

## **Robin Hood (Osprey, 2014)**

### **Robin Hood: the Legend, the Myth, and the Man**

Of all the myriad characters inhabiting England's vibrant past, two men stand out as representing something essential in the English identity. The first is King Arthur who pulled the nation together in a common defence against invaders; the second is Robin Hood who defied the odds to stand up to hypocrisy and injustice. Neither man may actually have existed, but they live in the collective imagination through the legends and myths told about them. This book focuses on Robin Hood who remains as elusive today as he apparently did to the Sheriff of Nottingham during England's Middle-Ages.

There are few in the English-speaking world who have never heard of Robin Hood. His name is synonymous with an outlaw whose motive is to do good deeds using unlawful methods. He is a trickster, fighter, lover, adventurer; he looks like Errol Flynn, or Russell Crowe, or Kevin Costner, or any of his television incarnations; he wears Lincoln green, carries a longbow and knows how to use it. He lives deep in Sherwood Forest and leads a band of colourful outlaws known as the Merry Men, and his passion is reserved for the always beautiful Maid Marion. Robin Hood takes from the rich and gives to the poor, and he fights against the corruption of the local law and the established church. He is a placeholder for better times when Royal authority is more judiciously applied. And all of the above is a combination of myth, fabrication, and mostly pure fiction; almost all of it anyway.

We know about Robin Hood because people told stories or sung ballads about an outlaw now lost to the historical record and then wrote them down. As time passed, later interpolations entered the tales as contemporary motifs and the exploits of other bandits were used to freshen up the stories for new audiences. The Legend of Robin Hood was born through that process. The core of the Legend is contained in a few collected ballads under the title of A Gest of Robyn Hode and dated before the English Reformation of the early 16th Century. While it is a bit too convenient, it is reasonable to argue that the stories after the Reformation form the Myth of Robin Hood. From that time, new characters are introduced, including some merely for entertainment value, and new stories emerge.

The greatest change though is that of Robin Hood himself. His status changes from yeoman to disaffected nobleman; he has a love interest where none existed before; and he becomes less brutal. This is also where the notion of Robin taking from the rich to give to the poor enters the story, along with the idea that Robin was fighting oppression while awaiting the arrival of the true king. The Myth reaches its apotheosis in the technicolour delights of The Adventures of Robin Hood with Errol Flynn dressed in Lincoln green, but the seemingly timeless story of Robin Hood has endured for new generations and audiences, and will no doubt continue to do so.

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Robin-Hood-Myths-Legends-Smith/dp/1472801253/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1474271538&sr=1-1&keywords=neil+smith+robin+hood](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Robin-Hood-Myths-Legends-Smith/dp/1472801253/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1474271538&sr=1-1&keywords=neil+smith+robin+hood)