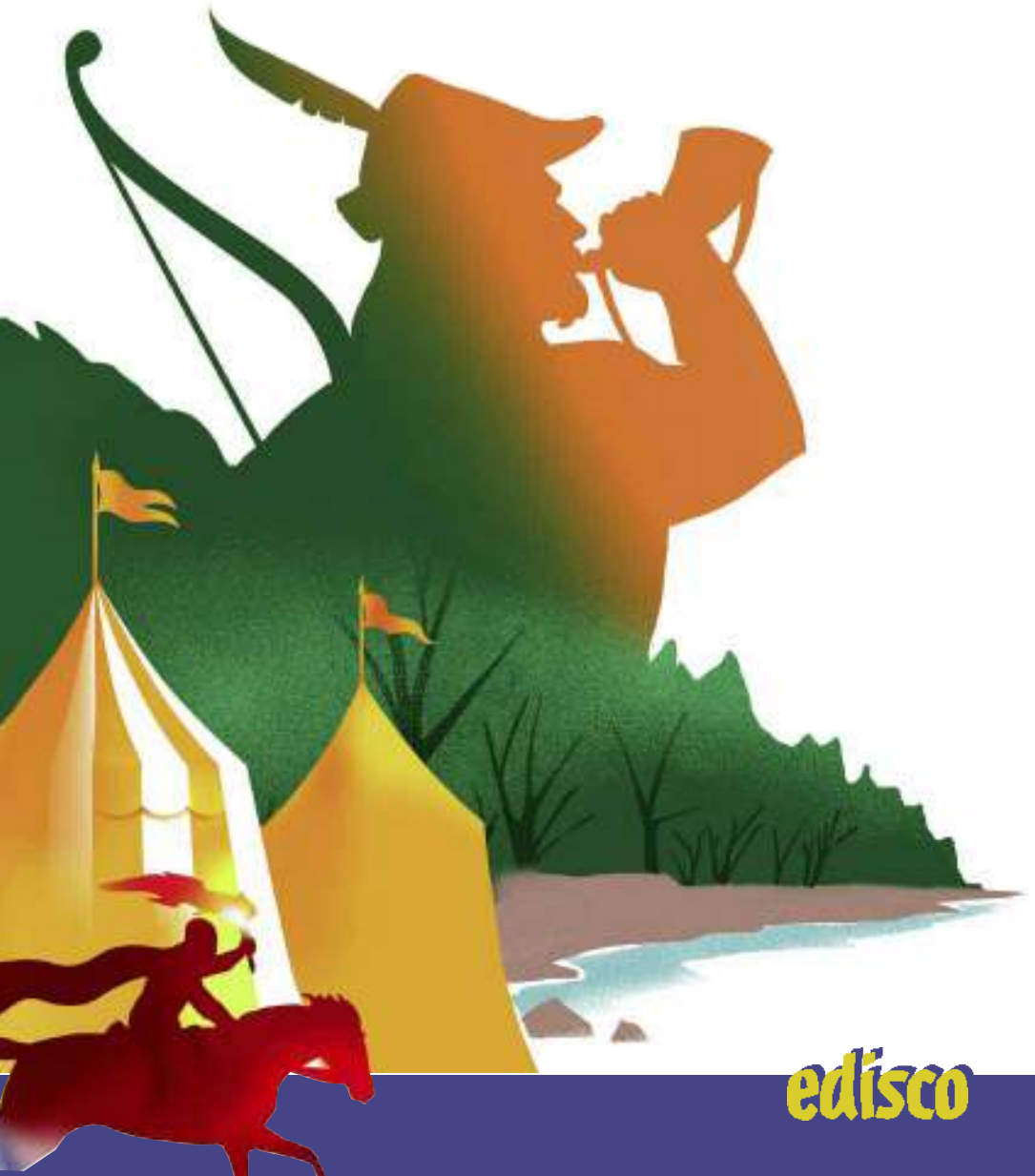
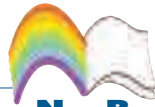


Robin Hood and medieval life





R A I N B O W S

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Robin Hood

History or legend?



The tales present Robin Hood as a yeoman, the young retainer¹ of a lord. He was accused of serious crime and outlawed; as a consequence, he fled and became a highway robber. He was the sworn² enemy of the Sheriff of Nottingham and a very skilled archer, the finest in England.

But did Robin Hood really exist?

We don't know for sure.

All the tales contain references to real places. Most of them are set in Sherwood Forest or in Barnsdale; the action sometimes moves from one place to the other, which is not surprising, as they aren't

far away from each other, about a day's journey. The facts, too, seem real: feuds³ with the Sheriff and his meetings with the king used to take place in Nottingham and highway robberies were common in Barnsdale. Both places were well-known for their outlaws that made travelling through them scaring.

If he existed, then, who was he and when did he live?

Evidence of outlaws with similar names has been found in the area, even though not all suggesting the same period. Traditionally, Robin Hood lived in the late XII century, under the reign of Richard the Lionheart. Historical evidence for the tales, which are one of the main sources of information, only dates back to the XIV century, though.

Documents referring to people with the surname 'Robinhood', almost all criminals, have been found recently. They are dated the second half of the XIII century. One of them reports the trial⁴ for robbery of a certain William, son of Robert the Smith, in Berkshire in 1261.

1. *retaine*:servitore, dipendente.

2. *sworn*:giurato.

3. *feud*:faida familiare.

4. *trial*:processo.

In a second record of the same case, dated 1262, his name had been transformed into William Robehod, or Robinhood. This means that the official who gave him the nickname⁵ of Robinhood probably knew the tales. Robin Hood, then, must have already been famous.

Another possibility is that he was the tenant⁶ of the Archbishop of York, who escaped justice in 1225. Other evidence of the same person is dated 1226, when the goods⁷ of Robert Hood, fugitive, were sold, and again 1227, when he was referred to as 'Hobbehod', outlawed.

Real or fictional, his legend grew through travelling minstrels as a symbol of the struggle⁸ of ordinary people against authority. He became the hero who fought to help the poor, to restore⁹ justice, to defeat corruption, to right wrongs.

In the XVII century his adventures became ballads, which were sung and sold in streets and market places. There are 38 'traditional' ballads, written between the XVII and the XVIII centuries, among which the most famous are: 'A Gest of Robin Hood', 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisbourne', 'Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar', 'Robin Hood and the Monks', 'Robin Hood and the Potter', 'Robin Hood's Death', 'Robin Hood and the Pedlar'.

The Romantic vision of the Middle Ages favoured a new popularity for the legend through some American and British writers, among whom Walter Scott, who used him in "Ivanhoe" in 1822. In the XX century four silent films before 1914, other films later – the most famous one starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland and the most recent one starring Kevin Costner –, cartoons, plays, TV programmes, all told the story of Robin Hood, the hero who fought for the oppressed.



Robin, popular hero.

5. *nickname*:soprannome.
6. *tenant*inquilino.
7. *goods*:beni.

8. *struggle*lotta.
9. *restore*riportare.



BEFORE READING

1 What do you know of the Norman Conquest? Choose the correct alternative, then check your answers after reading.

- a. Who were the two peoples involved in the battle?
- the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons
 - the Normans and the Celts
 - the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons
- b. What was the name of the Norman chief who conquered England?
- Richard the Lionheart
 - John Lackland
 - William the Conqueror
- c. When did the conquest take place?
- in the I century B.C.
 - in the IV century A.D.
 - in the XI century A.D.
- d. What was the relationship between the two peoples like after the conquest?
- very good
 - just a little tense
 - bad

2 Maybe you have either seen a film on or read the story of Robin Hood. What do you remember about him? Consider these points:

- where he lived
- when he lived
- what his men were called
- what they did
- who he loved
- who his enemies were

Robin Hood

Robin outlawed

Chapter 1

In 1066 the Normans defeated¹ the Anglo-Saxons and conquered England. The Anglo-Saxons hated the Normans, who had taken land and power from them.

They still hated them after over a century, when, in 1189, King Richard I came to the throne. He was a very good king, though²: people loved him and called him *Richard Coeur de Lion* or *Richard the Lionheart*.

At that time great armies were leaving England to go and fight in the Crusades, because they wanted to free Jerusalem from the Saracens. Soon after becoming king, Richard went on a crusade, too, and asked his friend, the Bishop of Ely, to rule the country in his absence. Richard's brother, John, was very jealous and ambitious; he wanted to take over³ the kingdom and, with Richard out of the country, he saw his chance to take the throne. He accused the Bishop of Ely of treason⁴ and persecuted⁵ him, forcing him to run away to save his life.

Prince John had many knights, barons and bishops on his side. He and his followers were cruel and hungry for land and money, which they took from the people. John appointed⁶ sheriffs to keep order throughout the country and they helped him oppress the population, instead of administering justice.

King Richard was told of the situation in England and tried to return but was taken prisoner. Many people feared he would never return.

One day, during King Richard's absence, a wedding was taking place in Locksley Hall, near Sherwood Forest. Earl Robin Fitzooth was getting married to Lady Marian Fitzwalter. He was

1. *defeat*: sconfiggere.

2. *though*: tuttavia, però.

3. *take over*: impossessarsi.

4. *treason*: tradimento.

5. *persecute*: perseguitare.

6. *appoint*: nominare.



Robin outlawed

about thirty, handsome, tall, well-built⁷, had brown hair and clear eyes and wore a beard. She was twenty-five, tall and beautiful. They both had strong, determined personalities and formed a perfect couple.

Earl Robert had arrived at the church with his bowmen, who stood on the sides of the aisle⁸ in military formation. Lady Marian, who looked calm and serene, was at the altar with her father, Lord Fitzwalter, who looked nervous, instead. Robert walked between the two lines of men to the altar and took his place near Marian. The Abbot⁹ started the ceremony but loud noises and shouting were heard all of a sudden. A band of armed men, among whom was Sir Guy of Gisbourne, rushed into the church. Sir Guy shouted: “I forbid¹⁰ this ceremony, in the King’s name! This man, Robert Fitzooth is a traitor and an outlaw, otherwise known as Robin Hood.” The Sheriff of Nottingham, a town near Sherwood Forest, was with them, too. He was a wicked man in Prince John’s service. “Robert Fitzooth, Earl of Huntingdon, has helped the King’s enemies,” read the Sheriff.

“He has broken the law and is a traitor to the King. Robert Fitzooth, also known as Robin Hood, is declared an outlaw, in the name of Prince John. His lands are confiscated and he is banished.”

Robert wanted to see whether King Richard’s seal¹¹, or at least the Bishop of Ely’s seal, was attached to the mandate¹². Of course, there was neither.

Guy of Gisbourne said Robert was no earl as he only called himself Earl of Huntingdon thanks to his mother’s Saxon origin. In fact, Anglo-Saxons noblemen who had refused to obey William of Normandy, the Conqueror, were no longer noblemen. Only earls and barons created by William of Normandy had rights. Besides, Robin had killed the King’s deer and committed many crimes under the name of Robin Hood.

7. *well-built*: di corporatura robusta.

8. *aisle*: navata.

9. *Abbot*: Abate.

10. *forbid*: impedire.

11. *seal*: sigillo.

12. *mandate*: mandato.

Robin Hood

Robin replied: “I am no longer Robert Fitzooth, Earl of Huntingdon. You have called me Robin Hood. You, the Sheriff, Prince John and all the abbots, knights and barons who oppress our people will fear my name. I will reign in Sherwood Forest and I will right wrongs¹³ until Richard comes back to our country.”

Robin swore his love to Marian and left her to her father. She would stay in Arlingford Castle with him until King Richard could marry them.

When Robin’s and Guy’s men started to fight, Lord Fitzwalter and Marian escaped to Arlingford Castle. Robin’s men had the best in the battle and went to Locksley Hall, Robert’s mansion¹⁴, through Sherwood Forest. During the fight Robin had hit Guy of Gisbourne, who had fallen unconscious to the ground. By the time he recovered consciousness¹⁵, Robin’s men had left.

When he felt better, Guy spoke of Robin to the Abbot. A tall, broad friar with a red face took his defence and was banished by the Abbot. The friar, who was no longer a Brother of that Order, left the Abbey as Michael Tuck, just as he had gone there three years before.

John 'Lackland', Richard's brother.



13. *right wrongs*: riparare i torti.

14. *mansion*: palazzo.

15. *recover consciousness*: rinvenire, riprendersi.