

**Robin Hood** is a legendary hero of England. He may or may not have been a real person. Mention is made of him in a book called *Piers Plowman* by Langland in 1377. He is mentioned in ballads, which are songs about heroes, in the 1300s, where he is considered a master of disguise. The earliest detailed information about Robin Hood dates to 1420.

The stories about Robin Hood take place in the 1190s in England. King Richard is off on the Crusades to the Middle East. His evil brother John has the throne. Robin Hood's adventures occur in Sherwood Forest where he and his band of merry men live. Depending on the story or the time, the number of his men varies from five to one-hundred forty. They are called **yeomen**, which are people in a class a little above a peasant.

In early versions, his great skill with a bow carved from a yew tree is bragged about. In later years his band is said to have preyed upon the wealthy to give to the poor. Robin is said to be loyal to King Richard and, although an outlaw, is eventually pardoned. The early ballads don't tell how or why Robin became an outlaw. His band wears clothing of Lincoln green, called this because the dyers who lived in Lincoln made an unusual shade of green by dying blue cloth with yellow.

He is seen to be rather reckless and daring. He sneaks into Nottingham often and sometimes gets caught by the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. Sometimes he picks a fight with a traveler through Sherwood Forest and has a difficult time. If he is in trouble, Robin gives three blasts on his horn, and his men appear.

No family members are associated with Robin. In the 1500's, a love interest, **Lady Marian**, was added to the stories. They both participated in the May festivities. The story of Robin Hood kept evolving over time with different details being added to the telling. In 1632, a writer of ballads who wrote *A True Tale of Robin Hood* claimed that Robin was really the Earl of Huntington who died in 1198.

The people who believe that Robin really existed say he is buried in Kirkstall Hall in Yorkshire, England. A grave there has this inscription: *Here underneath this little stone / Lies Robert Earl of Huntington / Never archer there as he so good / And people called him Robin Hood / Such outlaws as him and his men / Will England never see again.*

Only five of the men have names in the early ballads. **Allan a Dale** appears first in the 1600s in a story called *Robin and Allan a Dale* on a one-sided piece of paper. Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet and Will Stutely are named as merry men. In legends, Little John plays the part of the second-in-command to Robin. He often has adventures of his own. He is an excellent swordsman and archer. Little John's best-known weapon is the quarterstaff. He was carrying a quarterstaff when he first met Robin Hood.

Once, Little John beat Robin in an archery contest. Robin refused to pay him for his win. John left the band for a time. When Robin got captured, it was Little John who organized the Merry Men to trick the sheriff and the king in order to rescue him. Robin Hood apologized to Little John and said he would make Little John the leader of the band. John refused. Robin always remained the boss.

**Francis Child**, who collected ballads in the 1800's, gathered together 38 Robin Hood ballads. These make up the Robin Hood legend. Scenes from these ballads have been used for books, television shows, and movies. His multi-volume set was called *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. The Robin Hood stories appeared in the volume written in 1888.

1) Which of the following is a true statement?

- ☐ **A:** Little John was the shortest of Robin Hood's band of men.
- ☐ **B:** Maid Marian was Robin's mother.
- ☐ **C:** Robin Hood may not have been a real person.
- ☐ **D:** The merry men lived in London.

2) In which of the following places did the evil sheriff live?

- ☐ **A:** London
- ☐ **B:** Nottingham
- ☐ **C:** Sherwood
- ☐ **D:** Yorkshire

3) Which of the following is the definition of a ballad?

- ☐ **A:** A song about heroes
- ☐ **B:** A type of weapon
- ☐ **C:** A type of hat
- ☐ **D:** A wood platform

5) In which of the following countries did Robin Hood supposedly live?

- ☐ **A:** France
- ☐ **B:** Scotland
- ☐ **C:** Ireland
- ☐ **D:** England

6) Which of the following was Robin's chief assistant?

- ☐ **A:** Will Scarlet
- ☐ **B:** Little John
- ☐ **C:** Will Stutely
- ☐ **D:** Maid Marian