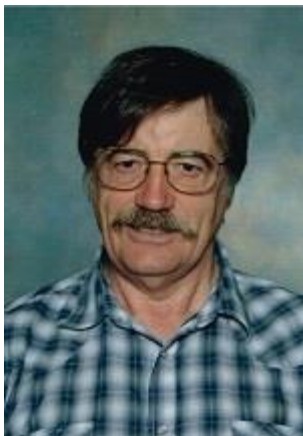
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About the Author



The author's interest in the American Civil War veterans started in junior primary school days. After careers in heavy industry and politics he abandoned these disastrous choices and gained a double honours degree (English & Drama) with Modern History as a third, specialising in the rebellion against western imperialists in nineteenth century India and China. Other subsequent history studies at university included: The Conquest of Mexico, Nazi Germany, Migration, the Crusades, Witch-hunts from 1400-1700 and the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Crete, Troy, Greece, Rome, and Medieval Europe. In 1995 by a fluke he became a tutor and defacto university lecturer/tutor, being the only person in the city qualified with the required highly specialized degree. He then worked in mainstream English for a term and then in university preparatory courses for indigenous students in English, Sociology, Education, Critical Literacy and Psychology. After government retrenchments to university in 1998, he returned to High School teaching. Since 2008 he organises and plays community radio programs in the Folk and Celtic genres. Garry recently finished a second university degree, this time solely in History.

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