Outlaws and Pirates

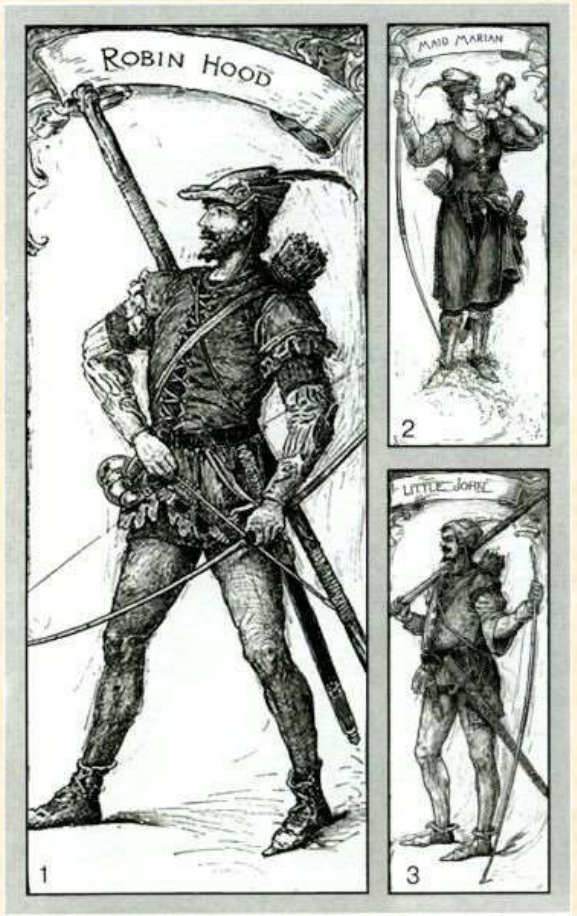
Session 1 – Into the Greenwood

Feelgood Learning

Introduction

Introduction

- For centuries, England was famous for its robbers.
- Early in the 14th century, a Franciscan friar stated sarcastically that in fortunate England there were no actual robbers.
- Instead, he said, the gentry, under the name of ‘shaveldours’, robbed churchmen and peasants at will.
- There are various well-documented cases of gentlemen who engaged in highway robbery and other violent property crimes.



Introduction

- The Dominican preacher John de Bromyard complained that England was more crime-ridden than any other country.
- Wealthy men surrounded themselves with gangsters and thugs, who acted as their enforcers and strongarm men.
- It has been argued that outlaws and robbers became so in times of peace – if there was war they would have been good soldiers.
- The legal system was corrupted by influence and bribery, so it was hard to bring serious criminals to justice.

Introduction

- The outlaw of legend is depicted as an innocent man, driven by powerful enemies to live outside society.
- He takes refuge in the forest, where he survives by robbery and poaching.
- But these crimes are viewed as necessary and justifiable.
- In time, he finds a chance to revenge himself, and vindicate his essential innocence.
- Then he returns in triumph to live on the right side of the law.

What was an Outlaw?

What was an Outlaw?

- In reality outlaws had more in common with the Mafia than the heroes of Anglo-Saxon legends.
- Outlaws often survived by exploiting peasantry.
- Professional criminals were more likely to be members of the landed gentry than peasants.
- They were often hired as thugs by the nobility.

What was an Outlaw?

- An outlaw was a man who had literally been put outside the protection of the law.
- Only men over 14 could be outlawed.
- Women were said to be ‘waived’ rather than outlawed although the practical outcome was the same.
- Criminal outlawries arose from indictments for treason, rebellion, conspiracy or other serious felonies.
- Civil outlawries were generally proclaimed in cases of debt.

What was an Outlaw?

- To be declared an outlaw an accused man had to fail to turn up at court (usually three times).
- Everything he owned would be forfeit.
- He lost all rights.
- Outlaws were called “wolves heads” because anyone could kill them with impunity.
- After being declared an outlaw, men turned to brigandage out of necessity.

What was an Outlaw?

- Being an outlaw was, however, often better than the alternative.
- Justice at this time was harsh.
- Of particular importance was trailbaston.

What was an Outlaw?

- Trailbaston was a special type of itinerant judicial commission first created during the reign of Edward I.
- The first trailbaston commissions date back to 1305, when Edward I directed several teams of justices to visit each English county and seek presentments for felonies (homicide, theft, arson, and rape) and certain trespasses (premeditated assault, extortion, and violent assault).

What was an Outlaw?

- The declared intention of the trailbaston commissions was to combat increasing levels of violence and public disorder.
- But an added bonus for the crown was the revenues brought by forfeiture, which was the punishment for conspiracy.
- Over the years it became a corrupt system that was misused by many of the justices for personal gain and advancement.

What was an Outlaw?

- Sentence of outlawry often led to a life of wandering.
- Many fled to the forests which were much more dense than today.
- It was impossible to police the forests.
- Forests were easily accessed and offered as much protection as fleeing to another continent.

What was an Outlaw?

- Some outlaws took sanctuary in churches.
- Sometimes gangs of outlaws used churches as bases for attacks and raids against the surrounding areas.

What was an Outlaw?

- Others joined the private armies of powerful lords.
- These kept such forces as a means of furthering their own criminal careers.

Robin Hood

Robin Hood

- Legend has it that Robin Hood was an outlaw living in Sherwood Forest with his ‘Merry Men.’
- There are several versions of the Robin Hood story.
- The Hollywood one is that of an incredibly handsome man – Errol Flynn – clothed in garments of Lincoln green, fighting and outwitting the evil Sheriff of Nottingham.

Robin Hood

- Robin Hood was the legendary outlaw hero of a series of English ballads, some of which date from at least as early as the 14th century.
- Robin Hood was a rebel, and many of the most striking episodes in the tales about him show him and his companions robbing and killing representatives of authority and giving the gains to the poor.

Robin Hood

- Their most frequent enemy was the Sheriff of Nottingham, a local agent of the central government.
- Despite this internal evidence from the early ballads makes it clear that the action took place chiefly in south Yorkshire.
- Other enemies included wealthy ecclesiastical landowners.

Robin Hood

- Robin treated women, the poor, and people of humble status with courtesy.
- A good deal of the impetus for his revolt against authority stemmed from popular resentment over those laws of the forest that restricted hunting rights.
- The early ballads, especially, reveal the cruelty that was an inescapable part of medieval life.

Robin Hood

- Numerous attempts have been made to prove that there was a historical Robin Hood, though references to the legend by medieval writers make it clear that the ballads themselves were the only evidence for his existence available to them.
- A popular modern belief that he was of the time of Richard I probably stems from the 18th century.
- The outlaw's existence may never have been anything but legendary.

Robin Hood

- The authentic Robin Hood ballads were the poetic expression of popular aspirations in the north of England during a turbulent era of baronial rebellions and agrarian discontent, which culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.
- The theme of the free but persecuted outlaw enjoying the forbidden hunting of the forest and outwitting or killing the forces of law and order naturally appealed to the common people.
- Robin Hood village games (like carnivals) were popular but often banned by disapproving authorities.

Robin Hood

- Although many of the best-known Robin Hood ballads are postmedieval, there is a core that can be confidently attributed to the medieval period.
- These are:
  - Robin Hood and the Monk,
  - Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne,
  - Robin Hood and the Potter, and
  - the Lytyll Geste of Robin Hode.

Robin Hood

- During the 16th century and later, the essential character of the legend was distorted.
- Robin became a fallen nobleman.
- Playwrights, eagerly adopting this new element, increased the romantic appeal of the stories but deprived them of their social bite.
- Post medieval ballads (which gave Robin a companion (Maid Marian) also lost most of their vitality and poetic value, doubtless as a result of losing the original social impulse that brought them into existence.

Robin Hood

- The creator of the modern Robin Hood was really Walter Scott in his novel *Ivanhoe.*
- It was probably the attention of writers such as Scott and Keats that prevented Robin Hood being lost like the tales of so many other popular outlaw heroes of the time.

The Real Robin Hoods

Adam the Leper

- Adam the leper and his gang were amongst the most ruthless and daring of the fourteenth-century gangs.
- All that is known of Adam are his crimes.
- His gang was active in the south east of England sometime in 1330s and 1340s.
- They did not bother hiding in the forest to waylay passing travellers.
- Instead, they were an urban gang who took bolder measures.

Adam the Leper

- One of the gang's favourite methods was to wait for towns to have fairs-then they would descend.
- While householders were at the fair, the gang plundered their unguarded homes, setting them on fire afterward.
- The distraught householders were generally too busy trying to save their houses and remaining possessions to give chase.

Adam the Leper

- Like Robin Hood and his merry men, Adam and his gang would also hold the wealthy to ransom.
- However, unlike Robin, who did not harm his victims, he was not a particularly gentle ‘host’.
- Men and women were captured and ransom was extracted on the pain of death.
- Even those who paid it might think themselves fortunate if they escaped some horrible mutilation.

Adam the Leper

- Adam's gang was audacious enough to target royalty.
- In 1347, the gang descended upon Bristol and robbed several ships in the harbour belonging to King Edward III.
- But their greatest coupe was in London.
- Here, the gang targeted a jeweller who held some pieces belonging to Queen Philippa.
- Adam and his men laid siege to his house, demanding the jewels.

Adam the Leper

- When the jeweller refused, they set the building on fire and seized the jewels by force.
- But this time, the victims gave chase, when the King sending Thomas, Lord Berkley after the gang.

Adam the Leper

- Adam was caught and brought to justice in Winchester.
- But his outlaws staked out the courtroom, attacking everyone who came out.
- They caused such trouble that the authorities had to let the outlaw leader go., free to continue his life or crime.

The De Folvilles

- John De Folville, Lord of Ashby Folville had seven sons.
- After his death in 1310, his eldest son, John took over the estate.
- But his other six sons formed a notorious medieval gang that terrorized Leicestershire throughout the 1320s and 1330s.

The De Folvilles

- The first of their crimes occurred on 29 January 1326, when a Master Roger Bellers was found murdered.
- His death was laid squarely at the door of “one Eustace de Folville and his brothers”.
- Bellers was a greedy fellow, guilty of persecuting and threatening the De Folvilles, as well as many of his other neighbours.
- So this initial murder may have been tolerated if not secretly well received by locals.
- But it outlawed the De Folvilles.

The De Folvilles

- However, in 1329, the King pardoned them – on the condition that they fought for him.
- This reconciliation with authority did not last.
- While part of the garrison of Leicester, the gang robbed the town burgesses.
- In 1330, the pardon was revoked.

The De Folvilles

- The de Folvilles made such a nuisance of themselves that in 1331, the King's justice Richard de Willoughby was sent to deal with them.
- Richard de Folville, "a wild and daring man and prone to acts of violence", who was also the Rector of Teigh, kidnapped Willoughby.
- He only released Willoughby after he paid his kidnappers 90 marks and swore an oath to "comply with their instructions" -which was presumably to protect them from outlawry.

The De Folvilles

- Eustace de Folville, the eldest of the gang, managed to elude justice, dying a natural death in 1347 having served the King in the Hundred Years War.
- However, justice caught up with Richard de Folville when, in 1340, the ruthless rector and two of the gang were run to ground in Richard's own church.
- A stand off occurred.
- Father De Folville killed one man with his bow before he was eventually dragged from the church and beheaded.

The De Folvilles

- Because he was a priest, Richard's death was deemed unlawful.
- So his killers had to do penance by praying for forgiveness outside all the neighbouring churches before being publicly beaten with a rod.

The Coterels

- The Coterels were another family affair, active in the peak district and Nottinghamshire between 1328-1333.
- Led by James Coterel and three of his brothers, outlawry was just another part of the Coterel's business portfolio.
- Although they were only younger son's, the Coterel's had their own land and property, even receiving rents while they were hiding out in Sherwood forest.

The Coterels

- The gang's first recorded crime was in in August 1328.
- Robert Bernard, the ousted parish priest of Bakewell in Derbyshire, paid the Coterels to beat up and rob his successor.
- Bernard had been driven out of his parish for embezzling funds and was jealous of the priest who had taken over.

The petition from Walter, Vicar of Bakewell, Derbyshire, dated c.1331 and written in old French to the King, asking for justice against the Coterel gang who have beaten him up and evicted him from his church

The Coterels

- Enforcement became the Coterel's mainstay- not for the poor and friendless, but the clergy and gentry.
- These well-placed contacts-which included at least seven members of Parliament- also protected the Coterels.
- They helped them evade arrest and ensured that anyone who crossed them felt the full force of the law.

The Coterels

- The Coterel's had no problem recruiting members- hardly surprising considering the protection the gang enjoyed.
- Even Roger de Wennesley, Lord of Mappleton who was sent to arrest the Coterels in 1330 ended up joining them.

The Coterels

- Members of the clergy also joined the gang.
- Some of these real life Friar Tucks were amongst two hundred gang members who were arrested in November 1331 when the Sheriff of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire finally moved against them.

The Coterels

- But like Adam the Leper and the De Folvilles, the Coterels evaded justice.
- Although Laurence was stabbed during an attempted arrest in 1330, Nicholas Coterel became Queen Philippa's bailiff for the High Peak and would lead an army of archers into Scotland.
- And James Coterel ended up in law enforcement.
- In November 1336 he was the arresting officer of a Leicestershire parson accused of illegal activity.