

# Remembering the Outlaw in Medieval England

The emergence of  
the Robin Hood legend

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Philosophical,  
Historical and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Australia.

July 2014

## Errata

- n. 18, p. xiv: remove 'earl'.
- n. 2, p. 1: 'rebellious earl' should read 'rebel'.
- n. 7, p. 4: 'is disloyal' should read 'acts in bad faith'.
- n. 2, p. 6: 'noticably' should read 'noticeably'.
- n. 12, p. 7: remove 'popular'.
- n. 22, p. 10: insert footnote 'Pollard, A. J., *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context*, London and New York 2004, pp. x-xi.
- n. 3, p. 15: delete colon.
- n. 20, p. 15: insert footnote 'Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, pp. x-xi.'
- n. 19, p. 16: 'lazyness' should read 'laziness'.
- n. 12, p. 43: ':' should read ','.
- n. 2, p. 46: 'originally real men' should read 'legends attached to real men'.
- n. 5, p. 56: 'earl' should read 'lord'.
- n. 12, p. 106: 'Luton' should read 'Lutton'.
- n. 18, p. 127: 'St Edmundsbury' should read 'Bury St Edmunds'.
- n. 12, 137: 'Vicecomitatum' should read 'Vicecomitum'.
- n. 1, p. 144: 'MS' should read 'manuscript'.
- n. 1, p. 158: 'earl' should read 'baron'.
- n. 5, p. 168: 'shall' should read 'will'.
- n. 15, p. 187: 'Henry VI' should be 'Henry VII'.
- n. 30, p. 249: 'traducing later myths into' should read 'comparing later myths with'.
- n. 10, p. 254: 'fifteeth' should read 'fifteenth'.

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# Summary

The heroic outlaw is a figure classically exemplified by Robin Hood: a mythical medieval outlaw who lived in an unknown time, and whose legends appear in chronicles and ballads dating from the early to late fifteenth century. This work seeks to examine the origins and development of legends about outlaws, through their evolution between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. While there have been a number of studies of the literary tradition of English language ballads about Robin Hood, they have not included Latin chronicle accounts of figures who came into conflict with the political establishment. This thesis compares these monastic accounts with later stories about heroic outlaws. In particular, it explores the historical context in the early thirteenth century of the Yorkshire outlaw Robert of Thwing, recorded by monastic chroniclers Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris. It compares this insufficiently studied tradition to later tales of Robin Hood, relating them to the increasing hostility towards sheriffs that emerged in the wake of the so-called Barons' Revolt of the 1260s. Although the monastic sources relating to Robert of Thwing differ significantly from the ballads of Robin Hood, making any comparison difficult, allusions to his name first appear in the thirteenth century, long before the composition of the surviving ballads, first known from the early fifteenth century. In 1262, a minor outlaw saw his name changed from William le Fevere to William *Robehod*, indicating 'Robin Hood' may have become something of a criminal nickname by that time. This suggests that tales of Robin Hood, first alluded to in *Piers Plowman* in the 1360s, may have originally been quite different from their surviving form. There was a long period within which we simply do not know about the evolution of stories about heroic outlaws. This thesis reflects on possible influences that may have helped shape that process.

Since they were orally transmitted, tales about outlaws required a popular audience to whom they may have been relevant. The audience for these stories changed dramatically over the centuries. According to Walter Bower, writing in the mid fifteenth century, stories about Robin Hood appealed to the *stolidum vulgus* (foolish common folk). Yet by the early sixteenth century, they seem to have been appealing to yeomen and gentlemen.

Stories may have varied and may have been altered to suit the tastes of various classes over time. This is how they survived.

This work charts the development of the tradition, and in doing so it shows how stories about many different outlaws may have been combined into accounts of a single figure. Did the surviving early ballads of Robin Hood preserve memories of earlier outlaws? What relationship is there between a Yorkshire tradition about Robin Hood, and another imposed on it, regarding a corrupt Sheriff of Nottingham, and the outlaws of Sherwood Forest? Is there any relation between tales regarding Robert of Thwing and other outlawed figures in the thirteenth century, and the later Robin Hood ballads? This thesis argues that late surviving tales of Robin Hood celebrate the deeds of many outlaws whose names have become forgotten, by amalgamating them into a single hero, and that these stories persisted into the sixteenth century. We can trace a great many outlaw traditions to historical archetypes, active between the civil wars of King John, and the aftermath of the Barons' War in the 1260s. In monastic chronicles, they were perceived to generally take the 'pro-English' side, opposing John and his foreign mercenaries as well as Henry III, over displeasure with his adherence to Roman policy, and the resulting effects. The balladeer who told tales in later times was more concerned to remember the outlaw and his tales of adventure, than stories about any particular historical figure.

# Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Charles Kos



# Acknowledgements

The completion of this work would not have been possible without the guidance, suggestions, corrections and enthusiasm of Professor Constant J. Mews, who encouraged me to pursue this research, and who devoted so much time and assistance, including assistance with correcting Latin translations. My co-supervisors Dr Clare Monagle and Professor David Garrioch have also provided great assistance, advice and direction. I would like to thank Emeritus Professor John Crossley, Dr Carol Williams, Dr Michael Hau, and many others, for their suggestions and direction over the years. I would like to thank my brother Daniel and mother Stella for helping me with typesetting, proofreading, and in so many innumerable ways.



# Abbreviations

- AM* *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. R. Luard, 5 vols, London 1864-9.
- Chron. Bur.* *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds 1212-1301*, ed. Antonia Gransden, London 1964.
- DBM* *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion, 1258-1267*, ed. R. F. Treharne and I. J. Sanders, Oxford 1973.
- Dobson & Taylor *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, ed. R. B. Dobson & J. Taylor, Bridgend 1997.
- MW (trans.)* *The Flowers of History, especially such as relate to the affairs of Britain. From the beginning of the world to the year 1307. Collected by Matthew of Westminster...* ed. and trans. C. D. Yonge, 2 vols, London 1853.
- ODNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the earliest times to the year 2000*, ed. B. Harrison, H. C. G. Matthew, Updated ed., Oxford 2004, online ed., Jan 2007.
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Oxford 1989 and 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., online ed., June 2011.
- Paris, *CM* *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols, London 1872-1883.
- Paris, CCC MS 16 *Matthaei Paris Chronica Maiora II*, in Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 16: at <http://parkerweb.stanford.edu/parker>.

- Paris (trans. Giles) *Matthew Paris's English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1853-1889.
- Political Songs* *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England, from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Peter Coss, Cambridge 1996.
- Stubbs W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development*, 3 vols, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, Oxford 1896.
- Walter *Memoriale Walteri de Coventria*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols, London 1872-3.
- Wendover, *Flores* *Rogeri de Wendover Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. O. Coxe, 4 vols, London 1841-2.
- Wendover (trans. Giles) *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1849.

# Introduction

The central contention of this work is that stories about Robin Hood as an outlaw, emerging into public awareness at the end of the middle ages, articulate an earlier set of traditions about heroic figures, mixed with much creative licence as well as invention. One of these individuals is Robert of Thwing, a knight of Yorkshire, described by Michael Clanchy as a Robin Hood-like figure.<sup>1</sup> This contention is certainly not a new one, but new evidence is brought forward to support the claim, which can broaden the possibilities for future research into outlaw tales. In particular, Latin chronicles deserve a fairer hearing in study of the celebrated outlaw. That field is traditionally dominated by Middle English texts as well as French romances, as primary sources. It is suggested that the Latin monastic chronicles, described aptly by Nancy Partner as *Serious Entertainments*, should be treated as such: sources for information, real as well as invented, on tales about outlaws and other heroic figures, but with an intention to delight the reader, as they do.<sup>2</sup> The stories in chronicles, as well as in Latin so-called ‘Political Songs’ of the era, as collected by Thomas Wright from old manuscripts, exist in an earlier form than written English ballads of later centuries, but they were also designed to entertain, not just to record history. Latin chronicles, Old French romances and Middle English ballads are all different literary forms of entertainment relating stories of heroic (and sometimes potentially dangerous) figures. In their own way, chronicles report heroic adventures traditionally not often considered in relation to the development of later ballads, from the end of the middle ages, about outlaws. There has been an unfortunate separation in scholarship between chronicle and literary sources, even though both tell tales of heroic figures. While it is impossible to find any original Robin Hood in these sources, they assist in taking us through the myriad of traditions and cultural ideas that have helped shape outlaw legends, through a changing cultural perspective as well as a literary one. Chapter One notes that allusions to a figure called ‘Robehod’, evidently an

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<sup>1</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers 1066-1272*, Oxford 1998, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The writing of History in Twelfth-Century England*, Chicago 1977, p. 4.

early form of 'Robin Hood', of whom ballads are first attested in the late fourteenth century, first emerge within a thirteenth-century context. It considers hostility to churchmen, not seen in legends about earlier figures, as significant in shaping this tradition. This point is important, as it ultimately allows a neglected social and political context relevant to the development of the stories to be explored within the scope of chronicles from the thirteenth century. These are ideas which are seen as intrinsic to an original tradition, separate from later additions by a storyteller.

This brings us to the second chapter, which examines the historical background conducive to the emergence of outlaw figures in the early thirteenth century. This is the time in which the Robin Hood legends most probably first originated as there are scant references to any such figure before *Robehod* in the 1260s. In the 1220s there was a figure in Yorkshire called Robert Hod but we know very little about him. Whether or not he was associated with another Yorkshireman, Robert of Thwing, active politically from about 1231-47, is uncertain. What is clear is the recurring theme in English political life in the thirteenth century, of rebel figures purporting to represent an English community against those perceived as foreign or self-interested parties. This is evident in chronicles, but is irrelevant to later ballad tradition, even if legends of heroic figures from history like Fouke Fitz Warin, and Ranulf III the Earl of Chester, were later integrated into later works. Men like these, and Hubert de Burgh justiciar of England, were seen by their admirers as fighting to retain their lands and power against a greedy administration which appeared distant from the people's needs, and therefore unrepresentative of the kingdom's interests. Robert of Thwing found himself the active leader of one such movement in 1231. The chapter examines the lead-up to this event, and the key issues involved. Men celebrated in chronicles were men of politics in their own time. In a later period, they became figures of legend, without the politics. They were of old landowning families and fought for their interests in this unstable period against foreign intervention in English affairs. In the case of figures like Fouke Fitz Warin and Ranulf, Earl of Chester, high social status meant that they could enjoy some success. They would be remembered in ballad tradition. By the fifteenth century, however, their names were becoming forgotten. Some of the fictional adventures of Fouke and Ranulf were retained in popular culture, without their names, although they were now performed by a

mysterious ‘Robin Hood’, who in his outlawry against a sheriff of Nottingham, supplanted the earlier heroic tradition of noble rebels.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter Three examines a pivotal series of events between the 1230s and the mid thirteenth century. A northern knight with a concealed identity, who was later identified as Robert of Thwing, led a series of renowned robberies against Roman clergy in England. Senior clerics and churchmen had been introduced into England after a decision of John in 1213 to grant the country to the Pope. Citing various tyrannies, these rebels wanted to punish the so-called ‘Romans’ and loot their lands. Funds raised from the sale of stolen grain were reputedly thrown to the poor. Stories in Latin chronicles are related in some detail to later stories about Robin Hood in subsequent chapters. The stories they provide about heroic outlaw-type figures are not looked at by scholars such as Stephen Knight, who focus on the ballads specifically about Robin Hood, based on an oral tradition mixed with invention. These chronicles are records, written in Latin, by monks about individuals who challenged the political establishment. The case will be made that stories about these figures constitute a possible influence on the subsequent evolution of legends about Robin Hood.

Chapter Four focuses on the exactions of sheriffs in the 1250s, which led partly to the Barons’ War of the 1260s, in which period we have the first appearance of *Robehod*. Little is known about this conflict. It is only in recent decades that the idea of peasant involvement has been discussed. The chapter relates ideas in the revolutionary 1260s Ordinance for the Reform of Sheriffs with the earlier savage exactions of sheriffs, noted by the chronicler Matthew Paris, in the 1250s. It is noted that sheriffs, always unpopular, were, by the chronicler’s standard, especially unpopular in this time. A discovery made by David Carpenter, but never related to the study of the origins of the celebrated-outlaw tradition, makes it evident that the shrieval system was especially rife with corruption by the 1250s. The notable outlaw activity around Nottingham in this period provides a secondary historical context to the development and popularity of the early legends of Robin Hood but the anti-sheriff nature of the ‘reform’ of the early story of Robin Hood has never been explained in terms of the influence of these elements. This is an addition to the context of possible enduring memories and mythmaking regarding the robberies of Roman clerics in the 1230s. It helps to show how the period leading up to the 1260s

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, pp. 672-3.

might have been formative in the public mind, in facilitating the development of a positive attitude towards outlaws and a negative attitude towards sheriffs. Simon de Montfort, eventual leader of the rebel movement, generated a cult following after his death in 1265. Montfort's epitaph, according to the chronicler Rishanger, lauds a man who fought for the poor. Montfort is forgotten by later myth but instead stories survive of a 'Robin Hood', presumably the outlaw Roger Godberd, who was active in this time. This is an example of potential mythmaking, in the sense of a popular cause, before 1381.

The remaining chapters develop the ideas introduced in the earlier historical chapters, relating them to themes found in various writings. Chapter Five introduces the ballad of *Gamelyn*, which, preceding the Peasants' Revolt by a generation, is the most bloodthirsty of any relating to the outlaw tradition. Anti-sheriff ballads concerning Robin Hood are considered as having been comparatively toned down in their being directed at the gentry and aspiring gentry. In these, Robin resides in a bucolic springtime forest, occasionally going into town to go about his business, and not always with a view to making trouble. William Langland's apparent hostility to celebrating Robin Hood as a less than worthy pursuit is not reflected in the ballad tradition. This implies that the tradition was continuing to evolve.

In addition to relating ideas in earlier chronicles to adventure themes in the ballads (a fresh insight into what might be the flexibility of the medieval oral tradition), we examine particular terminology in the period of the early (late medieval) ballads of Robin Hood. The meaning of the word 'yeoman' in the Robin Hood stories is much debated. It has been suggested the word can mean a forester or a middling-class person, who owns land. As argued here, an overlooked definition, and perhaps the more common type of yeoman in the ballads, is that of a 'king's yeoman' in the sense of a servant to the king, as in the thirteenth century. This is how the ballads explain Robin's yeomanry, even if the term subsequently came to embrace a more general social class.

Finally, the development of the Robin Hood playwright tradition in the sixteenth century is examined. In this period, there was an interest in consulting the chronicles of the past to construct fictional tales about medieval personages. It seems the playwright Anthony Munday sought to relate certain stories told in chronicles to his own invention

about an outlaw whose uncle is a wicked Prior of York of the cloister of St Mary's.<sup>4</sup> These late tales about Robin Hood share resonances with stories about Robert of Thwing told by chroniclers like Matthew Paris, whose work became available in print in the sixteenth century, even if they differ in points of detail.

The legends of Robin Hood present a continuously evolving set of images about heroic rebels, which began in the thirteenth century, often embracing stories about many different figures, which continue to the modern day. The name 'Robin Hood' is an enigma of uncertain origin. Modern mass media present Robin as a gallant and honest figure, unfairly outlawed by a titled elite with little desire other than to further its own despotic power at the expense of the poor. In myth, there are some common themes we can identify. Robin organises a revolt of some sort. He disrupts commerce through robbery. He apparently 'robs the rich to give to the poor.' His headquarters are apparently located within striking distance of Nottingham, so that he might easily strike at the corrupt sheriff, yet retreats to the safety of his forest lair after any trying adventure. Despite Robin's mythical status, stories of Robin differ from medieval romance in that they are almost credible, and relate to day-to-day life. There are no dragons, giants or travel to exotic lands in the outlaw tales of Robin Hood. Robin possesses no magical weapons. There is no Black Knight or grail quest, but a quasi-realistic representation of the Sheriff of Nottingham. The outlook is historic, the scene is England, and the topic is the defiance of tyranny and the righting of wrongs.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.



# Chapter 1 Images of the outlaw

Of all medieval outlaws, none is more famous than Robin Hood. Other outlaw-style figures were celebrated in vernacular literature, like Fouke Fitz Warin, a rebel in the time of King John. They never acquired the fame, however, of Robin Hood as the figure who battles injustice sometime in a mythic past. Robin Hood has become a figure of such significance that there is an article devoted to him in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, as if there were some historical basis to the myth.<sup>1</sup> The surviving Robin Hood tradition is complex. This chapter responds to modern writing on the historical Robin Hood, but rather than searching for any historical figure, it looks at a wide range of historical and literary sources to argue that the Robin Hood stories need to be seen as part of a larger set of stories and myths about outlaws, and related cultural and social themes which would have originated in the thirteenth century. The context for a thirteenth-century phase of the celebration of a heroic outlaw is yet to be defined. It will eventually be argued that the context for this idealisation of outlaws is ‘ant clerical’ in the sense of being directed against wealthy Roman-appointed ecclesiastics.

Robin Hood generated ultimately the most successful heroic outlaw-type legends because he brings together a whole range of attributes, partly representative of a continuum of images once typical of other heroic figures. This is because, before being written down in the early fifteenth century as ballads, Robin Hood stories were part of an oral tradition that ultimately contained an assortment of the best of the modified adventures of other medieval outlaws, even those popular in earlier romance. The fusion of earlier myths creates a number of problems in understanding the origin of the later myth. Robin is somewhat more mysterious than other heroic figures, of whom we have historical knowledge. It is harder to define his social situation, perhaps one of the reasons the myth endured through different periods of time. To appreciate more fully the development of this mythology we need to look not just at the ballads, but at the cultural background through which they were nurtured and developed into their ultimate form.

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. Holt, ‘Hood, Robin (*supp. fl.* late 12th–13th cent.)’, *ODNB*, 2004, online edn, Jan 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13676>, accessed 7/2/13.

We know that there was some fluid oral tradition in the thirteenth century from which romances might have been formed. In the fourteenth century there were 'ryms' of Robin Hood and Ranulf of Chester. In the fifteenth century there were ballads, such as the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, c.1500, made for performance by a guild hall for the benefit of gentlemen and yeomen.

The development of outlaw stories did not stop at the end of the Middle Ages. A wide range of stories about Robin Hood was still being recorded in the late sixteenth century. These were part invention and partly inspired by elements of earlier tradition. Despite evident contamination from newer elements, during the long journey of development, there are some central enduring themes within the tales, pointed out in this chapter, which are unique to the Robin Hood tradition. These include notions of the outlaw helping the poor and attacking avaritious churchmen and monks, particularly in Yorkshire. An awareness of these ideas will help to suggest a possible stimulus for such recurring themes, which cannot be associated with other known outlaw tales. In the 1950s, social historians such as Rodney Hilton sought to identify a political theme behind Robin Hood, above all the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. With the discovery that Robin Hood was already known in the thirteenth century, the political and social context of the stories told by the ballads needs further inquiry. Different stories developed for different audiences who were fascinated by different themes. By analysing many different sources on the tradition of the popular outlaw or other heroic figures of the outlaw type, such as a rebel earl, including with information from Latin chronicles, we can broaden our ideas of what sort of figure an audience wanted to hear about, in early times. Scholars examining the figure of the outlaw tend to confine themselves to vernacular literary texts. They tend not to utilise Latin chronicles to any great extent, although chronicles too are a reflection of cultural ideas, as well as being a source for entertainment, in addition to the vernacular tradition. The work as a whole will examine themes specific to the Robin Hood tradition (that is, not found in other outlaw tales) to help explore the political and social context that may have facilitated the subsequent development of various aspects of the medieval outlaw tradition.

## **What is an outlaw?**

Before we look closely at the surviving Robin Hood legends, through modern as well as antiquarian and medieval eyes, it is helpful to reflect on the term ‘outlaw’, in respect to the surviving ballads and earlier stories about heroic rebels. There are different types of ‘outlaw’ and ‘outlaw tale’, but there was only one clear definition of ‘outlaw’ in a legal sense, namely someone who failed to attend a court summons and was removed from all protection of the law. Such men might live in the forest as robbers and at other times hunt in game parks, and were often celebrated in the ballads. The outlaw of ballads was not just a trouble maker, but a heroic figure. We are confronted with a multiplicity of associated outlaw traditions, including the notion that he could be an earl, like Fouke Fitz Warin, an English law breaker of a different sort, who rebelled against King John. He was famous by the later thirteenth century, in romance as well as earlier oral tradition. Such a figure was more of a heroic rebel, or ‘noble outlaw’: someone of authority, no longer loyal to his king. Robin is seen as running from the law, epitomised by the Sheriff of Nottingham. This assists in calling him an ‘outlaw’. There is a recognition that although different stories about heroic figures occur in different languages, and for different audiences, such as the Old French romance, or Latin chronicle, or English ballad and rhyme, these seem often based upon similar oral legends which freely mixed while in that form. These stories are all based on a collection of myths rather than historical accuracies. The ballad writer is never specific on why a character is deemed to be an outlaw. They simply exist outside the law, committing criminal deeds seen in a positive light by the writer.

In later romance, and historically as an earl, Fouke refused to hand over his lands to a rival, at the arbitrary behest of King John. He would not be described as an outlaw in the strict sense, though he is certainly a similar sort of character to Robin Hood. He hid in the forests and lived outside of the law, or more appropriately, according to his own law, and a parallel character might have been wanted for justice by the royal court, in history or myth. We know that another figure of legend, Hereward the Wake, was a Saxon earl of the conquest era. He refused to submit to the Normans and his alleged deeds became myth and legend. He was actually called ‘the outlaw’ in the only surviving work about him, from the thirteenth century. The name stuck because of the plundering of his

father's property when he was young, among other misdeeds, resulting in his banishment. He would distribute plundered goods to his friends and supporters.<sup>2</sup>

John Leland in the sixteenth century referred to Robin Hood as *nobilis exlex*, or noble outlaw, even though Robin is never officially outlawed in the early ballads.<sup>3</sup> Although he does later receive a pardon, we know nothing of his previous crimes or summons. The reader merely presumes he has been outlawed, as he lives in a forest and travels into town mainly to commit crimes. As for Fouke in his romance, King John acts in bad faith first by ordering him to surrender his lands. Fouke then only kills in self defence. Fouke, like Robin Hood and others including more humble outlaw figures, live in the forests, a haven away from the reach of the bailiff or sheriff.

If such figures as a historical Fouke had simply avoided justice, there might not have been stories made about him. These heroic troublemakers were seen as active rebels. This is because they not only broke the law, but were recalled as making a mockery of it. In this way, they are all quite similar. Such was the extent of their crimes that their path to redemption could never lie through the courts but in a direct and unusual pardon from the king, whose will and foresight transcended mere bureaucracy. For popular literary characters, this occurred in the case of the trio of legendary medieval outlaws, William Cloudeley, Adam Bell and Clim of the Clough. These three are the quintessential and humble forest outlaws, merely 'outlawed for venyson', though the king himself eventually pardons them in person.<sup>4</sup> A ballad of their exploits is recorded in the sixteenth century. A direct pardon from Prince Edward occurs in the story about a rebel of the 1260s, Adam Gordun, a myth recorded in monastic record. There is also one for Fouke Fitz Warin, an earl of John's time, whose fictional adventures are related in literary romance. Finally, Robin Hood is pardoned by an unnamed king in late medieval ballads. Such pardons, often with penalties attached, were the way rebels were brought back into the fold, after a civil war or other disturbance. The special pardons given to these heroic figures of myth endured in reprints of the ballads of Robin Hood, into later times, as if Robin and his men had been the main recipients, and as the memory of most of the other outlaws dulled into insignificance. The other path for the heroic troublemaker was death,

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, pp. 639-40.

<sup>3</sup> John Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. Thomas Hearne, Oxford 1715, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 241.

as in the case of Eustache the Monk, who was executed in battle. Pardoned popular fictional rebels were then sometimes employed as king's yeomen. The aim of certain peasants in the revolt of 1377 was also to go directly to the king and appeal to him, perhaps in emulation of the style of the mythical figures they had heard tales about. These were famous because they transcended the bounds and laws that others dared not cross, but nonetheless often came to a good end.

## **Some historians and methods**

This chapter looks at earlier attempts to make sense of surviving stories about Robin Hood. Legends need not be specific on the question of their origins. They need not contain a history of their own development because they are written to be recited as entertainment. It is up to scholars to decipher the rest. The question of whether there is a social context or pre-existing legend which gave rise to the idea of a one-time existence of an outlaw behind the myth of Robin Hood is unanswered. Attempts to get to the bottom of the mystery have led to a divergence of opinion in terms of procedure. The question remains as to whether the available Robin Hood material, preserved in late-medieval ballads, can be used as evidence of an earlier tradition about idealised outlaws, or whether it should merely be investigated in its own literary or social temporal context. Rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive historiographical overview, this section highlights these parallel methods employed in examining the early myths of Robin Hood. More comprehensive historiographical discussions are found in later chapters.

There are two main schools of thought regarding inquiry into the early history of Robin Hood. On the one hand, scholars treat the ballad texts as examples of late medieval literature. They may analyse literary structure, and look for identifiable themes which they use to characterise the work within the historical framework of the time in which they were written. We encounter *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, by Maurice Keen, or *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, by Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, which show us quite plainly that the Robin Hood ballads contain elements reminiscent of the adventures of other outlaws, although there are also unique characteristics. By contrast, historians who have searched for the identity behind Robin, have often sought to look within the pages of legend for clues relating to an original history. They

sometimes compare real-life figures from historical records with literary characters from early ballads. This is an older and idealistic method, though it noticeably endures in David Baldwin's 2010 work, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked*. While they expose otherwise unknown historical detail, often in great depth, such approaches are perhaps doomed to failure because Robin Hood is not representative of one tradition but many. Other historians take a less empirical path. They seek to situate ballads within particular political and social periods in which they may have originated, in order to ascertain when they might have been originally composed, in a form no longer extant. For example, they might seek Robin's popularity amidst the peasant uprising of the late fourteenth century. This is the domain of the cultural historian.

Joseph Ritson was an eighteenth-century antiquary and editor of numerous ballads. He was one of the first to seriously tackle the question of historical context. He provided the following assessment regarding difficulties in finding historical truth behind the legend of Robin Hood:

It will scarcely be expected that one should be able to offer an authentic narrative of the life and transaction of this extraordinary personage...<sup>5</sup>

...a man who, in a barbarous age, and under a complicated tyranny, displayed a spirit of freedom and independence which has endeared him to the common people, whose cause he maintained.<sup>6</sup>

Ritson's statement conveys several of the heroic ideals often associated with this outlaw. He recognises some limitations with the idea of affixing a historic person to a powerful myth. In contrast, in the late nineteenth century, one may have read the following regarding Robin Hood:

He was said to have 'robbed the rich to feed the poor,' a sort of liberal paraphrase of the operation of the subsequent Elizabethan poor law; and under the new philosophy of the Robin Hood school the poor were not to be content to have

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ritson, (ed.), *Robin Hood: A collection of all the ancient poems, songs, and ballads, now extant, relative to that celebrated English outlaw*, ed. Joseph Frank, London 1832, vol. 1, p. v.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. xv.

their needs supplied through the voluntary charity of the rich, but were to take it from the latter by the right of communistic compulsion.<sup>7</sup>

Such was the view of H. C. Coote, who considered Robin's tales to be political propaganda from the time of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. What was Robin's actual purpose as a folk hero? Was it 'communistic compulsion', as the now-popular 'robbing the rich' phrase suggests? As mentioned, there are today many ideas regarding not only which archetypes may have influenced or popularised the myth, but whether it is even appropriate to consider finding any apparent historicity inside a mythical tale. A myth can never be comparable with any history. To draw direct comparisons would be foolish. Yet, one can still search for origins amidst a certain historical period which may have lent inspiration to the development and popularity of a legend.

One aspect of modern research centres on the legendary defiance of Robin to symbols of authority, such as a tyrannical Sheriff of Nottingham. This is usually said to reflect a fantastic and unlikely desire for social change in a tyrannical environment. As such, some suggest Robin Hood was merely the invention of the balladeer who wished to tell a tale which would appeal to the people. Maurice Keen, for instance, stated that the story of Robin Hood was a moral tale which illustrated social justice.<sup>8</sup> Keen looked to the popular unrest in the years preceding the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 as a possible catalyst for the popularity of the legend. As mentioned, the first obvious suggestion of Robin's existence as a ballad hero comes to us from the text of Langland's 1377, *Piers Plowman*. In this we find in *passus V* that 'Sloth', a lazy priest, admits that he can recite rhymes of Robin Hood but cannot say the Lord's Prayer. Keen's argument, that the *rymes* were inspired by a climate of social unrest prior to the Peasants' Revolt was a hypothesis, but without any strong textual foundation.

Rodney Hilton had much the same opinion. In a 1958 article in *Past and Present*, Hilton considered that the stories were basically fourteenth-century peasant ideas. Investigating the early ballads, he noted Robin's use of violence and suggested this was an expression of peasant vengeance against the arbitrary and cruel nature of the medieval justice system.<sup>9</sup> Tales of Robin Hood, he suggested, may have been a source of

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<sup>7</sup> H. C. Coote, 'The Origin of the Robin Hood Epos', *The Folk-Lore Journal*, 3, 1 (1885), 44-52, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> Rodney Hilton, 'The Origins of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 14 (Nov. 1958), 30-44, p. 36.

inspiration; a rallying point for peasants who felt oppressed by the system. In this view, peasants perhaps found hope in listening to stories of adventurous outlaws who freely flouted the unpopular laws, whilst they lived free in the forest. This contrasted to the humdrum existence of toiling in the lord's manor.

In a 1960 paper, James Holt, a political historian and specialist on the thirteenth century, differed from Keen and Hilton in contending that the ballads, as they exist in their surviving late medieval form, were written for a gentrified audience, rather than for peasants.<sup>10</sup> He also sought a historical thirteenth-century personage behind the Robin Hood myths. This was in opposition to the methods of Hilton and Keen who had associated Robin Hood with the Peasants' Revolt, based upon the earliest literary tradition from about that time. Holt treated the early ballads as representatives of an earlier tradition from which historical fact could be traced. He extrapolated geography and other details of the ballads into the thirteenth-century world, coming up with a geography centred in Yorkshire. His candidate was a certain peasant outlaw listed as *Hobbehod*, who lived in Yorkshire in the mid-1220s.<sup>11</sup> *Hobbehod* is an unusual name for a criminal and suggests notoriety. Holt's crowning argument was that a knight called Robert of Thwing had led a series of robberies, partly for the benefit of the poor, whilst his men wore hoods to obscure their identities. Since this Robin Hood-like behaviour had occurred in 1231, Holt maintained that *Hobbehod* could well have been part of this movement, making him a model for the later tradition.<sup>12</sup> The historian and television presenter Michael Wood has a similar argument, noting the coincidence of merely five years between the appearances of Robert Hod, also written as *Hobbehod*, possibly 'that devil Hood', and Thwing's activities. He relates the nature of the outburst of Thwing's activities to this Robert Hod, because the *Hobbehod* appellation implies Robert Hod was already some sort of legend, in 1226.<sup>13</sup>

Holt's argument has not been altogether accepted by other historians. In 1978, J. R. Maddicott challenged Holt's thirteenth-century interpretation. He wrote that since Robin Hood is unheard of in popular culture prior to 1377, his legends must have originated,

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<sup>10</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, pp. 110-11.

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Holt, 'The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 18, (Nov. 1960), 89-110, 107.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Wood, *In Search of England: Journeys into the English Past*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2001, pp. 82-6.

‘not more than a generation or two’, before that date.<sup>14</sup> He claimed the language of the earliest of the printed ballads, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, c.1500, was that of so-called ‘bastard feudalism’. This is reminiscent of the fourteenth century, when feudalism was in decline, and when pay was being substituted for the former obligatory feudal service of the thirteenth century and earlier.<sup>15</sup> Maddicott actually followed a similar approach to Holt, but kept in line with the timeframe of Hilton and Keen—the fourteenth century rather than the thirteenth, keeping closer to the time of *Piers Plowman*. He found fourteenth-century personages whom he considered fit various mythical characters. These included a Sheriff of Nottingham. John de Oxenford, a Nottingham sheriff in the late 1330s, was accused of taking corn from villages without payment. In 1338, during a war with the Scots, he had been given an order to arrange foodstuffs for the beleaguered garrison of Perth, Scotland. In response he levied wheat, malt and oats, but rather than sending them north, he sold them overseas for his own profit. The Perth garrison fell and Oxenford informed the exchequer that the supplies had been lost in transit. Oxenford’s crimes caught up with him, and after failing to attend a summons to trial in 1341 he was outlawed. Although this ruling was later annulled, he never regained his former position and vanished into obscurity.<sup>16</sup>

It is unfortunate that we do not have any popular legends mentioning Oxenford. Without access to such legends, it is difficult to see any link between Oxenford’s deeds and later legend. Although his administration seems to have been unpopular and corrupt, there are differences from the outlaw ballad tradition. In the *Gest*, Robin’s army of seven score invades Nottingham in order to free Robin’s friend, a certain Sir Richard atte Lee, from imprisonment. While fighting, Robin slays the sheriff with an arrow and chops off his head.<sup>17</sup> In history, Oxenford neither faced such an invasion, nor died such a death. It seems difficult to conclusively correlate this history with the stuff of myths relating to Robin.

Empirical approaches to the legend are criticised by Professor Stephen Knight, who commented in 1994: ‘Recent scholarship on Robin Hood is heavily weighted towards

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<sup>14</sup> J. R. Maddicott, ‘The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, *The English Historical Review*, 93, 367 (Apr. 1978), 276-99, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289-92.

<sup>17</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, pp. 133-4.

historical biography.’<sup>18</sup> His comprehensive work *Robin Hood: a Complete Study of the English Outlaw* may have significantly shifted scholarly attention away from the methodology of searching for some original event in history, towards an interpretation of Robin Hood which instead sought to place the legend within its own appropriate literary time period. Knight’s approach is ‘sociocultural’.<sup>19</sup> This contrasts with what Knight termed the ‘empirical-short-sightedness’ of scholars who occasionally too readily advanced along the path of collating myth directly with history. Knight criticises the approach, employed by Holt, of looking into the geography of the ballads. He rightly notes that Robin Hood place names are scattered throughout England.<sup>20</sup> Knight’s approach in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 2000, is to provide a comprehensive edition of Robin Hood primary material, as well as romances of other earlier outlaws whose tales seem to be similar. This actually develops the approach used by Maurice Keen in *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, by seeking the origins of outlaw myths as evolving literature based upon a changing audience. Keen had earlier helped inaugurate this reasoning with the assertion: ‘The background of his story is not political but social history.’<sup>21</sup> A more recent entrant into this field is Anthony Pollard. Although he is a historian, Pollard considers it most prudent to investigate Robin Hood in terms of the time in which the *Gest of Robyn Hode* appears—the late fifteenth century—although he does place the setting between 1272 and 1340.<sup>22</sup> Pollard’s 2003 work, *Imagining Robin Hood*, inherits Knight’s distrust of discerning historical details from a later tradition. Pollard’s approach is to present a portrait of fifteenth-century society in order to illustrate how an audience of that period may have understood the terminology of the ballads.<sup>23</sup>

The parallel, archival approach was continued after the 1960s and 70s. After twenty years of research, James Holt released his *Robin Hood* in 1982. In this work he relied considerably less upon his earlier association of *Hobbehod* with Robert of Thwing. Thwing’s movement gets barely a mention. Perhaps one reason is that there is no

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, Oxford 1994, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Keen, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> A. J. Pollard, ‘Robin Hood, Sherwood Forest and the Sheriff of Nottingham’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 52 (2008), 113-30, p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context*, London and New York 2004, pp. x-xi.

evidence that *Hobbehod*, an outlaw of 1225, was still alive in 1231.<sup>24</sup> The link is tenuous. Holt makes much of the fact that in 1296 we see the appearance of the name *Gilbert Robynhod*.<sup>25</sup> This is a very unusual name which evidently relates to the notoriety of the outlaw Robin Hood. Its existence appears to stamp out any claim that stories about Robin Hood first originated in the fourteenth century. It means that the investigation of Robin in the fourteenth and later centuries is an investigation into a later tradition. In 1985, John Bellamy developed the idea of Holt that the *Gest of Robyn Hode* was written for middle to upper-class audiences. He called the *Gest*, ‘an exercise in family propaganda’, deliberately compiled to rehabilitate the reputation of Sir John atte Lee, a king’s knight, who in 1368 had charges of maladministration brought against him.<sup>26</sup> Bellamy claimed the *Gest of Robyn Hode* was originally constructed for recital in the royal household.<sup>27</sup> Presumably, Sir John atte Lee’s reputation was to be resurrected by tales of his apparent ancestor, Sir Richard atte Lee, becoming Robin’s close friend in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. In this regard, Bellamy’s reasoning assumes a familial link between myth and reality. Bellamy relied upon a fourteenth-century character actually called ‘Robin Hood’ in his investigations. In a final chapter entitled ‘Conclusions and Additional Considerations’, presumably compiled after the publication of Holt’s work, he stated that Holt’s evidence relating to Gilbert Robynhod meant that the Robin Hood celebrated in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* could not be a story relating to the archetypal Robin Hood. Rather the *Gest* was about another later character of the same name.<sup>28</sup>

Holt’s analysis of the early traces of Robin Hood was greatly assisted by a 1984 discovery, which received his enthusiastic support.<sup>29</sup> David Crook had noticed that a certain William son of Robert le Fevere (Robert the Smith), found in the Eyre Roll of 1261, rather quickly became ‘*William Robehod*’ in the memoranda roll of 1262, after that figure became an outlaw. Crook suggested that this means that something already seems to have been known regarding the legend of Robin Hood.<sup>30</sup> Holt released an updated 1989 edition to his 1982 work, *Robin Hood*, in which he claimed the discovery supported

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<sup>24</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> John C. Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, London 1985, pp. 130-1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>30</sup> David Crook, ‘Some Further Evidence concerning the Dating of the Origins of the Legend of Robin Hood’, *The English Historical Review*, 99, 392 (July 1984), 530-4.

his notion of an early thirteenth-century origin for ideas of Robin Hood. The discovery seems to indicate, in the words of Holt, that the clerk responsible for changing the name ‘knew some sort of tale of Robin Hood.’ He may have applied a known legend to an outlaw.<sup>31</sup> Barrie Dobson and John Taylor, who edited a compilation of Robin Ballads, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, also support the deduction that Robin was already a legend in 1262.<sup>32</sup> No-one who supports this idea considers that William le Fevere himself was the inspiration for any heroic myth. Rather, it is considered that some earlier legend had been attached to his name, during the 1260s. Crook also joined the historical hunt for an archetypal Robin. He formulated his own candidate, locating a certain ‘Robert of Wetherby’, who had been an ‘outlaw and evildoer of our land’ and who found himself hanged in 1225.<sup>33</sup> Dobson and Taylor point out a problem with this identification, which also plagues that made by James Holt. This is that there is no definitive proof that either historical character became the focus of some legend.<sup>34</sup>

In a recent work, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked*, published in 2010, David Baldwin followed up older mentions in the literature of a Nottinghamshire outlaw of the 1260s, Roger Godberd, arguing that he is the inspiration for Robin Hood. He suggests that William *Robehod* of 1262, written as such before the main period of Godberd’s activity, could simply mean William the hooded robber.<sup>35</sup> Baldwin has proof that his candidate is similar to Robin Hood because the history is similar to some aspects of the later legend, but he admits that the traditions of earlier heroic figures may have also found their way into the story, and on the same evidence these could also be early Robin Hoods.<sup>36</sup> In this respect Baldwin does not consider there was an original story about ‘Robin Hood’ in particular. The Nottingham element in the Robin Hood tradition will be discussed further in later chapters. Baldwin also introduces a new focus into the Robin Hood literature: namely political and social history of a century before 1381. Although Holt and others mentioned the similarity of Thwing’s movement to Robin Hood stories, they did not elaborate. Baldwin says that no-one has followed up the

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<sup>31</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 191.

<sup>32</sup> R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*. London 1976, new ed. Bridgend 1997, p. xxx.

<sup>33</sup> D. Crook, ‘The Sheriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood: The Genesis of the Legend?’, *Thirteenth Century England*, vol. 2, eds. P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd, Woodbridge, Ipswich 1988, 59-88.

<sup>34</sup> Dobson & Taylor, p. xxxii.

<sup>35</sup> David Baldwin, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked*, London 2010, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

consequences of Godberd's membership of Montfort's movement during the so-called Barons' War. He presents a political and social context, claiming an association between Godberd's activities, and Montfort's rebellion, which carried with it a high set of political ideas which may have had a wide appeal. Previously, Maurice Keen in *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, stated that Robin articulated social, not political concerns.<sup>37</sup> If there are references to Robin Hood predating the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 by over a century, we need to consider what issues and grievances might have contributed to Robin's reputation in the second half of the thirteenth century.

The usage of *Robehod* as relating to 'Robin Hood' may be supported by the dates provided by two medieval chroniclers, Andrew of Wyntoun and Walter Bower, who composed their historical works in c.1420 and c.1440 respectively. They thought that Robin was once a real-life figure and both mention him as a historical late thirteenth-century outlaw. Wyntoun placed Robin in 1283 and called him a '*waythman*', which perhaps means 'forest outlaw.'<sup>38</sup> Bower said that Robin was a political rebel in 1266. Disinherited after the Barons' War against Henry III, he had subsequently taken to the forest. These later ideas, recorded in the fifteenth century, are not compatible with explanations of Robin Hood that emphasise a purely literary perspective, or in relation to the Peasants' Revolt. Whilst the methods of looking at stories about Robin as a late-medieval social or literary phenomenon have their merits, they cannot help us to investigate the murky origins of the idealisation of a heroic rebel in what seems to have been originally a thirteenth-century myth.

Knight's approach avoids the unknown and deals with the literary evidence. He looks at stories about Robin as a developing literary tradition. In doing so, he avoids the sweeping and sometimes contradictory assertions of the historians who seek to identify Robin Hood's early historical context. This approach might show us how stories developed, but it does not provide clues as to the ideas and situations that inspired them. Ultimately the historical development of the legends of the outlaw should be understood as reflecting inspiration from different sources as well as historical archetypes and periods. It is through analysis of their gradual evolution that outlaw legends can be understood. Many of them did not just appear in the late Middle Ages, but trace a progeny back to the days of King John. Knight and Ohlgren highlight this in terms of

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<sup>37</sup> Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 24.

their presentation of older tales describing that period, at the end of their *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, which recount eerily similar adventures to those found in the ballads of Robin Hood. This is where the next chapter takes us. Rather than searching for historical clues *per se*, this thesis looks at the development of themes, stories, and historical contexts of a political nature which might have made outlaw tales popular in their own times, before these stories died out, or were fragmented, modified and passed on, to become part of later adventures. This approach combines examination of stories in chronicles with more conventional literary sources like romance and ballads, enabling a broader view of the development of stories about outlaws, not really available with conventional methods of literary history.

To summarise, the traditional search for early outlaw origins has been through archival attempts to locate the outlaw and his accomplices directly within a historical time. This largely ignores the long development which took place between earlier figures and later stories. It is possible that the ‘Robin Hoods’ uncovered, mainly in the fourteenth century, may simply have been emulators, named after a famous earlier figure. An example of this is one we have mentioned earlier. John Bellamy considers that Robin of the *c.*1500 ballad the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, is based upon a fourteenth-century archival character, but acknowledges, based upon Holt’s work, that there was even an earlier Robin, in the thirteenth century, who was the original.<sup>39</sup> Such attempts to identify a specific individual have sometimes been derided by literary and social historians, whose emphasis has been towards examining the origin of the surviving ‘early ballads’ of Robin Hood as literature which looks back on a lost medieval world. Whilst these approaches have their place, it will be argued that inquiry into the emergence of the legend must take into account social, political and cultural developments taking place in England long before the ballads were recorded in writing, as well as before the social developments highlighted by Baldwin, in the 1260s.

## **Surviving lore of Robin Hood**

What do we have to work with? Foremost among Robin Hood literary survivals from the medieval period are several copies of a ballad, the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, printed *c.*1500.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, p. 136.

<sup>40</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 45.

The work, which contains over fifty thousand words of ballad prose, was so popular that it has been reprinted down the centuries. Far longer than the other surviving ballads, it is recognised to be a composite of at least four pre-existing ballads, which are no longer extant in their medieval form.<sup>41</sup> Shorter ballads which apparently never found an editor include two separate fifteenth-century manuscript texts containing the ballads which have been named *Robin Hood and the Monk* and *Robin Hood and the Potter*.<sup>42</sup> Whilst *Potter* is perhaps of a similar period to the *Gest*, *Robin Hood and the Monk* is the earliest ballad, dating to c.1450. There also exist literary fragments, references to Robin Hood pageants in other texts and records, and a curious and little studied medieval tale called *Robin and Gandelyn*, which may relate to the Robin Hood tradition.<sup>43</sup> ‘Hood’ is never mentioned, merely ‘Robin’. Nevertheless, the Robin it talks about is, like Robin Hood, a forest poacher and apparently an outlaw.

At first glance, these early ballads seem a genuine portal through which the reader inserts himself into Robin’s own pristine medieval landscape and adventures. Robin’s prominent enemies, as they appear in the ballads, are the Sheriff of Nottingham and an Abbot of St Mary’s. These were positions once held by real-life figures of feudal authority, a system which had broken down by the fifteenth century, when the ballads were compiled into their surviving form. The idea of the Sheriff of Nottingham as a principal enemy may have been less than relevant after the introduction of justices of the peace in the later 1300s. Nevertheless, there he stands in the ballads, as a relic of what was a bygone age in the late fifteenth century.<sup>44</sup> There are of course many fifteenth-century elements in the ballads, which is why Pollard wrote his book, detailing how a fifteenth-century audience might have envisaged Robin’s medieval world.<sup>45</sup>

There seems to have been a range of audiences for stories about heroic outlaws over the centuries. The thirteenth century witnessed celebration of the deeds of the heroic outlaw, such as Fouke Fitz Warin, written in Old French, within the framework of a family romance and based on an oral tradition. In Latin monastic chronicles we read exaggerated stories about outlaws, including information about Fouke Fitz Warin, Robert

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Almond, A. J. Pollard, ‘The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 170 (Feb. 2001), 52-77, pp. 75-6.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 227.

<sup>44</sup> J. R. Maddicott, ‘The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, *The English Historical Review*, 93, 367 (Apr. 1978), 276-99, p. 279.

<sup>45</sup> Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, pp. x-xi.

of Thwing and Adam Gordun. By the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, we read of ‘Ryms’ (evidently in English) about Robin Hood. In the 15<sup>th</sup>, written ballads appear based on old oral tales. The *Gest of Robyn Hode*, appearing just before c.1500 begins with an address to *gentilmen*, rather than peasants.<sup>46</sup> It was a printed work, and would only have been read by those who could both afford the cost of its purchase and possess the skill to read it. In the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, and the other early ballads it is usually affirmed that Robin himself is a ‘yeoman’, which, for a late medieval audience, was someone between a peasant and a member of the gentry, perhaps a small landowner lacking a title.<sup>47</sup> Robin may have been presented as a yeoman in order to appeal to a late-medieval audience. On the other hand, the term ‘yeoman’ has an earlier thirteenth-century usage, namely of being a servant in a nobleman or monarch’s household, a part which Robin actually plays in his employ to his king in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*.<sup>48</sup> This is another clue that the origin of Robin Hood lies not in the fourteenth, but in the thirteenth century. This is something which will be explored in-depth in a later chapter.

Stories about Robin Hood certainly precede the publication of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* by well over a century. There is a gap in our information and we do not know about any direct link between the late fifteenth-century texts on Robin Hood and the ‘*Ryms of Robyn Hode*’ mentioned in the B text of *Piers Plowman*, c. 1377, as having excited the imagination of a priest called ‘Sloth’. Unfortunately, we have little idea of what these ‘ryms’ were like, or how they may have differed to those extant from a century later. The audience at least, had changed. As will be seen, the *Gest* is addressed to yeomen and gentlemen. Sloth’s ryms, meanwhile, are associated with his laziness.

## **‘He robb’d the rich to feed the poor’**

Where does the idea of robbing the rich to feed the poor come from? The phrase seems a later interpolation, based upon vague medieval ideas of Robin helping the poor. It is certainly a popular phrase associated with the outlaw tradition, and its origin will be investigated in order to help locate Robin’s original context or cause. Here is one of the few examples of its use, in an old fictional epitaph to Robin Hood.

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<sup>46</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 90.

<sup>47</sup> R. Almond, A. J. Pollard, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 142.

*Here, underneath this little stone,  
 Thro' Death's assaults, now lieth one,  
 Known by the name of Robin Hood,  
 Who was a thief and archer good;  
 Full thirteen years and something more,  
 He robb'd the rich to feed the poor:  
 Therefore, his grave bedew with tears,  
 And offer for his soul your prayers.*

This anonymous epitaph, apparently first found in an edition of epitaphs from 1727, is one of several varieties of Robin Hood epitaph which are extant from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but not before.<sup>49</sup> One line: 'Full thirteen years and something more', is found in an alternative epitaph in Martin Parker's *A True Tale of Robin Hood*, of c.1632. This lacks the phrase 'He robb'd the rich to feed the poor', instead containing: 'These northern parts he vexed sore.'<sup>50</sup> This suggests that the idea of robbing the rich to feed the poor may not have always been applied to him. Its presence puzzles scholars. In the early ballads Robin is sometimes reported as apparently never having had any 'positive intention to help the poor.'<sup>51</sup> He seems too pre-occupied with the sheriff and his minions. Perhaps stories regarding it have not survived. If the ballads are inspired by historical events, perhaps there is more than one archetype for Robin Hood. The archetype for the surviving stories did not necessarily 'rob the rich to give to the poor'. Such a scenario might have occurred if 'Robin Hood' was also used as a criminal nickname in the Middle Ages, as seems to have been the case.

An exciting development which demonstrates the presence of the phrase at least in the late Robin Hood story tradition is found in the *Forresters* MS, discovered in 1993, and edited by Stephen Knight in 1998, as well as in another late story. Knight's edition is a compendium of seventeenth-century ballads, containing earlier versions of known late ballads, and several hitherto unknown works. In one ballad, *Robin Hood and the Old Wife*, Robin is said to have assisted an impoverished woman. In her words to Robin, she reminds him that he gave her twelve pence to buy 'hose and shoone', against the 'frost

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<sup>49</sup> *Sepulchrorum inscriptiones: or a curious collection of above 900 of the most remarkable epitaphs, antient and modern...*, ed. James Jones, Westminster 1727, vol. 2, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

*and snow*'.<sup>52</sup> William of Cloudesley also helps an 'old wyfe' (woman). She lies beside the fire, which William had provided for seven years.<sup>53</sup> There may be further glimpses of similar generosity in other post-medieval late ballads, which contrasts with the apparent absence of this generosity in the early tradition.<sup>54</sup> This is puzzling. The presence of Robin's generosity in the late tradition means there may indeed be a complex lost tradition of generosity which has either not survived, or is hidden within the early ballads, if it indeed existed at an early stage. Knight attributes Robin's reputation for helping the poor to a sort of a sixteenth-century 'gentrifying reorganisation', in which Robin was increasingly seen as more chivalric and aristocratic in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century traditions.<sup>55</sup> This 'gentrifying reorganisation' culminated in a play of c.1598 by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle, in which Robin was provided the title 'Earl of Huntingdon'.

Holt states that the early stories of Robin do not seem to concern themselves with ideas of robbing the rich and giving to the poor.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the last lines of the closing stanza of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* read as follows:

*For he was a good outlawe, And dyde pore men moch god.*<sup>57</sup>

In spite of this, the preceding content of the ballad does not really concern itself with 'pore men'. This statement, tacked onto the end of the ballad, seems odd, appearing as an afterthought. Perhaps the original ballad lacked it entirely, and it is a later addition, based on an idea known but not explained. Yet it is still a medieval survival. In this ballad, Robin seems more interested in lending four hundred pounds to an English knight, who is a day away from bankruptcy. This was thanks to his inability to meet the harsh repayment terms of a loan he had received a year earlier from a most usurious abbot of St Mary's Abbey, York. The grateful knight uses Robin's money to repay the loan. He then gives the greedy abbot a good talking to, and journeys to Sherwood a year later to repay Robin the interest-free loan. Robin, however, enthralled by the honesty of the knight, does not accept repayment. Instead, Robin gives him a further four hundred pounds, half

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<sup>52</sup> Hilton Kelliher, Stephen Knight (ed.), *Robin Hood: The Forresters Manuscript: British Library Additional Manuscript MS 71158*, Cambridge 1998, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 243.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>56</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 148.

the amount which Robin has just intercepted from a baggage train, ironically belonging to St Mary's. Robin can certainly dispense money, but not apparently to the poor. Although he generously gives the money to an ally, this friend is still perhaps better off than most of the population. It makes one wonder about the origin of that ultimate phrase, that Robin, '*dyde pore men moch god*'. Holt thinks the phrase refers to the story about the poor knight, but he admits that this is not satisfying.<sup>58</sup> After all, why would this point need to have been made at the end of the story if it had already been made sufficiently evident in the story itself? Perhaps the extant material does not provide a full picture of what was once more broadly known. This is a puzzle which we will analyse further in later chapters.

There is a mention of Robin Hood helping the poor in a stanza from the middle of the sixteenth century, fifty years after the publication of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. Robin's men are said to have robbed the rich to give to the poor in the chronicle of the poet William Warner. This is something which does not occur in the extant early ballads:

*Braue Archers and deliuer men, since nor before so good,  
Those took from the rich to giue to the poore, and manned Robin-Hood.*<sup>59</sup>

Did social dynamics cause the legend of Robin to change so rapidly, or was there more than one tradition going at the time? This question might be answered by the fact that the *Gest of Robyn Hode* differs remarkably from another early ballad—*Robin Hood and the Potter*, whose unorthodox Middle English diction seems a little more rustic than that found in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. *Potter* is not addressed to gentlemen, as is the *Gest*. H. C. Coote derisively commented upon its style in 1885, stating that it betrayed the 'sort of people' for whom it had been written. He considered that Robin represented the peasantry.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, *Piers Plowman* was written before the Peasants' Revolt. The *Gest of Robyn Hode* and other ballads could well contain vestiges of popular stories from a more bygone era, representative of the '*ryms*' of Robin Hood, mentioned by William Langland. There may well have been more than one audience and this may explain some of the puzzles associated with differences in the early stories about Robin Hood. This will be investigated later on.

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<sup>58</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, New York 2003, p. 66.

<sup>60</sup> Coote, p. 49.

There is a way in which Robin does seem to assist the populace in the early ballads, and it is found in *Potter*. In this tale, Robin hijacks the goods of a travelling potter, and travels to Nottingham to set up shop. He pretends to be a potter and sells heavily discounted pots to the residents. Perhaps the original meaning of Robin helping the poor has been lost, for although Robin is helping the poor by supplying subsidised products, the ballad dresses it up as Robin acting like a fool rather than being a Good Samaritan. Onlookers to the spectacle mutter amongst themselves, ‘*Ywnder potter schall never the (prosper).*’<sup>61</sup> It reflects the humorous tone of a later seventeenth-century ballad, *Robin and the Fishermen*, in which Robin cannot catch a single fish, despite his employment on an otherwise successful fishing expedition.<sup>62</sup> There seems to have been a comedic idea of Robin as a buffoon, unable to practice any profession but outlawry. Stephen Knight articulates the trend in the ballads, in which Robin often: ‘leaves the forest to take up a trade, shows himself to be a heedless or incompetent tradesman, but then triumphs through his cunning and skill...’<sup>63</sup> Interestingly no scholar seems to have noticed that Robin’s apparent buffoonery, originating in the comedic *Robin Hood and the Potter*, may have been originally construed as a legitimate means of helping the poor, subsequently corrupted through the passage of time. The fact the ballads fail to properly articulate a legendary role for Robin in assisting the poor, despite making the suggestion, does not necessarily indicate that this was their original form. They might represent stories which are older and considerably different to their surviving form.

## **Images of Robin Hood**

Images of Robin Hood have varied greatly over time. Not all stories have survived. As mentioned earlier, *passus V* of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, of 1377 contains a chapter composed of the fictional doings of allegorical characters who are representative of the seven deadly sins. One of these characters is ‘Sloth’, a loafing priest. Sloth admits that his knowledge of Robin Hood’s deeds outweighs that of the Lord’s Prayer:

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<sup>61</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 66.

<sup>62</sup> Knight (ed.), *Robin Hood: The Forrester’s Manuscript*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

*I kan noght parfityly my Paternoster as the preest syngeth,  
But I kan ryms of Robin Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre,  
Ac neither of Owre Lorde ne of Owre Lady the leeste that evere was maked.*

I know not the Our Father perfectly as the priest sings it,  
But I know the rhymes of Robin Hood and Randolf Earl of Chester,  
But of Our Lord or of Our Lady I know nothing at all.<sup>64</sup>

‘Randolf’, or ‘Ranulf’ as the character is also known, is presumably based upon Ranulf III of Chester, who lived from 1170 to 1232.<sup>65</sup> In his time he was one of the most powerful of English magnates. Many of his deeds are well recorded historically and some of his purported deeds are chronicled, although no rhymes from the time of *Piers Plowman* survive. Ranulf gave his loyalty to King John and Henry III. He was the leader of various armies, including the continental invasion in 1214. He also cultivated an alliance with Prince Llewellyn to ensure his safety. He was his own man, and built defences in the 1220s on the Welsh border which were designed to protect against English invasion more-so than an attack from Wales.<sup>66</sup> The link of a historical Ranulf with a mythical Robin is intriguing. Glyn Burgess suggests a sort of equal footing in what might have been ‘distinctly secular’ popular tales.<sup>67</sup> This allows the possibility of the early Robin Hood legends having been inspired by popular events of the early thirteenth century. In his historical study of Ranulf III, Alexander considers that this Ranulf did not capture the public imagination, and he was not even an outlaw-type figure. He suggests that Langland’s rymes could have been about Ranulf II, because he was a heroic rebellious outlaw-type figure, unlike Ranulf III, who stayed true to King John.<sup>68</sup> In a 2005 article, Burgess affirms that Ranulf III is still the most likely candidate, because surviving tales about him, found in *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, refer to Ranulf III.<sup>69</sup> Associating Robin with Ranulf at least seems to link Robin with the time period of kings Richard, John and Henry III. We have several mythical heroic rebels who lived at about

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<sup>64</sup> Langland, p. 82., my translation.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Eales, ‘Ranulf (III), sixth earl of Chester and first earl of Lincoln (1170–1232)’, *ODNB*, 2004; online ed., Oct 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2716>, accessed 7/2/13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Glyn Burgess, ‘I kan rymes of Robyn Hood, and Randolf Erl of Chestre’, *“De Sens Rassis”*: *Essays in Honor of Rupert T. Pickens*, ed. C. J. Chase et al., New York 2005, pp. 51-2.

<sup>68</sup> Alexander, J. W., *Ranulf of Chester*, Athens 1983, p. 101.

<sup>69</sup> Glyn Burgess, ‘I kan rymes of Robyn Hood, and Randolf Erl of Chestre’, pp. 83-4.

this time, and the rebels of the earlier century are largely unknown in popular legend. Robin's legend may have been developed afterwards, and may have endured for a significant time before being put into writing in the late fifteenth century, allowing for a mixing of the traditions.

By the late sixteenth century, Robin Hood would be placed by the playwrights Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle amidst the grand courtly intrigue and conspiracy of King John's era. They seem to have taken the artistic license of gracing him with the title of 'Earl of Huntington'. Their main play was *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, c.1598. In this, there is a conspiracy by a prior of York, the Sheriff of Nottingham, and 'Sir Doncaster'. They are furious with Robin. Doncaster complains of him: '*twas hee that urg'd the king to sesse (assess) the clergie...*'<sup>70</sup> For this, and perhaps other unspecified details, which the playwright does not mention, not having provided a full background, the conspirators do their best to stop Robin. In the play, designed for an Elizabethan audience, Robin is excommunicated and his lands are stripped from him, though he can be absolved by paying his debts, and through a decree of Rome.<sup>71</sup> In this play, there also seems to be something of a war between Robin and part of the church hierarchy, but the background to this is not fully explained. Sir Doncaster eventually ends up organising Robin's death in a second play, *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington*. There is an apparent continuity in regards to the notion of Robin being hostile to clerics, between the early ballads and later tradition. In the early ballads, Robin confounds the abbot and a monk of St Mary's abbey. Furthermore, in the medieval *Gest*, Robin is also killed by a conspiracy involving a 'Roger of Doncaster'. Details, however, are not provided. Why is this? The difference between traditions is that the Robin of the ballads is seemingly a humble forest-based outlaw, although slightly gentrified, with no earldom. For Stephen Knight, the Elizabethan plays complete a process of gentrification begun in earlier times.<sup>72</sup>

The eighteenth-century antiquary Dr William Stukeley propounded Munday and Chettle's ideas regarding Robin's pseudo-historical earldom, in a work of 1746.<sup>73</sup> Stukeley's notions are rightfully considered fanciful today.<sup>74</sup> His work is nonetheless

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<sup>70</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 343.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>72</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 296.

<sup>73</sup> W. Stukeley, *Palaeographia Britannica*, pt. 2, Stamford 1746, p. 115.

<sup>74</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 42.

representative of an early attempt at tackling the issue of Robin's origins from a research-driven perspective, seeking to add greater detail to the material provided in the ballads. Its apparent sagacity carried weight in the otherwise commendable 1795 *Robin Hood*, by Joseph Ritson, which contains edited ballads, as well as an analysis of the available material on the outlaw. Thereafter the idea of Robin's earldom largely vanished from established consideration, owing to the forgery of names in Stukeley's genealogy.<sup>75</sup> There does not seem to be any record of any earl of Huntingdon being associated with events which could be associated with the Robin Hood tradition. Ritson seems to have been attempting to place Robin Hood towards the beginning of the thirteenth century. What is special about that period?

The enduring memory of hardships experienced in England in the reign of King John, 1199-1216, allowed for the later appearance of the legends of a multitude of outlawed chivalric heroes. To be outlawed by the likes of John—an unpopular king—might allow one to be one remembered as a hero in later stories. Eustache the Monk, a Flemish pirate and mercenary of these times was famed in a romance, written c.1223-84.<sup>76</sup> In the romance, he robbed only those who were not forthcoming and open with regards to the goods they carried. This was a practice used against monks by Robin Hood in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. In myth, Eustache apparently once disguised himself as a potter and shouted 'Pots for Sale!', as Robin does in the much later *Robin Hood and the Potter*.<sup>77</sup> There is another figure from the time of King John whose adventures show up in later Robin Hood. Fouke Fitz Warin, a baron of the Welsh march, was famed in the romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, written in Old French c.1325-40.<sup>78</sup> He was a historical figure who was outlawed about 1200, with his lands reverting to the crown in the subsequent year.<sup>79</sup> In the tale about him, he is disinherited of his lands by a corrupt John, and fights a rear-guard conflict as a fugitive, hiding in forests. The similarities between *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* and the 'later' Robin are startling. His legendary brothers, John, William, Phillip the Red and Alan, sound a lot like Robin's famous merry men: Little John, Will Scarlet and Alan a Dale. An episode in which Fouke captures a baggage train of cloth is repeated

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-3.

<sup>76</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 668.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 682-3.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 687.

<sup>79</sup> Glyn Burgess, *Two Medieval Outlaws: Eustace the monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn*, Cambridge 1997, p. 100.

by Robin in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*.<sup>80</sup> An episode in which Fouke leads a foolish King John into the woods before apprehending him and making him repent becomes Robin doing the same to the Sheriff of Nottingham in *Robin Hood and the Potter*.<sup>81</sup>

In examining this evidence it is easy to assume that Robin Hood is merely a late story based on earlier legends associated with characters from the time of the First Barons' War of 1215-17, or some later conflict. The Robin Hood stories, however, never mention any war. Robin is on friendly terms with royalty in several ballads. In the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, he states: '*I love no man in all the worlde so well as I do my kyng*.'<sup>82</sup> This does not sound like an allusion to the hated King John, who inspired the celebrated romances of rebellion in the works about Fouke and Eustache. It sounds like a king who is loved and admired. This could really have referred to any king *other* than John. Unlike those 'earlier' legendary outlaws, Robin of the ballads seems to support his monarch. He is clearly a different breed of outlaw, perhaps from a different time. When exactly this was is something of a mystery, although the fact that his legends utilise the adventures of earlier popular outlaws suggests he is their successor in terms of the story people wanted to hear. Would peasants really have wanted to hear about valiant noblemen in 1381, during a revolt which sought the removal of all nobles from power, save for the king? The revolt might have forced pre-existing stories about outlaws into two directions, one sympathetic to oppressed peasants, another for a more well-to-do audience.

A recorded opinion, dating from c.1440, states that Robin fought on the side of the barons against the oppressive system of Henry III in 1266. The following quotation from Walter Bower's chronicle is not mentioned by Stephen Knight or other scholars of Robin Hood, save for a partial quote from 1864 by Francis Child, and in subsequent editions of his work, in which the last sentence of the following is omitted.<sup>83</sup>

In that year also the disinherited English barons and those loyal to the king clashed fiercely; amongst them Roger de Mortimer occupied the Welsh Marches and John d'Eyville occupied the Isle of Ely; Robert Hood was an outlaw amongst

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<sup>80</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>83</sup> Francis James Child (ed.), *English and Scottish Ballads*, vol 5, Boston 1864, pp. xi-xii.

the woodland briars and thorns. Between them they inflicted a vast amount of slaughter on the common and ordinary folk, cities and merchants.<sup>84</sup>

For this chronicler, as well as for his near contemporary, Andrew Wyntoun, writing in c.1420, Robert Hood had been a real figure of the thirteenth century. Listing him among leading members of the nobility almost makes it seem like he is not the humble forest outlaw of the ballads. Despite the existence of this reference, the thirteenth century has been very much overlooked by scholars interested in identifying a historical origin for Robin Hood. For this reason, subsequent chapters of this work will include details on popular political and social perspectives about outlaw figures in that century, who may have influenced or paralleled early ideas of Robin Hood.

About eighty years after Bower made his statement, we are fortunate to have another summary of this confusing legend as it was understood in c.1521. This is the opinion of the Scottish chronicler, John Mair in his *Historia Majoris Britanniae*. Interestingly, and apparently for the first time, Robin is here placed in the late twelfth century, amidst the reign of Richard the Lionheart.

About this time, as I conceive, 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 only those that were wealthy. They took the life of no man, unless he either attacked them or offered resistance in defence of his property. Robert supported by his plundering one 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 [goods of the] poor, but rather enriched them from the plunder taken from the abbots. The robberies of this man I condemn, but of all robbers he was the humanest and the chief.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. D. Watt, vol. 5, Aberdeen 1990, p. 356. 'Isto eciam anno grassati sunt acrius Angliae barones exheredati et regales; inter quos Rogerus de Mortuo Mari marchias Wallie, Johannes Dayvillis insulam de Hely occupabant; Robertus Hode fructecta et dumeta silvestria exulabat. Inter quos quam maxime strages communibus et plebeis, civitatibus et mercatoribus ingruebant', *Ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>85</sup> John Major, *A History of Greater Britain As Well England and Scotland*. ed. trans. Archibald Constable, Vol. 10, Edinburgh 1892, pp. 156-67, *Historia Majoris Britanniae, tam Angliæ quam Scotiæ, per Joannem Majorem*, Edinburgh 1740, pp. 128-9: 'Circa haec tempora ut auguror, Robertus Hudus Anglus et Parvus Joannes, latrones famatissimi in nemoribus latuerunt, solum opulentorum virorum bona deripientes.

Just as in the early ballads, as well as in the later work of Munday and Chettle, there seems to be a degree of hostility towards clergy in the legend in John Mair's description of Robin Hood, one of the most laudatory of all time. It is written in such a way that it conveys the impression that it is based upon popular ideas. Yet there are other views to be found regarding the mystery of this legend's origins. A more sober attempt at ascertaining some historical fact behind the legends was made by Alexander Smith in his c.1665 work, *History of Highwaymen*:

*Robin Hood a Highwayman and Murderer:*

The bold robber, Robin Hood, was, some write, descended of the noble family of the earls of Huntingdon, but that is only fiction, for his birth was but very obscure, his pedigree *ab origine* being no higher than from poor shepherds, who for some time had lived in Nottinghamshire, in which county, at a little village adjacent to the forest of Sherwood, he was born in the reign of King Henry the Second. He was bred a butcher, but being of a very licentious, wicked inclination, he followed not his trade, but in the reign of King Richard the First, associating himself with several robbers and outlaws, he was chosen their captain.<sup>86</sup>

Smith's sobering opinion was presumably based upon what was then available. He seems to draw upon many sources. One is Bower's *Scotichronicon*, in which Robin is listed as a *sicarius*—a 'cut-throat', or 'murderer'. The mention of a noble pedigree seems based upon the work of Richard Grafton. His *Chronicle at Large*, c.1569, suggested an earldom, stating that Robin was: 'an Earl by descent or created so by acts of courage', who had 'fallen into debt' from 'riotous living', and thereby took to the forest to avoid arrest.<sup>87</sup> As mentioned, the playwrights Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle gave this 'earl' the pedigree of the Huntingdons in their c.1598 play: *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*. Alexander Smith may also have been aware of the Robin comedy ballad, *Robin and the Butcher*. In this, Robin disguises himself as a butcher, and sells his

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Nullum nisi eos invadentem vel resistentem pro suarum rerum tuitione occiderunt. Centum sagittarios ad pugnam aptissimos Robertus latrociniiis aluit, quos 400 viri fortissimi invadere non audebant, rebus hujus Roberti gestis tota Britannia in cantibus utitur. Faeminam nullam opprimi permisit nec pauperum bona surripuit, verum eos ex abbatum bonis sublatiis opipare pavit. Viri rapinam improbo, sed latronum omnium humanissimus et princeps erat.'

<sup>86</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, pp. 182-3.

<sup>87</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 28.

meat in Nottingham for ridiculously low prices to a confused but eager populace, among which is counted the Sheriff's wife. Its plot is a parallel to that of the earlier *Potter*. After encountering the sheriff, Robin as a 'butcher' lures the sheriff into Sherwood, where Robin's real identity is revealed. The unfortunate sheriff is then humiliated and held for ransom. Smith's reference to shepherds is curious, but could well be based upon the occupations of the main characters of the French pastoral poem, *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, c.1283, by Adam de la Halle, which, save for the title, has nothing to do with the outlaw balladry of later Robin Hood. Smith's date for the legend, being the 'reign of King Richard the First', seems to be a reflection of that provided in John Mair's *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, which stated that Robin performed his deeds 1193-4.

Alexander Smith's information is not ground-breaking. It is, like other attempts, a compromise between selected views and the conjectures of previous theorists, as well as inferences taken from the ballads. In fact, as early as one looks, it seems, Robin's origin remains a mystery. Yet there are certain geographical and other attributes to the legend, whose significance deserves to be explored further.

## Looking for context in a timeless myth

Any search for an original context for stories about outlaws is hampered by various difficulties. For example, do details in the extant ballads hearken back to social conditions in a hypothetical time associated with Robin Hood, or do they merely reflect memories prevalent at the unknown time of that ballad's later composition? The truth is perhaps a mixture of both possibilities. A legend needs to be relevant to the time period in which it is popular. For this reason, some commentators take a broad view. For instance, it has been said that Robin represented a:

...permanent protest of the industrious classes of England against the galling injustice and insulting immorality of that framework of English society, and that fabric of ecclesiastical as well as civil authority, which the iron arm of the conquest had established.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> G. F., *London and Westminster Review*, XXXIII (1840), 483. Moreland, 'Ritson's Life of Robin Hood', *PMLA* (Modern Language Association), 50, 2 (Jun. 1935), 522-36, p. 533.

This is perhaps going too far, and relates to influences of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, of 1819, which made Robin, 'Locksley', into a true Englishman—a Saxon fighting the Norman tyranny. Scott's setting was the year 1194, relying upon the sixteenth-century tradition of John Mair.

On the other hand, there is a traditional paper on Robin Hood, 'The Origin of the Robin Hood Epos', by H. C. Coote of 1885, which has been quoted above. Although this perhaps tells us more of attitudes in Victorian England than anything of Robin Hood's day, it raises a very interesting point regarding the unresolved question of the audience of the ballads:

Though history has ignored the disagreeable fact, there is no real difficulty in showing that communism was publicly advocated in this country in the reign of that too glorious monarch Edward III. The disastrous outbreak of the English Jacquerie under the weak rule of his unfortunate successor has doubtless attracted all attention to itself to the oblivion of the older fact.<sup>89</sup>

The 'Jacquerie' is an allusion to a peasant revolt of northern France in 1358. The English version Coote refers to is the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Looking past his outspoken and ill-concealed political opinions, we see one of the earlier commentaries on the audience for the ballads. Coote claimed that the Robin Hood 'propaganda' differs from the 1381 revolt insofar as it involved a 'communistic' claim on the part of yeomen, not peasant labourers.<sup>90</sup> Coote contended that the ballads were designed to 'exasperate the rude mind of the yeomen into ruthless crusade against the clergy and landed gentry.'<sup>91</sup> As mentioned, in the 1960s, Holt and Keen concentrated more upon peasants. Yet, Holt showed that there was at least a yeoman/gentry audience for the ballads.<sup>92</sup> Keen remonstrated that Holt was probably correct.<sup>93</sup> The ballads are addressed to yeomen and Robin's men are yeomen, a step above peasant.

Coote, in his older view, considered the name Robin Hood, part of an 'epic of communism.' 'It was intended to be plain and popular, and its universal acceptance

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<sup>89</sup> Coote, p. 44.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> J. C. Holt, 'The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood', p. 109.

<sup>93</sup> Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, p. xiv.

shows that the choice was excellently made.’<sup>94</sup> His bold and brash assessment allowed him to articulate plainly something which has been glossed over in recent studies. He noted of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*:

The poem is remarkable for its extreme rancour against monks, abbots and priors, making against them the stock charge of habitual avarice, but supporting it only by the not very heinous fact of an abbot finding it necessary to foreclose a mortgage against a friend of Robin Hood for an overdue loan.<sup>95</sup>

Stephen Knight in 1994 agreed somewhat with Coote’s old observation on the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. It ‘advocates massive theft from the church, civic insurrection against and murder of a properly appointed sheriff, breach of legitimate agreement with a king.’<sup>96</sup> All the Robin Hood stories agree on Robin’s piety, coupled with his hatred for corrupt clerics. In the manuscript which contains *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Robin travels to Nottingham from Sherwood, in order to attend mass. He is spotted by a priest whom he had previously robbed, and is reported to the sheriff who apprehends him after a fight. There is no early literary prelude to the Robin ballads. We do not know why Robin hates clerics, or why clerics are presented as avaricious men who are ready to use the sheriff to deal with Robin. The ballads provide no explanation. This is quite important because it suggests that the popularity of the early ballads of Robin Hood is associated with an anticlerical social environment which has not been defined.

Does Robin of the ballads have a political philosophy of some sort? The *Gest of Robyn Hode* starts off with Robin located in his forest home, plotting revenge against clerics for unknown crimes. Robin is questioned by Little John, who asks Robin whom he should fight. Robin responds with a set of commandments. It seems to be a short little manifesto—an outlaw creed for Little John to abide by for the remainder of the ballad, and perhaps for other ballad adventures as well:

*Loke ye do no husbonde harme,  
That tilleth with his plough.  
No more shall gode yeman,*

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<sup>94</sup> Coote., p. 46.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 49

<sup>96</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 81.

*That walketh by grene wode shawe,  
 Ne no knyght ne no squyre,  
 That wol be a gode felawe.  
 These bisshoppes and these archebissoppes,  
 Ye shall them bete and bynde;  
 The hye sherif of Notyngham,  
 Hym holde ye in your mynde.*

Look you do no farmer harm,  
 Who tills with his plough.  
 No more should you harm a good forester,  
 Who walks by the green wood trees.  
 Neither a knight, nor squire,  
 Who would be a good companion.  
 These bishops and these archbishops,  
 You shall beat and bind them;  
 The high sheriff of Nottingham,  
 Hold him in your mind.<sup>97</sup>

In this passage, the bishops and archbishops are the only people Robin will allow John to spoil. Robin does not ask John to rob the Sheriff of Nottingham. He seems to merely warn John to look out for him. The warning is well made. In the tale, sometime after the knight's loan is paid off by Robin, it is revealed that the same knight, now called Sir Richard, has had his castle besieged by the Sheriff of Nottingham and is subsequently captured. In a passionate exhortation, Robin calls on the loyalty of his men. They invade Nottingham, where Robin personally encounters the sheriff, and slays him. The story serves to indicate that Robin will not attack the sheriff unless he has to, in order to protect an ally. This evidence seems to indicate that the social context of Robin's activity may lie in anti-clerical ideas which centre on usury or corruption of some sort. This was presumably an early basis of popularity with an audience sometime during the development of the ballads. It is also to be seen that Robin's grief is not with misruling

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<sup>97</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, pp. 91-2., my translation.

monarchs. He is therefore not of the same variety or context of those outlaws who were remembered to have battled King John in myth and legend.

In fact the whole Nottingham story seems to come from a later outlaw tradition, added to an earlier Robin Hood framework, as will be argued in later chapters. The legends reflect the memory of more than one heroic lawbreaker. John Mair, in the early sixteenth century, called Robin the ‘first among thieves’. By then Robin was the most popular outlaw. It may have been permissible to incorporate the legends of other outlaws into one monolithic story, so long as the audience understood they were enjoying tales of Robin Hood.

## A multiplicity of outlaws

There are other outlaw tales. Maid Marian, Friar Tuck, Guy of Gisbourne appear in ballads written after the end of the Middle Ages, yet are evidently based on medieval legends and may not even initially have been associated with Robin Hood. Friar Tuck was the alias of a historical outlaw from the early fifteenth century, otherwise known as Robert Stafford. He was a chaplain who committed robberies and led a notorious gang. In myth, in his first battle encounter with Robin Hood he is almost Robin’s equal, and decides to join his men. The lady Marian Fitzwater, an invention of the sixteenth-century tradition, is based on a timeless, almost mystical theme. This does not feature in the early ballads, other than in Robin’s veneration for the Virgin. The thirteenth-century continental poem, *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, by Adam de la Halle, and performed at Naples, has nothing to do with the Robin Hood tradition, save for the association of Robin and Marion, as pastoral figures. Another basis for much later notions of Marian is perhaps in the romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. Fouke marries the fairest lady in the land, a very rich Matilda de Caus, whom King John had desired for her beauty.<sup>98</sup> Marian also enters the Robin Hood tradition through the Morris dance festivals, popular at and after the end of the Middle Ages, when Robin Hood was becoming exceptionally popular. These sometimes comprised an ‘Abbot of Unreason’, later replaced by Robin Hood, who danced with a fine lady in village festivals.

Little John may be based upon numerous individuals. One of his later legendary names is John Naylor. Another, found in the medieval *Gest of Robyn Hode*, is a name he

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<sup>98</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 699.

adopts as a disguise, Reynold Grenelefe. A piece of medieval doggerel by a parliamentary clerk lists Robin alongside Little John and ‘Reynoldyn’, suggesting Grenelefe may have once been considered a separate outlaw.<sup>99</sup> Another of Robin’s men, Will Scarlet seems to be based on different figures. One of them is a Will Scathelock of the later tradition, known in the ballads as Will Scarlet. Scathelock seems to mean ‘lock breaker’. This seems incompatible with another outlaw, one of Fouke Fitz Warin’s brothers and compatriots. These are, in thirteenth-century romance: ‘William, Phillip the Red, John and Alan.’<sup>100</sup> As mentioned, Phillip ‘the Red’ sounds like Will Scarlet. It appears that the two characters became merged in later tradition.

Ultimately, invention and memory regarding these and other figures became integrated into ballads because some people wanted to hear about a variety of outlaws. It may have been easier to somehow fit them all into one story than introducing each outlaw separately and then relating their deeds. Robin’s ‘merry men’ as well as Robin himself, seem to be composed from the scraps of various traditions, mixed with later invention, possible under a flexible oral tradition. Robin is based on not one outlaw, but many.

## **The longbow**

The weapon of the forest outlaw is the longbow. The longbow has a timeless attribute, not just of the fourteenth century, as many would assume. The Bayeux tapestry appears to show Normans with the weapon, and Saxon shields filled with arrows.<sup>101</sup> In the time of the Lionheart, the favourite continental bow weapon was the crossbow, which Anna Comnena complained, in writing between 1118 and 1148, could pierce not only a buckler, but a man and his armour right through.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, the longbow is the practical and universal weapon of the rebel in the forest. He requires it to slay the king’s deer. Its use is the sign of a forest fighter, an outlawed peasant, or a rebel who has become disenfranchised and who has not the strength to resist outside the safety of the forest, where he no longer needs his armour. A powerful weapon, the longbow can be

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<sup>99</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 69.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 693.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Hardy, *Longbow—A Social and Military History*, *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

carried easily in the forest, and was also one of the more cost effective of weapons, making its use available to all.

The oral tradition was flexible, and before they were finally written down, ballads of Robin Hood seem to retain elements from other stories. The ballad *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley* from the sixteenth century, describes heroic outlaws which are very proficient in the use of the longbow, perhaps more so than even Robin Hood. Cloudesley had a bow which was ‘great and lange’.<sup>103</sup> After using a longbow throughout the ballad, Cloudesley is made to shoot an apple from his son’s head in a display of skill. The legends have been intermingled, for Robin too is among the finest of archers. In *Robin Hood and the Potter* we read about him in an archery contest in which he bests the sheriff’s men, wearing a disguise. Before any of the surviving stories of Robin were even written, the chronicler Wyntoun claims in the 1420s that Robin was active in Ingolwode. This is the territory of Cloudesley, not Robin: an early cross-fertilisation, reflecting the fluidity of an oral outlaw tradition. It is an aspect of a tradition with a long and largely unknown development.

There are other elements, not just the use of the longbow. In the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, Robin is a great archer. In a raid on Nottingham, he shoots at the sheriff with a ‘full goode bowe’, and then closes in to strike off his head with the sword.<sup>104</sup> In *Robin and the Monk*, he defeats twelve men in close combat.<sup>105</sup> A versatile warrior of the ballads, Robin is at home shooting long distance, as well as in fighting with a sword. He is a jack of all trades, a friend of the king, enemy to bishops, a master of weapons. In myth, he retains some of the most entertaining attributes of many other outlaws. An appreciation of the multiplicity of outlaw adventures and elements in stories is pivotal for understanding the origin of the elements of the Robin Hood tradition. This is a key argument in this work, as we will look to other various outlaws and contexts, in politics, and times of social hardship, which would have influenced the development of the tradition of the heroic figure who resists authority.

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<sup>103</sup> Knight and Ohlgren, p. 261.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 134.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

## Conclusions

Different perspectives of the outlaw have evolved over the centuries. The images have often reflected contemporary concerns. Though it is mixed in with ideas about other outlaws, at a fundamental level, the tradition of Robin Hood seems to build on hostility to rich clergy and usurious monks. Continuous assertions through history that Robin robbed clerics, including John Mair's *c.*1521 assertion that Robin enriched the poor by what he took from the abbots, paves the way for a historical understanding of a context or prerogative behind Robin's enmity or cause, which an early audience may have been able to understand.

In the earliest sources, chronicles of the late medieval period, Robin Hood is lauded as a historical figure of legendary fame. A most striking feature of the chroniclers' testimony is that it makes no claims regarding Robin's origins. These are obscured not simply by history, but by the multiplicity of outlaw images. The fact Wyntoun claims Robin was active in Ingolwode suggests that even by Wyntoun's time, Robin was, perhaps to some, confused with William of Cloudesley, in some ballad which has not survived. This raises another argument. Given the flexibility of oral tradition it seems that remembering the outlaw and his stories was more important than remembering Robin Hood. That name was simply a unifying umbrella for the best of the ballad tradition, in which stories about many different outlaws came together. Traditionally, the 1260s or the 1280s are considered periods of his activity, thanks to mentions by chroniclers Walter Bower (of whom only one story regarding Robin is known to Knight and Ohlgren), and Andrew of Wyntoun. Stories made during and after these times may have been the inspiration which allowed the development of outlaw legends found in ballads about Robin Hood. As such, this investigation is based around the attitudes, legends and political events, which crafted a set of unique social perspectives, in the thirteenth century. What remains to be done is to search for an appropriate context for the placement of evidently anti-clerical establishment ideas, which became attached to the figure of the outlaw in mythology, within a historical period in which they may have found popular support.

Further to the idea that a social context is relevant to the development of an outlaw tradition, it seems several different mythic heroic figures lived at about the same time. There are some late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century outlaw legends with a

tangible historical inspiration. These seem to have been set in the early thirteenth century and are associated with the trouble relating to King John. The background to this trouble and its aftermath will be discussed in the next chapter, which explains a key social theme relevant to the development of ideas about the place of the heroic outlaw. This was a time characterised by increasing suspicion towards those perceived as foreign, with political conspiracies fomented against them. By the 1220s and especially the 1230s, this would have some degree of popular support. It was a time of consolidation of outlaw legends about men who fought King John and also a time of an ineffective central government, when people looked to the actions of powerful figures, such as Fouke Fitz Warin, or even Ranulf III of Chester, for guidance and inspiration. In chapter three, it is suggested that the 1230s were troubled by remarkable and under-studied political turmoil. This period was one of great hostility to foreign clerics in England. It is important for us because it occurred a generation or two prior to the mention of '*Robehod*' in 1262. This was a fertile period for generating outlaws perceived by some as acting for the interests of exploited elements in society. Such themes would later combine and intermesh, into outlaw myth, dominated not by politics, but popular figures.



## Chapter 2      Seeds of unrest: 1216-1231

The context for the foundations of popular myths of the Robin-Hood type of outlaw has never been fully understood. It is clearly inadequate to explain his emergence as a hero figure in terms of a response to the Peasants' Revolt in the later fourteenth century. By contrast, the extant testimony in Latin chronicles about the political crisis of England in the thirteenth century, can help illuminate the context in which myths emerged about various heroic rebels, later conflated into the figure of Robin Hood. This is the argument of the chapter. He would be remembered not as robbing simply any landowner but as having a broad yet specific set of enemies. One side of the image of Robin Hood was anti-monastic. In the early thirteenth century there was a profound distaste of rule of the English kingdom from Rome. This was directed against higher-level churchmen, from Italy, but not necessarily against the English church. In order to understand why the thirteenth century generated images of heroic rebels against authority, we need to grasp the troubled political context of the period.

It is known that characters like Fouke Fitz Warin, a rebel of John's reign and later, had their stories intertwined with those of Robin Hood. One of the reasons why this may have happened would be due to a similarity or relevance of context. Obviously the chronicles in the early thirteenth century do not mention Robin Hood. Nevertheless, they do concern themselves with political ideas related to profound social unrest. The signing of Magna Carta in 1215 resulted in high expectations for the new government of Henry III, crowned king at the age of nine. This chapter charts the unrest of the aftermath of 1215, to see how the idea of a new political elite emerged, and consequently the idea of a new form of political rebel as well. This rebel was partly a foundation for the Robin Hood type. The political instability and weakness of the early decades of Henry's reign led to the emergence of figures perceived by their admirers as striving to restore justice in society. This was a kingdom which had fought for Magna Carta, yet had ended up under the rule of papal appointees, known to the contemporary Latin chroniclers as 'Romans'. While there are no surviving ballads from the thirteenth century comparable to the tales told about Robin Hood in the early fifteenth century, individuals did emerge who

resented the appointment and privileges of Roman ecclesiastics. One of these was Robert of Thwing, a figure politically active as a critic of the ecclesiastical establishment between 1231 and 1247. His reputation and exploits have led to him being described as a 'Robin Hood like figure' by Michael Clanchy.<sup>1</sup> This chapter explores the seeds of unrest that would lead to the emergence of a figure admired by some as a heroic rebel, but reviled by certain ecclesiastics who feared his influence.

There is a strength in understanding political contexts through the entertaining Latin stories told by the chronicler in the early thirteenth century. The chronicler takes us straight to the issues of the day which concerned him, despite the fact there is a clear bias in his writings. Chroniclers explain political conflicts in terms of what they see as affecting or harming the good of the kingdom. The fear of foreign ecclesiastics, as it emerges in this period, is related to a desire to defend hard-fought liberties in a period of domination from Rome, following King John's defeat. There is a relationship between an early understanding of the heroic figure of romance at the time of inception of the formation of stories, and entertaining political stories about the time in which they lived, as told by their contemporaries. While it is often argued that the social tensions that created the image of a heroic outlaw emerged at the time of the Peasants' Revolt in the fourteenth century, attention can also be focused on social, political and cultural events of the early thirteenth century as creating the conditions in which such heroic outlaw figures as Fouke Fitz Warin could emerge. Men like Fouke Fitz Warin became famous not simply due to the imagination of the writer of Old French romance, generations after his deeds, but because there was also a recognised underlying popular tradition, based upon little-known political ideas that have not found their way into that romantic tradition.

In order to explain these evolving tensions, we shall consider the career of someone who would become presented in chronicle tradition as one of Thwing's arch-enemies, Peter des Roches. He was a man who represented much that his rivals feared, throughout his career. His was a viewpoint which generally opposed the desire for internal reform, expressed by vocal English nobles. While these nobles were suspicious of Rome, he was loyal to the papacy. He believed his king, Henry III should rule absolutely, while the discontented nobles, tired of the disastrous royal mistakes of the past, and fearing future

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<sup>1</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066-1272*, Oxford 1998, pp. 183-4.

ones, wanted a greater say in the policy of the kingdom. Des Roches supported the political influence of a foreign clerical elite, increasingly despised, not only by English nobles, but by the 1250s, a significant part of the population as well, according to certain chroniclers. This presents a very different situation indeed from a century and a half later, when, during the Peasants' Revolt, serfs in southern England followed leaders who demanded the execution of nobles. If the interests of certain nobles were aligned with those of the people and storytellers, this can illustrate why certain figures of this era, such as Fouke Fitz Warin, Earl Ranulf of Chester, Robert of Thwing, even Hubert de Burgh, the justiciar, could be perceived as heroic figures in the writing of the St Albans chronicler, Matthew Paris (c.1200-59). His account deserves to be read as helping create the ideal of a hero, who resisted unjust authority. In later myth, these figures seem to have become heroic because they performed adventurous deeds, or because they opposed nefarious individuals, such as King John. Not mentioned in romantic tales is that by the mid thirteenth century, the ideal of 'the Community of England' was emerging in the writing of Matthew Paris. It was associated with various discontented nobles and barons. The phrase suggests a body with a kind of common interest and purpose. Its inception occurred gradually as a backdrop to the later events of the Baronial Revolt and civil war of the later 1250s and early 60s, in which the nobles' radical ideas for constitutional monarchy, briefly attempted but not realised in the days of Magna Carta, were defended with arms.

In the early years of the thirteenth century, the political bickering and disappointed expectations that followed Magna Carta, facilitated a more radical response. Conspiracies and factions formed which maintained conflicting views about the future of the country, while England seemed (to some) to be controlled by Rome, and in the hands of a weak king. In fact various nobles, including Fouke Fitz Warin, aligned themselves on different sides of the conspiracies, relating loosely to pro-English vs. pro-foreign interests. The instability lasted a long time, almost throughout Henry's reign. By the 1250s, due to the weakness of the king as well as shrieval and other corruption, so many local 'tyrants' sprang up that St Albans' chronicler Matthew Paris would ultimately claim, with his characteristic exaggeration, that England seemed to have returned to the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols, London 1872-1883, vol. 5, p. 595.

This trouble perhaps really originated in 1213 when King John granted England to the pope in return for political support against his unruly nobles. The action contributed to the barons demanding greater rights in the form of Magna Carta, as well as to a civil war. John's death in 1216 paved the way for greater papal interference in the affairs of England, leading to suspicion of foreign and Roman motives. The subsequent period of the 1220s, in which England languished under the unstable minority of the boy king, Henry III, might be categorised as one based upon political uncertainty, and simmering discontent. It was the period in which Matthew Paris lived as a young man, not yet chronicling the events of the nation, at St Albans. He saw politics in terms of English natives resisting continual attempts at domination by foreigners. In his eyes, foreigners such as the pope controlled the king. He wanted a reduction in papal power, as well as royal power, to the benefit of the English.<sup>3</sup> Henry governed at the behest of his noble advisors—in particular two deadly rivals: Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches. Their political rivalry sets the scene for understanding major themes of social unrest in the period. Dissatisfaction resulting from the ineffective reigns of John, and the minority and later reign of Henry III, would lay the ground for the heroic figure of later romances inspired by this period, being seen as an object of respect.

## **Historians and the factional dispute**

In the late nineteenth century, the nationalist historian Bishop William Stubbs laid the groundwork for understanding the factional situation of the early thirteenth century when he compiled his multivolume *The Constitutional History of England*. His work still provides a basis for understanding the factional dispute which occurred, providing a background to the embryonic formation in this period of ideas regarding the heroic rebel. His work is also an excellent index to the political events of the Middle Ages, as related by monastic chroniclers. His treatment of a clash between Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches in the pivotal year of 1223 concentrates upon notions of Hubert's victory against 'foreigners', with the crushing of Faulkes de Breauté, a Norman who had been imported by John, and who had sided with anti-royal rebels in 1223.<sup>4</sup> Those considered to have

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<sup>3</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: c.500-1300*, New York 1974, p. 371.

<sup>4</sup> Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development*, vol. 2, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Oxford 1896, pp. 35-6.

been ‘foreigners’ in the thirteenth century fall into a broad category. The term relates to Romans and provincial relatives of Henry III, who clustered around the king, as well as French invaders in the civil war against John. Those who made deals with foreigners were perhaps less likely to have achieved the support of the English nobles, although this is not a hard and fast rule for the time and this is why the work of the nationalist historians is flawed. It is to be noted that these English nobles were still French speaking, but identified themselves as hostile to foreigners.

While their conflict is often seen (following Stubbs) as essentially political, I would argue that the cause of Hubert de Burgh generated significant support in wider society, vital for appreciating subsequent idealisation of figures viewed by some as rejecting the king’s law in a heroic mould. This small survey of historiography is far from exhaustive. The dominant approach has been to focus on political tensions generated by suspicion towards foreigners in the early thirteenth century, particularly in terms of the clash between the political rivals Peter des Roches and Hubert de Burgh, who represented different approaches to government. The former looked to the continent and Rome for inspiration and assistance, and the latter concentrated more on establishing his powerbase via alliances with the English church and various English nobles.

An inevitable result of the presence of foreigners in England was the creation of factional rivalries. Stubbs considered de Burgh responsible for the request of papal letters from Rome, in 1223. At the time, these were thought to have been requested by Peter des Roches. These letters permitted the end of Henry’s minority, but were used by his enemies to expose des Roches as a confidant of foreigners. Stubbs considered that the letters had come into de Burgh’s possession and that he took advantage of them by elevating the king from the minority in order to cast off the influence of foreigners. Stubbs interpreted de Burgh as an Englishman who helped to strengthen England by helping Henry achieve a partial majority before he had come of age.<sup>5</sup> This may have been in the interests of a ‘patriotic’ de Burgh, from Stubbs’ nineteenth-century perspective, but it was perhaps not in de Burgh’s interests, as the king’s guardian, to lose his power to his king earlier than was absolutely necessary.

Stubbs presents some of Hubert de Burgh’s questionable actions in a favourable way, discounting de Burgh’s activities relating to hampering the recovery of continental

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

provinces, which Henry eventually perceived as deliberate treason by de Burgh.<sup>6</sup> According to Stubbs, who presented de Burgh kindly, Hubert had not committed any treason, but had been merely sceptical of Henry's ability to prosecute a favourable campaign.<sup>7</sup> It is a view which neglects Henry's long-standing desire to reunite his ancestral lands. Above all, Hubert's main loyalty seems to have been towards himself and the loyalty he might secure by acting in the interests of the English nobles, against des Roches.

Stubbs' work was superseded for historical reference in the twentieth century in comprehensive works by Sir Maurice Powicke, who articulated a similar argument to that of Stubbs. This was that de Burgh represented the 'insular or nationalist' element, with the other side representing the 'continental' element.<sup>8</sup> This is conceptually attractive though certainly not a universal rule: the outspoken St Albans chroniclers did not criticise des Roches as an agent of foreigners, though Paris did see his rival de Burgh as a firm supporter of the English.

The tensions surrounding what became the conspiracy of the papal letters of 1223, reveal the existence of anti-papal sentiment on a scale large enough to cause a shuffling of Henry's closest advisors during his minority. The major issue was a question of who encouraged the pope to issue letters allowing an early declaration of partial majority for the king. Since this was a king appointed by the pope, and an effective puppet, the issue was really over the control of England. The major specialist for this period is D. A. Carpenter. His researches serve to clarify earlier misconceptions regarding the perpetrator of this conspiracy. For instance, Carpenter improves on the work of Powicke, by analysing the motives of various factional leaders. His explanation of this particular intrigue is incisive.<sup>9</sup> He isolates the motives which his main suspect for the affair, Peter des Roches, would have had for promulgating the letters, and contrasts them with the possible motivations of Hubert de Burgh and Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, who were ideologically pro-native and who had been Powicke's choice as

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<sup>6</sup> *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, ed. trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1849, vol. 2, p. 554.

<sup>7</sup> Stubbs, 2: 42.

<sup>8</sup> F. M. Powicke, 'Distrain of Knighthood and Military Obligation under Henry III', *Speculum*, 25, 5 (Oct. 1950), 457-70, p. 460.

<sup>9</sup> Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990, p. 306.

suspects for having triggered the letters.<sup>10</sup> Carpenter rationalises the affair into a political intrigue and counter-intrigue involving two factions, which resulted in the temporary downfall of Peter des Roches. Carpenter's 1980 article, 'The Fall of Hubert de Burgh', clarifies several misconceptions, including the neglect of the connection between Hubert's later fall in 1232, at the hands of Peter des Roches, and events earlier in Henry's minority. Carpenter considered that the careers of Hubert and Peter must be viewed as a whole, if the actions of various characters are to be understood.<sup>11</sup> This is perhaps because similar issues lingered, unresolved, for much of Henry's lengthy but ineffective reign. This was the period for the forming of an oral tradition around common enemies, with popular figures as the heroes.

The major authority on the policies and actions of Peter des Roches is Nicholas Vincent. His work, *Peter des Roches: An Alien in English Politics*, is an invaluable source of information on an otherwise little-studied period. It also contains significant research relating to Hubert de Burgh, who was des Roches' sworn enemy for many years. Vincent has utilised and built upon much of Carpenter's work, with regards to his research into Peter des Roches. He is not so much concerned, however, with the broader response in society to his influence. Vincent's research is intimately associated with a rationalisation of the intrigues between des Roches and de Burgh. This involved, at times, Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who along with de Burgh was virtually the co-regent following the ousting of des Roches.<sup>12</sup> These pro-native leaders sought a degree of independence from the papacy.

John handed England to the pope in 1213. In the subsequent period, Roman appointees were sent to England to take charge of not merely clerical estates, but other churches. These were advowsons, economic assets owned by gentry and others, who were not accustomed to an increasing degree of Roman interference in their affairs. If there was a faction representing the English nobles and gentry, it may have utilised xenophobic propaganda against these appointees. Vincent and Carpenter differ in their interpretation of anti Roman-appointee related xenophobia. Vincent suggested that in 1223 Hubert de Burgh and others used a strategy of whipping up xenophobia against

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<sup>10</sup> F. M. Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward: The Community of the Realm in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford 1947, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Carpenter, 'The Fall of Hubert de Burgh', *The Journal of British Studies*, 19, 2 (Spring 1980), 1-17, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, p. 324.

select political opponents, for political gain, as well as later on in 1231.<sup>13</sup> Carpenter suggested that papal provisions severely angered Englishmen by 1231-2, but is cautious about the possibility of widespread anti-foreign sentiment earlier on.<sup>14</sup> There is justification for this stance, for there is simply little evidence in the chronicles, as the events occurred prior to the writing period of the pro-native chronicler, Matthew Paris. He was an outspoken writer who might have been quick to specify just who he considered was working for whom, if there really was any Roman involvement. His lack of knowledge, however, is not to be taken as evidence of absence. His interpretation of the documents he sourced, for instance, was not always accurate.<sup>15</sup> Paris' major distinction comes from his unusual and relentless expression of political concerns. Much can be learned about medieval mentalities from his writings.<sup>16</sup>

The apparent 'weakness' of the king (or strength depending on how it is viewed), is exemplified by the purported control others held over him. It is partly explained by the presence of powerful foreigners in England at the time. In addition to the Romans, who occupied traditionally English benefices, the king had some half-brothers, who were known as the 'Poitevins'. Matthew Paris tends to criticise these foreigners heavily in his works. Vincent made numerous discoveries, among them that Peter des Roches, traditionally considered the leader of a faction of Poitevins, and even Poitevin himself, was not Poitevin in origin, despite medieval chronicles stating that this was his place of origin.<sup>17</sup> This reveals increasing complexity behind the superficial conflict between a Poitevin and an Englishman. It raises questions about any interpretation of des Roches having been a political figurehead of the Poitevins, or of other foreigners, in England. Vincent's discovery makes a break from early scholarship. It means that the conceptualisation of the political struggle is a lot more complex than one of simply English vs. Poitevin, as Matthew Paris, chronicler of St Albans, liked to portray it in his later years.<sup>18</sup> Paris himself perhaps knew the situation was more complex. We have the 'paradoxical' situation of his lack of criticism of Peter des Roches coupled to statements

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Vincent, *Peter des Roches: An Alien in English Politics*, Cambridge 1996, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> Carpenter, 'The Fall of Hubert de Burgh', p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Gransden, p. 361.

<sup>16</sup> Kate McGrath, 'English Jews as Outlaws or Outcasts: The Ritual Murder of Little St. Hugh of Lincoln in Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*', Alexander L. Kaufman, (ed.), *British Outlaws of Literature and History*, Jefferson 2011, pp. 11-27, esp. p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, London 1958, p. 140.

regarding the 'Poitevins' being generally all treasonous, and a bad lot, who were only interested in lining their own pockets, at the expense of a naive king Henry.<sup>19</sup> Paris may have known that he was not of the same stock. Des Roches certainly had some questionable ties to Rome. This would prove to be a problem in an increasingly incendiary situation. Tensions between the nobles and Rome would lead to outright violence by masked gangs in 1231 with the major perpetrator, Robert of Thwing, eventually seen in a somewhat heroic light by Matthew Paris.

Did des Roches encourage the control of England by foreigners? There certainly seems to be something to this. As a foreigner, he could perhaps expect less help from the English nobles than the native de Burgh. Who was considered a 'foreigner' or 'alien' back then? Clanchy considered that the terms seem to have applied more to the southerly Poitevins, who spoke in a French dialect which differed from that spoken by the more familiar Normans. Others considered as aliens were the Italian Romans, considerable numbers of whom took positions within the English church during the 1220s.<sup>20</sup> Vincent argued that de Burgh exploited anti-foreign sentiment in his actions against des Roches, in the papal letters affair of 1223.<sup>21</sup> Des Roches was seen to have been in connivance with the pope. In the event, des Roches was accused of treason, and removed from political power.<sup>22</sup> It might be suggested that des Roches' dismissal was an early vestige of sentiment against encroaching Roman authority. This would be an extension of Vincent's argument that de Burgh's actions exploited xenophobia. It may have been seen that if Peter des Roches and his papal ally had been triumphant, the power of Rome would have increased over English lands: an unacceptable outcome to those who had recently fought hard for their rights under Magna Carta, not to mention an abortive French invasion over a claim against John to the throne. John had also razed the English countryside with foreign mercenaries in a terrible vengeance. The ineffective rule of his successor fostered the dream of a better world, as well as reducing the need for social as well as political upheaval. It is with this backdrop, that there developed an oral tradition about figures who had boldly opposed John, such as Fouke Fitz Warin, or at least offered entertainment value, as in the case of a buffoonish Eustache the Monk, who also

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<sup>19</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 450.

<sup>20</sup> Clanchy, pp. 183-4.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent, p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

opposed, as well as fought for John in the war. Such tales provided a sense of escapism. What must be pointed out is that these were legends attached to real men, mentioned by chroniclers. What is proposed is that although mythical characters like ‘Fouke Fitz Warin’ (mainly inspired by Fouke Fitz Warin III, 1160-1258) and ‘Ranulf of Chester’ (possibly relating to Ranulf de Blondville, 1170-1232, but we cannot be sure), were written about in a sensational way in later centuries, the chronicles reveal that they were also active historically. Another, more obscure figure of this mould was Robert of Thwing, whose opposition to Roman domination is discussed in the following chapter. This aspect of the political situation is not to be gleaned from reading the later romance *Le Fouke Fitz Waryn*, which details stories about both Fouke and Ranulf. Before their appearance in romance or rhymes, it is the chronicles that are witness to the emergence in the thirteenth century of heroic outlaw-type figures, briefly mentioned amidst a world of politics, in which they took certain sides.

## Chroniclers

In attempting to ascertain some glimpse of the opinions and ideas in the aftermath to the crisis of John’s reign and Henry’s minority thereafter, we may turn to contemporary chronicles. These were written in Latin by monks. We also turn to writings likely written by monastics who also wrote in Anglo-French.

The ‘political protest’ output of anonymous medieval authors took the form of poems or ‘songs’ as they were later termed. These were collected and edited by Thomas Wright in *The Political Songs of England*, published in 1839. They are loaded with medieval moralising lessons and invective against abusers of liberty and decency. Wright’s work was reprinted in 1996. Peter Coss provided a new introduction with modern references for the songs. There is one song of particular interest which shall be discussed later.<sup>23</sup> It was sourced by Wright from a fifteenth-century collection attributed to Flacius Illyricus, but was presumably transcribed from earlier sources. It is confirmed in its antiquity by the existence of a parallel poem in a manuscript discovered by Thomas Wright.<sup>24</sup> It is relevant to our discussion, for it mentions Peter des Roches, among other political

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<sup>23</sup> *Thomas Wright’s Political Songs of England, from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Peter Coss, Cambridge 1996, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Political Songs*, 347-8.

figures, in a rather poor light. According to Thomas Wright, it was written by the king's ecclesiastical opponents, and seems to demonstrate the hatred of an English cleric towards the actions of des Roches and others who support King John.<sup>25</sup>

The writers of the songs and poems found in Thomas Wright's compendium are anonymous and their sermonising generally shorter than that found in the monastic chronicles. Among these is the work of the 'Barnwell Annalist', an unknown chronicler of the early thirteenth century. His work was apparently incorporated into the later chronicle of Walter of Coventry (*fl.*1293). He provides a sound assessment of events in Henry's minority, including the papal letters affair of 1223, which are not mentioned in other larger chronicles. We also have the chronicle of Ralph of Coggeshall (*d.* after 1227), who was a Cistercian abbot of Essex.<sup>26</sup> Within 50 miles of London, and in contact with continental Cistercian houses, he was relatively well informed of developing events.<sup>27</sup> He is important for this study, which examines in part the developing suspicion of foreigners; because he stated that in 1213 the nobles of England complained that des Roches, a foreigner, had been placed over them.<sup>28</sup> This marked the beginning of a new political elite, possibly seen as opposed to the interests of the English. This was a reason for a new era in politics in which, with a king out of control, the English nobles felt a need to begin to assert themselves in a warlike fashion. 1213 could be seen as the beginning of a time for the development of the context behind the heroic rebel in English affairs of the thirteenth century.

The prolific St Albans' chronicler, Roger of Wendover, writing before *c.*1235, appears at times to be neutral in his estimations, even writing of the 'treacherousness' of those who had given up the city of London to the enemies of an unpopular John.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Wendover also could not help recounting stories which paint John in a bad way. He is mildly pro-native in his assessment of political disputes, and does not take sides between de Burgh and des Roches.

Matthew Paris (*c.*1200-59) was Wendover's chronicling successor at St Albans. He was a boy in the latter stage of John's reign, so his opinions are more appropriate to the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> D. A. Carpenter, 'Abbot Ralph of Coggeshall's Account of the Last Years of King Richard and the First Years of King John', *The English Historical Review*, 113, 454 (Nov. 1998), 1210-30, p. 1211.

<sup>27</sup> Gransden, p. 324.

<sup>28</sup> *Ralph of Coggeshall, Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson, London 1875, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 329.

politics of the following decades, and are therefore more considered in the following chapters. His stories are far more pro-native and anti-foreign than those of the adult contemporaries of John's day, and are perhaps more relevant to the strongly pro-native, and indeed more pro-English feeling of the 1250s, than to issues of the time of Henry's minority. These successive St Albans' chroniclers are pre-eminent amongst their English chronicling peers, both for their descriptions of purported social ideas, which they consider to have been prevalent at various times, as well as the voluminous content of their works.

It is prudent to consult the chronicle sources for political insight into factional dispute as they provide us with a record of strong opinions of the day. There is in fact an increasing contemporary trend among scholars to return to the chronicles for insight into political affairs. In a recent article, John Gillingham considers that: 'judgements on John's record as king are increasingly returning to contemporary opinion as voiced in both English and non-English narrative sources.'<sup>30</sup> In a more recent paper, Bjorn Weiler maintains that the greatest English chronicler of thirteenth-century political affairs, Matthew Paris, was frequently conversant with official figures.<sup>31</sup> One of them was Hubert de Burgh.<sup>32</sup> Another was Peter des Roches, who gave Paris a book upon des Roches' return from crusade in 1238.<sup>33</sup> Paris was also connected to the king, meeting with him on several occasions. The king was well aware that Paris was the St Albans chronicler.<sup>34</sup> The monastic sources are therefore indispensable for an analysis of this period.

## **'Outlaw' and heroic tales of the day**

The social situation at the beginning of the thirteenth century was marked by increasing fragmentation within the kingdom. We know only a fraction of whatever popular tales may then have been current. Fascinatingly, most of those we do know about relate to figures who lived much earlier. We know about Hereward the Wake, a Saxon earl at the

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<sup>30</sup> John Gillingham, 'John', *ODNB*, eds. B. Harrison, H. C. G. Matthew, Oxford 2004, online ed., June 2010, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14841>, accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>31</sup> Bjorn Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the writing of history', *Journal of Medieval History*, 25 (2009), 254-78, p. 263.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Lloyd and Rebecca Reader, 'Paris, Matthew', *ODNB*, online ed., June 2010 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21268>, accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Bjorn Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the writing of history', p. 263.

time of the conquest. Although he had a high position, his popularity came from his English identity and perception that his people had been oppressed by Norman overlords. The story about his deeds was written down in Latin during the thirteenth century in Peterborough Cathedral Manuscript 1, ff. 320-39. This is perhaps based upon an earlier copy, for the author within the tale, its composer, makes some extraordinary claims to have researched stories about Hereward. He claims that his enquiries about anything written about Hereward were met with success. A short English text about Hereward, was sought out, and thence translated into Latin.<sup>35</sup> He also claims there was a deacon called Leofric (Hereward's priest), who wrote down in English, various tales of 'giants and warriors' from ancient times, as well as true events, for the entertainment of his audience as well as for the preservation of their memory. From these writings, the author found only a 'few loose pages' about Hereward, which were rotten and torn, and which he was only partly able to decipher, because the writing was unfamiliar. He despaired at being unable to find a reputed large book of Hereward's doings, but supplemented his story with information he heard from those who knew and took part in Hereward's activities: firsthand information from Hereward's former subjects and associates, including two of Hereward's knights whom he questioned.<sup>36</sup> Stephen Knight's view is that this information would place the composition of the tale in the first quarter of the twelfth century, when Hereward's old compatriots may have been elderly.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps other details were added long after this initial composition, for there are inconsistencies in the author's story. He seemingly could find no-one to help him decipher the 'unfamiliar' English writing about Hereward, despite men from Hereward's own time being still alive. Leofric was also supposedly both Hereward's priest, therefore a primary witness, as well as a collector of and writer of tales of English heroic figures, with which he entertained people. These possible inconsistencies aside, the story itself is considerably an invention, following a standard formula employed in storytelling romance of the twelfth century.<sup>38</sup> Hereward had an enduring fame. There seems to have been an oral as well as written tradition, in English. The author of the work states: 'Very

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, p. 638.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 639.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 635.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

many men are recorded from among the English people, and the outlaw Hereward is reckoned the most distinguished of all'.<sup>39</sup>

We know also about a figure in London called 'William with the Long Beard', also known as William Fitz Osbert, who was an agitator with religious concerns. It was feared that William's followers, reportedly in the tens of thousands, would break into houses of the rich; and William was subsequently executed. He never made it into any ballad or romance, but nevertheless he must have had some considerable impact, for Matthew Paris called him a martyr.<sup>40</sup> There may have been many others, such as figures from Arthurian romance, who were heroic figures rather than 'outlaws'. Although there may have been some oral traditions, the outlaw ballad had not yet been invented.

Hereward and William are very different figures to those heroic outlaw-types of the thirteenth century, who faced less insurmountable odds. Thirteenth-century heroic figures actually had a good chance of achieving victories. They faced no William the Conqueror but a weak King John. We can even get an idea of what sort of problems the people faced, in and after this period, by looking at the political commentary of the day and thus grasping the context in which stories about heroic rebels would emerge.

## **Political factions**

Political life in early thirteenth-century England involved a grand, but rather complex dispute based around competing factions at court. Peter des Roches and Hubert de Burgh were two men of almost equal administrative capacity. They vied with one another in something of a contest to control the young king, Henry III, who ascended to the throne in 1216, at the age of nine, and his government.<sup>41</sup> Their conflict, however, related to a broader, potentially divisive issue in English society, namely the role of foreigners in holding significant positions in the church.

Peter des Roches had been Justiciar under the reign of King John, holding the position until 1217, when he was replaced by Hubert de Burgh. Des Roches arose from obscure continental origin, Touraine near Poitou in the south of France, to become the Bishop of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 639.

<sup>40</sup> Paris, *CM*, 2:419.

<sup>41</sup> Carpenter, 'The Fall of Hubert de Burgh', p. 1.

Winchester in the reign of John.<sup>42</sup> It seems his power was always derived from his role as Bishop of Winchester, with its connections to the pope, as well as his long-standing political loyalty to the royal family. Des Roches tended to concentrate, a little more than his rival Hubert, upon political dealings and alliances with powerful foreigners, such as the pope, and the Holy Roman Emperor. Due to his propensity to deal with Henry's foreign relatives, as well as the pope, des Roches is seen as having been something of the leader of the foreign element in English politics.<sup>43</sup>

The Englishman Hubert de Burgh was no churchman. Like des Roches, he had relied, for the furtherance of his career, upon his adherence and total loyalty towards King John. After John's death in 1216, de Burgh relied instead upon seeking support among like-minded English allies and his political cunning for the maintenance of his career at the head of the nation. In his role as Justiciar and guardian to Henry, Hubert essentially relied upon the acquiescence of the English magnates—lay and ecclesiastic—though he himself was not from among them. He was, like Peter des Roches, of obscure origin. Long considered to be quintessentially pro-English by early scholars such as Bishop Stubbs, it should be considered that the English nobles had no particularly strong loyalty towards him.<sup>44</sup> Like des Roches, he was a self-made man, and had advanced his position by his own loyalties to the increasingly desperate King John. Both men had to look for partnerships in existing and emerging factions.

De Burgh's edge was that rule from Rome was scarcely popular among English magnates, who grumbled at seeing their money disappear offshore after John's permanent submission of England to the pope in 1213. This added to various anti-foreign hatreds, which had partly manifested from an abortive invasion of England in 1216-17 by Prince Louis. By securing the support of the magnates at pivotal moments, de Burgh was able to consolidate his power against des Roches. Des Roches could not generally call upon the same support. He was an enemy of Stephen Langton, head of the English church, whom he had wished to replace, and this limited his ability to form networks with English clerical magnates. In this, the two parties in fact represented two opposing

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<sup>42</sup> Although Roger of Wendover places the origin of Peter des Roches in Poitou, cf. *Paris, CM*, 3: 240, his actual homeland has recently found to have been nearby Touraine; cf. Vincent, p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent, p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> Stubbs, 2: 44.

political views on the future direction of the kingdom. One looked overseas whilst the other looked to England and the English church.

If we consider that Hubert's concerns were primarily related to maintaining his control over the young king, many of his later Anglo-centric actions become more intelligible. His reluctance for instance to engage in foreign war has been interpreted optimistically as a desire for peace.<sup>45</sup> In fact, his and Langton's main concern in 1224 was not for the sudden loss of their lord Henry's continental territory of Poitou to the French. Interestingly, St Albans chronicler Roger of Wendover suggested the Poitevins felt they had been abandoned by their king, Henry III, who never expressed any wish towards losing control of his continental inheritance.<sup>46</sup> That decision was made for him by de Burgh. It seems few, if any plans were made for the defence of that province. In this, and other matters, Hubert may have actively sabotaged attempts at foreign conquest.<sup>47</sup> This was an Anglo-centric action in an increasingly Anglo-centric period, in the wake of Magna Carta, when resistance to Rome helped generate an 'English' identity among those who looked to their own defence, and were less interested in asserting themselves overseas. This epitomises the cultural and social feeling of this period of reconsolidation, in which a group defining itself as English felt their destiny in the hands of others.

## Dissent

Des Roches' recurring problem, or advantage, throughout his career was his foreign birth and habit of bestowing his favours upon other foreigners. These were continental nobility as well as his own family.<sup>48</sup> He also retained Normans and Poitevins in his Episcopal household at Winchester.<sup>49</sup> While he was Justiciar he faced accusations of favouritism to aliens whilst displaying further ambition by attempting unsuccessfully to have himself promoted into the archbishopric of York.<sup>50</sup>

Des Roches' ambition for power seems to have been widely known. There exists a cynical medieval poem in Thomas Wright's collection, found amidst the writing of

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 450.

<sup>47</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2: 531.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter Des', *ODNB*, online ed., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22014>, accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent, p. 162.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575), a Lutheran reformer and scholar.<sup>51</sup> This poem, written by an ecclesiastic, is important as it shows how the church was presented as having been divided into ‘foreign’ and English factions—which sought to either cooperate with the distant pope, or operate autonomously. The poem is highly critical of des Roches’ faction, which supported King John and the pope, and opposed the election of the pro-native Stephen Langton to the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Langton was a man who in 1207 declared, ‘...from our tender years, we have loved our kingdom with a tender, natural love’.<sup>52</sup> Carpenter calls this an example of Langton’s ‘Englishness’; a sentiment to which des Roches’ actions could not align.<sup>53</sup> In this poem we first read an invective against John for oppression, claiming essentially that:

*Plebs in Aegypti cophino servit, et sudat anxia sub Pharaone domino.*

The people serves in the coffer of Egypt, and anxiously sweats under the rule of Pharaoh.<sup>54</sup>

The poem mentions plebs—the commoners who themselves are apparently suffering. It is, according to Thomas Wright, an essentially haranguing invective against John’s faction.<sup>55</sup> If this is accurate, it seems the author is saying the ramifications are not localised to an upper political level but could perhaps enter the popular mind. It implies the ideas found in the poem were a cause for social concern. The poem describes des Roches as being interested in counting money rather than religious affairs. It illustrates the presence of a perceived demarcation between English and Roman perspectives for the future of the English church. The necessity for an allegiance to Rome would make it very difficult for both John, and subsequently Henry, to rule independently, and maintain the support of the nobles. It seems to have contributed to their weaknesses, but also to their survival, as well as to the massive powers they vested in their advisors, who had the effective sanction of the pope to pursue their interests, in lieu of supporting the king.

John’s actions were seldom popular. In 1212, the position of trust secured by Peter des Roches was displayed when he was entrusted by John with the custody of five year old

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<sup>51</sup> *Political Songs*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Gervase, vol. 1, xxxi, *op cit.*, Carpenter, (trans.), *Minority of Henry III*, p. 324.

<sup>53</sup> Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, p. 324.

<sup>54</sup> *Political Songs*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Henry III, son of John and heir apparent.<sup>56</sup> After years of arguing with the pope, and with John's excommunication in 1213, Peter des Roches displayed his loyalty. He was only one of two English bishops who remained by John's side, having been for some time, part of John's inner circle.<sup>57</sup> As John needed loyal men, Peter was thrust into the role of Justiciar. According to Ralph of Coggeshall, the magnates complained and murmured that a foreigner had been placed over them.<sup>58</sup> John still required political support, however, from nobles who did not respect him. In order to bring them into line, John cemented his unpopularity, submitting the future of the English crown to Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) and his successors, dated May 15, 1213.<sup>59</sup> In exchange for an annual tribute, England would become a papal fief, and this perhaps is the basis for what shall be considered to be the native-inspired anti Roman-appointee movements which would follow in years to come. The action also helped trigger the drafting of Magna Carta, a war with France and a civil war, after which the climate was such that pro-English politicians could easily make credible xenophobic accusations, as shall be seen.

Coggeshall's account is important because it suggests that the magnates in 1213 were vehemently opposed to des Roches, on the basis that he was a foreigner. As des Roches had cooperated with John's submission to Rome, it could almost have been seen as a group of important foreigners deciding the future of England, with the hitherto all-important barons given limited say. A condition John purportedly agreed to was that: 'the king should in all good peace receive the lord Stephen, archbishop of Canterbury, and the other bishops of England, and should place them in all the abbacies, and should satisfy the holy church in all things, and that the king and his heirs should every year give to the Roman church a thousand marks sterling.'<sup>60</sup> Greater exactions would follow, much to the frustration of the nobles.

Thus, between 1213 and 1215, King John had been able to turn the Pope from a 'remorseless enemy to a valuable ally'.<sup>61</sup> This set the ambitions of the English barons against those of Rome. All the chroniclers were opposed to this action of 1213 save for

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<sup>56</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ralph of Coggeshall, Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson, p. 168.

<sup>59</sup> *Memoriale Walteri de Coventria*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols, London 1872-3, vol. 2, p. 210.

<sup>60</sup> *The Flowers of History, especially such as relate to the affairs of Britain. From the beginning of the world to the year 1307, collected by Matthew of Westminster...*, ed. trans. C. Yonge, 1853, vol. 2. pp. 118-9.

<sup>61</sup> C. Warren Hollister, 'King John and the Historians', *The Journal of British Studies*, 1, 1 (Nov. 1961), 1-19, p. 7.

the Barnwell annalist who was the only chronicler to give a sympathetic justification. He stated that this was done in order to avoid invasion from France, as few would dare to attack the lands of the pope.<sup>62</sup>

For some time, finances had been strained. The expense of constant warfare was taking its toll and the continental lands did not seem to have been paying their way. English money had paid for the defence of Normandy, a 1206 adventure to Poitou, as well as another invasion in 1214.<sup>63</sup> John seems to have been straining the kingdom, and the patience of the nobles, to raise war money. This only weakened his position. By delivering England into the hands of the pope, the nobles could give up any hope of having an English king and could only expect to pay more in future. England was caught in a crisis. It was a land effectively without a ruler, and two future directions were open. It could be ruled by foreigners, or it could be ruled by the English. The English nobles were in a strong position to have a say in the matter, and ideas of resistance to John by various nobles seem to have inspired various legendary tales, which will be discussed in further chapters.

## **Crisis in 1215**

Dissatisfied with John's decisions and unhappy with their position, in June 1215, a conference of nobles took place with the king at Runnymede. John was forced to sign Magna Carta, a document which promulgated a new system of taxation and constitutional reform. Peter des Roches was also replaced as Justiciar by Hubert de Burgh. This was agreed in the presence of Stephen Langton.<sup>64</sup> The power of des Roches was no longer acceptable to the English nobles, as he had been replaced by an Englishman who had campaigned against the presence of foreigners in power.

Perhaps in an attempt to get back at the insurgent nobles who had removed him, to undermine Hubert de Burgh, or to ingratiate himself further with John, Peter engaged in correspondence with the pope in order have the agreements repudiated. The pope responded, imposing papal excommunication on the 'rebels'. He also imposed papal suspension on Stephen Langton, the powerful Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>65</sup> Langton had

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<sup>62</sup> Walter, 2: 210.

<sup>63</sup> R. V. Turner, *King John*, London 1994, p. 86.

<sup>64</sup> Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, p. 136.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

also occupied the clerical seat which des Roches long coveted and des Roches had never been completely satisfied with his Winchester bishopric. This enmity would soon bring Langton into cooperation with de Burgh to secure des Roches' removal.

This was a time of great rebellion. Fouke Fitz Warin III (c.1165-d.1258) was a marcher lord, and enemy of John. John had begun to recruit a continental mercenary army in April 1215, which, when it had been assembled, crossed over into England. John then began to avenge himself upon his uncooperative nobles. He burned their lands and caused general devastation.<sup>66</sup> John remained formidable, and till the end of his life in the following year, he was not deserted by Peter des Roches, nor Hubert de Burgh. Fouke Fitz Warin took up arms against John and he was celebrated in literature in the following century as a heroic outlawed figure. Another outlaw figure at this time, Eustache the Monk (c.1170-1217), once a mercenary for John, was also celebrated in the generations subsequent to his death. Both men would be celebrated because of their open and heroic defiance against what grew into the myth of John's wickedness. John's armies consisted not just of English soldiers, but of foreign mercenaries who cared little for the lands they burned. Both the armies of the English and John's armies would be taken aback by events resulting from a subsequent invasion.

## **1216: Invasion by Prince Louis**

In an effort to escape John's savage retribution for Magna Carta, his rebellious vassals offered the crown of England to Prince Louis of France.<sup>67</sup> An anticipated invasion occurred, based upon previous overtures of the pope to punish John, and despite the subsequent illegality of the act in the eyes of Rome: John had, after 1213, remained a Roman vassal. In May 1216, Louis was proclaimed king in London, a city with a tradition for acclaiming new monarchs. His official coronation followed on 28 October 1216. As the months dragged on, Louis had evidently been inserting French nobles into captured English castles, rather than giving them back to their English owners. It made the English paranoid against the foreigners, as is evidenced by a passage in Roger of Wendover's chronicle. Wendover claims that in c.1216, perhaps at the height of a wave

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<sup>66</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 348-53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 357-9.

of unpopularity against Louis, a rumour is reputed to have done the rounds. Apparently, upon his deathbed, a dying French nobleman, the Viscount de Melun, stated:

‘I grieve’, said he, ‘for your desolation and ruin, because you know not the danger which hangs over you; for Louis and sixteen other French counts and barons with him have sworn, that, if he subdues England and is crowned king, he will condemn to perpetual banishment all those who are now fighting with him and persecuting King John, as traitors against their lord, and will destroy the whole race of them from the kingdom...’ and with these words, the nobleman immediately expired.<sup>68</sup>

In a dramatic moment, and with his dying breath, the courageous nobleman warns the English that they have been betrayed. The story may have been exaggerated before Wendover heard it, assuming it was real to begin with. Despite this, it contained a plausible lesson for the English to have considered. If the English had rebelled against their own king, how would they treat a French one? The story, excellent anti-alien propaganda, seems tailor-made for the rumour mill. Tolerance to foreigners cannot have been high in this period, with their armies ravishing the kingdom, causing distress. The idea of English nobles being replaced with French ones also echoes events of *Hereward the Wake*, a story known in these times, where a Saxon earl battles the triumphant continental interloper. In *Eustache the Monk*, a later romance about these times, the main character, based on the historical Eustache Busket, must leave France out of persecution. Initially tied to John, Busket found a vocation fighting in England, and supplying weapons to the rebellious northern barons.<sup>69</sup>

In the years thereafter, political figures such as Hubert de Burgh and Stephen Langton would exploit such anti-foreign feelings for political advantage. Importantly, the message shows that it is up to the noblemen to save England. John is seen as inept, and a slave of the pope. The French apparently want to betray the English nobles. John’s son is too young to rule. There is no-one left to defend English interests. The dramatic Wendover

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<sup>68</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 377., “Doleo...super desolatione et subversione vestra, quod vos quae vobis imminent pericula ignoratis. Juravit namque Lodowicus et sedecim cum eo de regno Francorum comites et barones, quod si contigerit cum Angliam subjugare, et in regem Johannem persequuntur, ut proditores domini sui, perpetuo damnaret exilio, et omne genus eorum deleret de terra...” Et his dictis, nobilis ille continuo expiravit.’ Paris, *CM*, 2: 666.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (eds.), *Robin Hood and other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, p. 671.

story reflects the situation of the nobles having to look to themselves for their own defence.

Louis was not, in the end, successful in the war. The significant remaining foreign threat to a nobleman's or knight's land was Rome. Thenceforth, those who schemed with Rome would arouse suspicion among those who identified themselves as English and looked for a figure who could restore what they imagined as their traditional liberties.

## **Succession and Regency**

The death of King John on October 19, 1216 provoked intense debate about the future government of the realm. The pope endorsed Henry as 'King Henry III' whom, he considered might prove to be a faithful vassal and inheritor of John's agreement to keep England within the papal domain. Henry III, in the end, with papal support, was more preferable to the English than the son of the French monarch, whose loyalty to the English who had fought with him had been under question. By the Treaty of Lambeth in 1217, Louis acknowledged his rule in England had never been legitimate.

The pope had written many letters to Henry III in his first year as king. He begged him to follow the advice of Guala Bicchieri (1150-1227), the papal legate. Between 1216 and 1218, Guala would issue directives to de Burgh and des Roches. In various letters, he was permitted to interdict or excommunicate all clerks deserving of such punishment, to grant abbeys and churches to those who supported the king, as well as to annul oaths taken to Louis.<sup>70</sup> In short, he was an emissary of a foreign power, interfering in English affairs, and seemingly with every right to do so.

On October 28, 1216, Henry III was crowned king at St Peter's, Gloucester. The aged William Marshal (1146-1219), veteran of many wars, had, with Peter des Roches and Hubert de Burgh, remained loyal to John to the last. He had been selected by the royal council to become regent to the kingdom, and he ruled until his death on 14 May, 1219. This ended the regency whilst Henry was still in his minority, and led to the ascendance of both Peter des Roches and Hubert de Burgh. Their importance was manifestly increased by Marshal's death.<sup>71</sup> Guala was then removed to make way for a triumvirate

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<sup>70</sup> G. J. Turner, 'The Minority of Henry III', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, pt. 1, 18 (1904), 245-95, p. 257.

<sup>71</sup> F. J. West, *The Justiciarship in England 1066-1232*, Cambridge 2005, p. 242.

of Hubert de Burgh, Peter des Roches, and a new legate, Pandulf. The English barons could look up at the triumvirate, which held the title 'governor of the king and his realm', and consider that two of its members, Pandulf and des Roches, who were foreigners, ruled over them.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the barons consoled themselves with the idea that when Henry finally came of age, he would cast off the foreigners, and restore England as an independent power.

## **1219-1220: Triumvirate**

Peter des Roches had been the co-regent with William Marshal and became immediately less powerful without him. A great council of barons, in conjunction with Rome had threshed out a separation of powers.<sup>73</sup> A resurgent Hubert de Burgh assumed the role of Chief Justice and effective Regent over the kingdom. Hitherto, de Burgh had jointly authorised letters in conjunction with des Roches, but now, des Roches became the effective junior partner.<sup>74</sup> From 20 April, de Burgh began to attest the royal orders, although he was still subservient to the papal legate Pandulf.<sup>75</sup> Des Roches' patronage to aliens and his perceived exploitation in his role as forester and sheriff for various custodies, as well as a deterioration in personal relations between members of the minority council, led to des Roches' political isolation.<sup>76</sup> In 1220 the pope appointed des Roches Archbishop of Damietta, in Egypt, perhaps in the way of a conciliatory gesture for not appointing him to the Archbishopric of Canterbury.<sup>77</sup> This placed des Roches in opposition to the pro-English faction of Stephen Langton.

His power reduced, and frustrated in his projects, des Roches decided to set off overseas. The Dunstable annalist pointed out that many were unsure where des Roches was off to on this overseas journey, with some suggesting the Roman court.<sup>78</sup> This statement itself is quite telling and indicates that there may have been some paranoia surrounding des Roches' intentions. As it was, des Roches decided to take a pilgrimage

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>73</sup> Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, p. 128.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>75</sup> F. J. West, 'Burgh, Hubert de', *ODNB*, online ed., <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3991>, accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>76</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *AM*, 3: 68.

to Santiago de Compostela.<sup>79</sup> Hubert de Burgh was quick to exploit this, asserting conspiracy with foreigners as a reason for the trip. At this stage, Stephen Langton was working to reduce the power of Rome over English affairs. Tension between the English church and Rome is indicated by a May 1220 letter written by Pope Honorius III to the legate Pandulf. This demanded that the king be given custody of the royal demesne and complained of English bishops driven by avarice who themselves occupied lands belonging to the king.<sup>80</sup>

By summer of 1220, des Roches had been effectively replaced by de Burgh as head of the English government.<sup>81</sup> On 17 May, Langton even conducted a new coronation for Henry, superseding that conducted by des Roches in 1216.<sup>82</sup> We can surmise that this may partly have been to demonstrate that it was not Rome but the English church that would legitimise Henry's rule in the ancient tradition. At this time, Langton made several visits to Rome, determined to remove the legate Pandulf, who had replaced Guala.<sup>83</sup> Langton was successful. With Pandulf's departure, he would thenceforth become the most powerful churchman in England.

Now began the savage anti-foreign accusations. Des Roches' dealings with aliens, among other matters, made him increasingly vulnerable to accusations of self interest.<sup>84</sup> An example of this occurred on 30 May, 1221. While des Roches was briefly overseas, his two closest alien allies, Engelard de Cigone, and Peter de Maulay, were seized and humiliated before an investigative council, and briefly imprisoned. The purported conspiracy was that Eleanor of Brittany, a prisoner, would be smuggled to France by des Roches.<sup>85</sup> Vincent points out that the fact such allegations could have been taken seriously indicates the extent to which the alien connections of des Roches, had been taken seriously.<sup>86</sup> It was perhaps the departure of Pandulf, the pope's man in England that suddenly made des Roches a very dangerous contender for that position. The realisation of this possibility may have facilitated the conspiracy of 1223 against des Roches.

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<sup>79</sup> Vincent., p. 199.

<sup>80</sup> *Royal and Other Historical Letters Illustrative of the Reign of Henry III*, vol. 1, ed. Henry Walter Waddington Shirley, London 1866, vol. 1, p. 535.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent, p. 182.

<sup>82</sup> *Royal and Other Historical Letters Illustrative of the Reign of Henry III*, vol. 1, p. 535.

<sup>83</sup> Vincent, p. 182.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>85</sup> *AM*, 3: 68.

<sup>86</sup> Vincent, pp. 203-4.

In a council at Oxford in 1222, Langton asserted his control over the English church.<sup>87</sup> He had beaten des Roches in their power struggle. He would effectively rule with Hubert de Burgh as de-facto co-regent, but the penultimate battle with des Roches was just beginning. The Dunstable annalist tells us that the pope promised Stephen Langton that England would not be subject to any further legate in his lifetime.<sup>88</sup> There is historical evidence from this time that the idea of a strong English church was not simply a desire of Langton's. A study by Newman shows that after 1220, gifts to ecclesiastical institutions were in decline.<sup>89</sup> Magnates in Yorkshire in the 1220s had even begun to sue to reclaim lands from recently appointed Roman ecclesiastics, who had arrived in England to claim power of English benefices. These benefices had formerly been bestowed by the ancestors of the magnates upon English ecclesiastics.<sup>90</sup> The change in the status quo may have been startling. This shows us that the issue of increasing foreign control of the church was not just a political but a cultural issue as well. By 1231, the rebel Robert of Thwing would react strongly to a deprivation of a church-living on his land by an Italian, who had had the support of the Archbishop of York and other churchmen. Des Roches would find himself caught up in a related rising tide of discontent.

## **1223-24: Conspiracies**

Henry began his rule as a very young and weak ruler. His accession to partial minority in 1223, at the age of sixteen, caused a significant degree of political consternation amongst the barons. Since, at the age of twenty one, Henry would lose his minority and become a fully-fledged ruler, the time for any action by the nobles towards removing the child king was fast receding. People were interested to know how he would rule: chaotically like his father, or wisely. What had brought matters to a head was that Henry had received the proposal for a partial coming of age, apparently inspired by the pope, in 1223. This would entail the circumstance that various barons would have to surrender control of royal castles to Henry, over which they had hitherto held custody since the death of John

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<sup>87</sup> F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, *Councils and Synods with other documents relating to the English Church II: 1205-1213*, 2 vols, Oxford 1964, vol. 1, pp. 100-25.

<sup>88</sup> *AM*, 3: 74.

<sup>89</sup> J. E. Newman. 'Greater and Lesser Landowners and Parochial Patronage: Yorkshire in the thirteenth century', in *The English Historical Review*, 92, 363 (Apr. 1977), 280-308, p. 292.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 292-3.

in 1216. This would naturally present a security risk to the nobility should Henry turn out to be like his father. An added risk would stem from the consideration that whoever controlled Henry during the subsequent partial majority would also control the castles, and therefore England. It would be better if Henry's guardian were an Englishman rather than a foreigner—namely de Burgh rather than the scheming des Roches, or another alien.

We should also consider that this was a time in the fresh aftermath of a series of disastrous wars inside England, involving King John, when the heroes of that war were still popular and fresh in the minds of many. Many of these same figures were now involved in managing a different threat, coincident with the time of the first development of thirteenth-century outlaw and heroic rebel stories.

To the eyes of the English of the day, someone in early 1223, and with papal connections in England, had secretly convinced the pope to declare the king of age. Since the sixteen year old king was too young to have his minority fully terminated, Pope Honorius III maintained that he was of sufficient wisdom, beyond his years, to enjoy a partial coming of age. As such, he should be given effective control of government.<sup>91</sup> The question on noblemen's lips may have been who in England had advised the pope to take such a step, and to what gain?<sup>92</sup> Questions over the reason for the pope's letter would trigger allegations of treason.

The pivotal papal letters, of 13 April, which had contained instructions to enact the partial majority, were addressed to Hubert, Peter des Roches and the distinguished William Brewer (*d.*1226), another self-made man through his loyalty to John. These had all been John's most faithful advisors. It seems likely that at least one of these was the real culprit for requesting the letters. The letters were not addressed to Stephen Langton.<sup>93</sup> In a sense he had been excluded from the proposed proceedings and he only intervened late in the controversy.<sup>94</sup> In fact, his exclusion by the pope may be evidence enough to suggest that he would have perceived the action as a conspiratorial power-play against him and the English church, by the Romans and des Roches. This overhauls traditional notions of his complicity.<sup>95</sup> Carpenter has pointed out that Hubert de Burgh

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<sup>91</sup> Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, p. 302.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

and Langton were rather secure in their positions in 1223 and had no need to have requested the letters. In other words, recent research suggests the 'English faction' was confronted with a plot which was not of their doing.

Des Roches, more developed in terms of his foreign policy abilities than de Burgh, had probably himself requested the papal letters. He sought to recover his standing by flattering Henry with a partial coming of age. He would achieve this in petitioning the pope to declare the end of Henry's minority before his sixteenth birthday, in 1223.<sup>96</sup> This way, Peter himself would have become something of a 'kingmaker' in the eyes of an impressionable young Henry. In this way, the growing power of Justiciar Hubert de Burgh could perhaps be curtailed as he would lose his guardianship over a king who would no longer require his guidance. This would open the door for des Roches to make his comeback, and put grand ideas into the young king's head: something to be feared.

As it counted somewhat on Hubert de Burgh's ambivalence, des Roches' well-laid plan backfired spectacularly. Stephen Langton in particular, had preached against the interference of foreigners (so-called Romans) in the English church. Together with Hubert, he initially opposed the letters, and then conspired to utilise the letters against des Roches as evidence of a conspiracy to take power.<sup>97</sup> One can only speculate as to the degree to which the nobles reacted to the idea that Des Roches saw himself as a kingmaker. Fortunately for them, the letters seemed to contain an unacceptable clause which allowed for Henry's rule to be revoked. This was enough to turn des Roches from potential hero of the young king to 'conspirator' against him, cementing the power of the representatives of the loose anti-des Roches faction, over the young king.

The ideal of keeping castles in English hands was not yet forgotten. Henry had resolved to restore the castles of the crown into Hubert de Burgh's hands as part of his partial coming of age. This would significantly complicate matters for de Burgh. Although he represented generally English interests, he had also been John's loyal servant to the end. Granting de Burgh and Henry the right to the former royal castles seemed a little unsettling given the recent warfare against John over Magna Carta, and against the French, in which the English nobles had given their blood to keep those strongholds in their hands.<sup>98</sup> A possible time for action had thus arrived. We now have a

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<sup>96</sup> *AM*, 3: 83.

<sup>97</sup> Vincent, p. 209.

<sup>98</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 276.

case of an individual, possibly famous in later romance for his daring, attempting to assert the rights of the English against Henry, in what was becoming a complex situation.

Ranulf, the Earl of Chester, most powerful of the English earls, attempted to rouse support for a fully fledged rebellion against Henry and Hubert de Burgh. The earl was perceived by Roger of Wendover to have been the leading member of this conspiracy.<sup>99</sup> Wendover casts a dismal view over the attempted rebellion, stating that at Leicester, the Earl of Chester was: ‘huffing and puffing and issuing threats against king and justiciar, because of the king’s requirement to give up his lands and castles.’<sup>100</sup> Hubert was partly implicated in the earl’s rage, because he would have full responsibility for administering the handover of castles, and this actually led to complaints of oppressiveness from nobles.<sup>101</sup> Although de Burgh had de-facto support from English nobles, there were certainly more radical ideas about, and des Roches was an opportunist.

It is a measure of the desperation and marginalisation of des Roches that he now decided to throw his weight behind this possible revolt, though rather than being an issue of treason, it may have begun more as an attempt to win the king’s favour against his rival. While the Earl of Chester was worried about the end of the royal minority upsetting the status-quo in terms of the issue of the control of hard-won castles, des Roches’ motive for joining the rebels may have been simple opportunism. The powerful forces of the Earl of Chester, among others, may have been enough to have swayed the king and his supporters into removing de Burgh from power.<sup>102</sup> Since England remained under theoretical papal power, des Roches may also have entertained notions of becoming a papal regent, a new ‘legate’, over England.<sup>103</sup> He was after all something of the pope’s remaining representative after the departure of Pandulf. Des Roches could not hope to achieve such a position with Langton and de Burgh in power. This may be what the nobles feared and this might be one reason why the conspiracy of Ranulf, joined by des Roches, never really got off the ground.

We read in the Dunstable Annals some details of this conspiracy. The Earl of Chester conspired with William de Fortibus as well as Faulkes de Breauté, a rogue knight and

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>100</sup> ‘tumens et minas contra regem et justiciarium intendens pro custodiis castrorum ac terrarum, quas idem rex exigebat ab illo’, Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 276.

<sup>101</sup> F. J. West, ‘Burgh, Hubert de’, *ODNB*.

<sup>102</sup> Stubbs, 2: 34.

<sup>103</sup> Vincent, ‘Roches, Peter des’, *ODNB*.

former Norman mercenary of John who, according to Wendover, had committed robberies and murders.<sup>104</sup> He had allegedly plotted to capture London.<sup>105</sup> These were perhaps mere rumours yet were picked up by Wendover at St Albans.<sup>106</sup> They were evidently sufficient to cause a strong reaction. The involvement of the foreign-born Faulkes de Breauté and des Roches, as well as the Earl of Aumale, another rebellious foreigner, against the English-born Hubert and Langton, led Stubbs to suggest the conspiracy was one of foreigners against the English.<sup>107</sup> In this instance, things were rather more complex. On 9 Nov 1223, tensions came to a head, when Hubert seemed to have convinced Henry that there was a plot on his life, and both fled London.<sup>108</sup>

The Dunstable annalist tells us that during a council meeting on 4 December 1223, Hubert raged against des Roches, accusing him of treason against the king.<sup>109</sup> Des Roches fiercely swore, in front of the congregation, to spend everything he possessed to ensure Hubert would be toppled from power.<sup>110</sup> In fact he had been conspiring overseas. He had decided to send Robert Passelewe and Robert of Kent to Rome, as envoys to secure the appointment of a legate to dictate terms to the archbishop, as well as request papal intervention.<sup>111</sup> Des Roches had been grasping for power through papal influence.

It seems that the rebels, the Earls of Chester and Aumale and others, discussed laying siege to London but eventually decided against it. Wendover claims they feared excommunication at the hands of the archbishop.<sup>112</sup> In December 1223, des Roches cemented his opposition by holding, with the earl of Chester and others, a Christmas court in Leicester, in symbolic opposition to the king, who held his own court at Northampton.<sup>113</sup> It would seem that the Earl of Chester and his compatriots decided not to initiate what Wendover called a 'doubtful struggle'.<sup>114</sup> Langton had actually issued an excommunication edict on 26<sup>th</sup> December, directed at the king's enemies and 'invaders of the holy church'.<sup>115</sup> This may have been decisive as the barons then decided to accede

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<sup>104</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 386.

<sup>105</sup> *AM*, 3: 83.

<sup>106</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 449-50.

<sup>107</sup> Stubbs, 2: 34.

<sup>108</sup> Vincent, p. 212.

<sup>109</sup> *AM*, 3: 84.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Vincent, pp. 213-14, et. Walter, 2: 262-3.

<sup>112</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 450.

<sup>113</sup> Vincent., p. 214.

<sup>114</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 449.

<sup>115</sup> J. W. Alexander, *Ranulf of Chester*, Athens 1983, p. 89.

to the king's order to surrender their castles, which occurred on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, 1223.

De Burgh required the existence of a purported conspiracy against the English church in order to receive help from Langton to remove des Roches. By acting in his usual manner, des Roches stirred up anti-alien and anti-Roman enmity in the English church, and perhaps in the mind of Langton, who might have been replaced had he not acted against des Roches. Des Roches had already lost the partial-guardianship of the king in 1220 and this manoeuvre of 1223 removed him from his local government roles.<sup>116</sup> By the beginning of Jan 1224, des Roches decided to capitulate, and relinquish his 'royal custodies, the county of Hampshire and the castles of Winchester, Portchester and Southampton'.<sup>117</sup> In this, he followed the example set by Fawkes and Ranulf of Chester, in the weeks previous.

The assaults on des Roches continued. By summer of 1224, Stephen Langton expressed his frustration with Romans and foreigners in general. He made assertions, calling the aliens: 'The scourge of all native men, to whom the whole people of England was given as booty.'<sup>118</sup> He advised: 'take care that the aliens (*extranei*) no longer act against you.'<sup>119</sup> This may certainly have been directed against des Roches—Langton may have earlier conspired to ensure that des Roches would take the blame for alleged treason regarding the affairs of the letters. Langton seems to have acknowledged the existence of a duality in English politics—that of the *extranei* and the *Anglicos*, or English and foreigners. Since Langton stated that the Romans were the scourge of 'all native men', and that the aliens were 'invaders of the holy church', it seems there may have been some sentiment against Roman interference in England in the early 1220s.

Carpenter points out that Hubert succeeded at this time because he had the backing of magnates, lay as well as ecclesiastic.<sup>120</sup> De Burgh's alliance with Langton was in essence also an alliance with the English church, a church which under Langton had opposed the influence of Roman appointees. There was therefore an anti-foreign dimension to the reason for de Burgh's survival. He was not acting alone, and by successfully utilising misinformation and by fomenting anti-alien ideas against des Roches, de Burgh may

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<sup>116</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

<sup>117</sup> Vincent, p. 214.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Carpenter, 'The Fall of Hubert de Burgh', p. 3.

have been convinced that this *modus operandi* was one which could be successfully exploited in future. De Burgh created expectations not easily satisfied.

## **1224: The Loss of Poitou**

Additional pressure was applied upon des Roches in the form of the defection of the count of Thouars and La Marche to the continental power of Louis VIII. This was a blow to des Roches, as he had been working for years to secure Thouars' loyalty.<sup>121</sup> This caused the military loss of Poitou in 1224, and precipitated a crisis with regard to the refugee nobles. There were greater implications for the argument developed here. After the loss of one of the final relics of the 'Angevin Empire', England and English nobles would have expected to enjoy a greater ratio of supremacy within the kingdom. Peter des Roches was even more of a foreigner in England than he had been hitherto and therefore more irrelevant to some xenophobic English.

It is interesting to compare the attitudes of Wendover and Paris towards the events behind the loss of Poitou. Wendover stated that the Poitevins thought they had been abandoned by the English King, and conquest was achieved without much bloodshed.<sup>122</sup> Matthew Paris, perhaps in his twenties at the time of the loss, later added his own commentary to this event, which is not as sympathetic to the Poitevins. He claimed that all Poitevins were natural traitors, and this perhaps reflected his own views regarding the influence of foreigners in English politics—against whom he was forever hostile:

Oh innate treachery of Poitevins! There was only one citizen who put himself forward for the defence of his lord the English king, and he was afterwards discovered to have hidden the standard of the king where he could produce it when that monarch was again restored, and he was seized by his treacherous fellow citizens, and hung; but as he died for a just cause, it is clear he was a glorious martyr.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Vincent, p. 218.

<sup>122</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 450.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 2: 450., 'O innata Pictavensibus proditio! Non erat qui opponeret se ad defensionem regis Angliae domini sui, praeter unum civem, qui poste adprehensus est occultasse signum regis Angliae ubi illud proferret aliquando evocato eodem rege Angliae; captus est proditione concivium et suspensus. Unde quia pro justitia obiit, constat ipsum martyrem esse gloriosum.' Paris, CM, 3:84.

Paris may have been recalling a variation of a popular story he heard from his youth—he was one to insert popular prejudices into his chronicle.<sup>124</sup> Talk of treasonous Poitevins may not have been unusual. Langton and de Burgh were in power during the critical moments of the loss of Poitou, and they were more interested in dealing with an unruly Falcassius the year before, than with the maintenance of the distant Angevin possessions.<sup>125</sup> Paris wrote his chronicle till about 1258 when pro-English feelings and resentment against Henry's Poitevin favourites were at a height. Paris' feelings against foreigners did not change throughout his life, due in part to the perceived weakness of Henry towards them. The idea of xenophobic sentiment at the time was not invented by Paris as Stephen Langton and De Burgh had made political capital out of xenophobic sentiment in the court.<sup>126</sup> Paris is partly representative of the more extreme faction which supported the English cause.

For supporters of inward-looking pro-English policy, things perhaps appeared to be improving. In 1224 des Roches seems to have hoped for the salvation of his career from the papacy, but this aspiration came to naught.<sup>127</sup> From December of 1223 he ceased to witness any executive order and his power had come to an end.<sup>128</sup> Des Roches did not merely fall from grace. He was financially humiliated as well. His loss of local government power in 1224 left him exposed to the countless lawsuits based upon grievances accumulated in his tenure, although he won most of these.<sup>129</sup> It was, however, an added strain to a shattered career. In the end, he decided to go on crusade.<sup>130</sup> The faction led by De Burgh, as well as des Roches' other enemies would continue to ensure that Peter might not regain his former position, and continued to attack him in his absence. In fact, following an investigation into his affairs, des Roches had to pay a fine of five hundred pounds in 1227—a bill of collection for his debts to the exchequer.<sup>131</sup>

It is important to stress that the subsequent rise of de Burgh did not necessarily equal a rise in power of the king. In fact, de Burgh seems to have kept his king in the dark, particularly regarding matters of war and even domestic policy. It is suggested this was

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<sup>124</sup> Vaughan, p. 264.

<sup>125</sup> F. A. Cazal, 'The Last years of Stephen Langton', *The English Historical Review*, 79, 313 (Oct. 1964), 673-97, p. 696.

<sup>126</sup> Vincent, p. 305.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>129</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

<sup>130</sup> F. J. West, 'Burgh, Hubert de', *ODNB*.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

partly from a lack of desire among English nobles for foreign adventures, before affairs at home should be set right.

### **1227-1230: The growth of resentment to Hubert de Burgh**

The absence of des Roches seems to have made de Burgh both more complacent and also greedier for greater powers, now that his main rival for Henry's trust and affection had departed England and Hubert had been left as a principal advisor. In 1227, de Burgh was made the earl of Kent and given additional revenues.<sup>132</sup> Hubert achieved a personal coup in 1227 in which the great charter was reissued allowing Henry to maintain his rule by decree. On 28 April 1228, Hubert was made lifetime Justiciar.<sup>133</sup> This rise to power is indicative in part of the support he could muster.

1227 may have been the summit of power for de Burgh. Since Henry came of age, he would rely less and less upon the Justiciar. The death of Pope Honorius in 1227 had brought Gregory IX, a new, perhaps more avaricious pope to power. Furthermore, de Burgh's key ally, Stephen Langton, who may have been pivotal in securing the support of the English clerical magnates, died on 9 July, 1228. With the death of this key ally, de Burgh began to recede in the royal estimation. As a sign of things to come, the new pope demanded a scutage of a tenth of English property.<sup>134</sup> Such outrages perhaps offered Hubert new opportunities to cement his popularity among the English nobles, against Rome. The English nobles did not appreciate being taxed by Rome. Wendover states that Ranulf, Earl of Chester took a brave stand and did not allow his lands to be taxed by the Romans in 1229.<sup>135</sup>

It is in the area of taxation that Hubert's popularity collapsed. In the period 1227-1231, England was subjected to the heaviest taxation since the rule of King John.<sup>136</sup> In other words, for some, this would have been King John revisited. The new government was something of a disappointment: nothing in the way of great military accomplishment was achieved with these taxes. The king had materialised a grand plan for a re-conquest

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Paris, *CM*, 3: 169.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 3: 189.

<sup>136</sup> Vincent, p. 267.

of Normandy, after the nobles of Normandy promised to stand by him.<sup>137</sup> De Burgh advised against it, and the king temporarily dropped the matter.<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, later in the year, at Michaelmas, Henry ordered the attack, and a great army was collected. Such quantities of men arrived in Portsmouth from: ‘Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Galway, such that all were wonder-struck’.<sup>139</sup> Upon understanding that there was insufficient provision or arms on the ships to maintain half the army, Henry flew into a rage, calling de Burgh an ‘old traitor’. He accused de Burgh of having received a bribe from the French queen, and apparently would have killed him were it not for the Earl of Chester’s intervention, and that of several others.<sup>140</sup> Des Roches was then still away on crusade, but ever-ambitious, and thirsty to formulate and activate his long sought-after revenge, which he had promised at Christmas of 1223. This would leave de Burgh in an increasingly difficult situation, which would have forced him to conspire with powerful English nobles who wanted a return to the former status quo, of less interference from foreign appointees. De Burgh was becoming more extreme.

Des Roches also was looking for a new angle, and to re-inforce old alliances. After the crusade, des Roches accompanied the emperor to Rome in May 1229 and assisted in the mediation of a peace treaty between emperor and pope. He would spend the next two years residing at the papal court, perhaps renewing and mending strained relationships which might prove useful in future. He may have caught wind that his old enemy Hubert de Burgh was becoming unpopular with Henry, before making his triumphal return to England.<sup>141</sup> The death of Langton opened up the possibility of the acquisition of the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Becoming the pope’s man in England after the departure of the legates would secure des Roches the alliance he would need to control Henry, and acquire his sought after revenge against de Burgh.

## **1230 - Christmas 1231**

The next few years were filled with warfare. On 21 January 1230, the king committed all the royal escheats into the hands of the Bishop of Chichester, Ralph de Neville (*d.*1244).

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<sup>137</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 514.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 531.

<sup>141</sup> Vincent, ‘Roches, Peter des’, *ODNB*.

He had been the keeper of the royal seal during the king's minority, and subsequently until 1238, as well as chancellor until 1244.<sup>142</sup> Stephen de Seagrave (1171-1241) also had a prominent role in administering escheats.<sup>143</sup> Seagrave would later prove a firm ally of the resurgent Peter des Roches.

Hubert needed all the support he could muster because he had displeased his king. He might have needed to appease some who did not wish to fight. We cannot be sure of this, but we know his behaviour aroused suspicion. Henry had pressed for the recovery of his ancestral lands, and Hubert had been unable or unwilling to allow this. At Easter 1230, Henry achieved his invasion of the continent, landing in Brittany. Instead of proceeding to Normandy, Wendover claims the English did little but hold entertainments and spend their money, and that Hubert de Burgh held them back from engagements with the enemy.<sup>144</sup> It was essentially a 'fruitless and mismanaged progress from Brittany to Bordeaux'.<sup>145</sup> This expedition may have been staged to reaffirm the loyalty of continental vassals, but it also seemed a deliberate waste of time and effort. Failure to recover Normandy led to accusations of mismanagement by enemies of de Burgh. Henry had not reclaimed his lost lands, but his authority was stamped in Brittany, and peace with the French was concluded on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1231.<sup>146</sup>

De Burgh's problems had only just begun. Des Roches' crusade in which the Holy Sepulchre had been secured was over, and he returned to England, in July 1231 to a triumphant welcome. This coincided with Hubert's unpopularity with the king. In his return, des Roches was a conquering leader and statesman, but he also remained an alien, and closer than ever to the traditions of the continent than those of England.<sup>147</sup> Peter des Roches now began to promise the king that he would make him rich and powerful.<sup>148</sup> It must have been a very welcome change following the military fiascos of the previous years.

Hubert was set to embark on the most controversial phase of his career, taking the remarkable step of betraying his king to satisfy a particular strong faction of rebellious

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<sup>142</sup> D. A. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 62.

<sup>143</sup> *Fine Rolls*, ed. trans. D. A. Carpenter, D. Crook, 14 Henry III, online version, C 60/29 #151, 28 oct 1229 - 27oct 1230, [www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/cocoon/frh3/content/calendar/roll\\_029.html](http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/cocoon/frh3/content/calendar/roll_029.html), accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>144</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 538.

<sup>145</sup> Vincent, p. 255.

<sup>146</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 541.

<sup>147</sup> Vincent, p. 255.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

nobles who hated the papal influence in England. The mishandling of the Breton expedition already brought Hubert into conflict with the king. His marriage had brought him into conflict with Rome.<sup>149</sup> De Burgh had married Margaret, the daughter of William the Lion, the king of Scotland, and his future earldom would rest upon their joint issue.<sup>150</sup> An inquiry was held in Rome in 1231-32, to examine whether the marriage was valid on the grounds of the relation of Margaret, his third wife, to his second wife.<sup>151</sup> Carpenter suggested this interference would have infuriated Hubert.<sup>152</sup> An increasingly desperate Hubert was not without more cards to play. One ambition may have been to achieve vengeance against the church. He required the support of the magnates, and with Langton dead, he needed to find a way of undermining the support base of a resurgent des Roches in England. The stage was set for a re-ignition of anti-alien ideas; an attack on the pro-Roman factions which might win him popularity among dispirited nobles.<sup>153</sup>

In the next chapter, it will be shown that in the early 1230s, an increasingly desperate Hubert de Burgh, perhaps fearful of the re-ascendancy of Peter des Roches, was complicit in a nationwide political conspiracy, with popular consequences, to punish the Romans in England. As part of a secret alliance, he allowed documents bearing the king's seal to fall into the hands of a radical but powerful faction of English nobles and gentry, which helped them to wage economic war upon Roman ecclesiastics in England. In doing so, he helped create conditions for the story to be told of an individual who might, to his admirers, be seen to restore justice to those oppressed by Roman clergy.

## Conclusions

The tension generated by papal control over England after 1213 led to conflict between English magnates and Roman officials and thus the emergence of anti-Roman attitudes, instrumental in laying the foundation for stories about heroic English rebels. Had it not been for Roman control and the interference of foreigners, the English nobles would have seen themselves as the principal beneficiaries of the wealth and rewards pertaining to their position. We have seen that as early as the beginning of the 1220s, there was

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>150</sup> Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, p. 56.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

animosity against issues of Roman control in England; part of a wider anti-foreign sentiment in political circles. This may have contributed to the ousting of Peter des Roches, who tended to associate himself with foreigners.

There had been a personal war underway between Peter des Roches and Hubert de Burgh. Their political rivalry would spill over into the next decade. A legacy of this was the weakness of the monarch, Henry III. He had been a puppet throughout his minority, and even in his majority, he does not seem to have been in full control of his military capabilities. He had left planning and decision-making to de Burgh, who seemed reluctant to assist in recapturing the old Angevin territories in France. It was the weakness of the monarch that induced noblemen such as Ranulf of Chester to foment revolt.

The period witnessed the emergence of several men who would later become perceived as heroic figures. It is interesting to reflect that characters such as Fouke Fitz Warin and Eustache the Monk, as well as Ranulf III of Chester (his twelfth-century ancestor may also have contributed to the Chester legends) all lived about the same time, and became in later times, among the most famous of heroic figures, alongside Robin Hood. The thirteenth century was a time in which politics was dominated by a deep suspicion and fear of foreign control over England. Nobles would have been fed up with the chaos of the old regime and had high hopes for change under Henry III, who they hoped would help safeguard hard-won liberties.

Although Peter des Roches and Hubert de Burgh would fade into obscurity (despite Paris' praise of Hubert, neither were figures who could be seen as inspirational or heroic) the lost legendary deeds of Ranulf, Earl of Chester evolved from historical memories, and lingered in the popular mind until the time of the Peasants' Revolt. Thereafter they would be largely forgotten. Some of the legendary tales of Ranulf survive in the romance, *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, from later times. These adventures will be discussed in a later chapter, but none mention Ranulf's actions against Rome, recorded in the chronicles and thereby a matter of public interest. Nor do the later romances mention Fouke Fitz Warin's apocryphal but entertaining actions against a Roman legate, discussed in the following chapter. The political context which precedes those events, discussed in this chapter, has been lost from later stories, forcing us to see the medieval world through the prism of the artistic licence of the writer of romance.

Des Roches, de Burgh, and the factions they represented would fade into obscurity, but not before a vicious political struggle which would leave both men discredited, and Henry increasingly estranged from his nobles, and locked in the arms of his foreign relatives. Actions such as these would lay the conditions for situating the individual perceived as standing outside the law of the land not as an object of fear and suspicion but awe and respect.

## Chapter 3 Robert of Thwing and hostility to Roman clergy

A little-studied series of riots occurred throughout England between December 1231 and April 1232, of significance for throwing up an individual who would be perceived by authorities as breaking the law of the land, but who would be revered by admirers as a hero for resisting authority. These riots are associated with a conspiracy of English nobles who aimed to destabilise the power-base of Roman ecclesiastical appointees, many of whom came from Italy, and had been granted administrative capacity in England by Pope Gregory IX. The popular face of the movement was initially a mysterious figure, later revealed to be Robert of Thwing, an English knight from Yorkshire whose men were reputed to have thrown money, taken from Roman ecclesiastics, to the poor. The rioters punished Roman appointees economically. Although they were initially successful, and their illegal movement went relatively unimpeded for months, it ultimately proved abortive. Little change to the status quo was achieved and many of the rioters were later excommunicated by Rome and punished by the king, Henry III. Nonetheless, memories of this and related events, recorded by Matthew Paris, a chronicler as well as a storyteller, may have helped define and shape oral legends of the ballad outlaw, in the decades and centuries which followed.

The aim in this chapter is to show how primary chronicle sources between 1230 and 1270 document the emergence of the image of a rebel with a mysterious identity, hostile to the influence of corrupt foreign clerics. It is argued that these texts articulate new myths which differed from those of earlier heroic figures which were being formed even in the thirteenth century. Memories of stories about the events provided some basis, in later times, for the modification of related legends about heroic figures, not only in Robin Hood stories but seemingly also those of another outlaw called William Cloudesley. Michael Clanchy has already suggested that ‘Tweng (Robert of Thwing) ... is a real-life example of a folk hero of the Robin Hood type, who robs fat prelates and fights for

English liberties.’<sup>1</sup> Maurice Keen has observed: ‘Thwing’s followers carried out systematic raids on the property of foreign monasteries, seized their granaries and sold the corn cheaply or even gave it away “for the benefit of the many”. Such activities would suit a historical Robin Hood.’<sup>2</sup> The main sources of information we have on the robberies are the thirteenth-century chronicles of Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris. Both were monks of St Albans abbey. Clanchy has remarked: ‘The principal significance of Tweng is that his confederation shows that the anti-Roman prejudices of the St Albans chroniclers were not a private eccentricity of their own but voiced wide resentment against the intrusion of foreigners into the English church.’<sup>3</sup> The Latin stories provided about Robert of Thwing seem to be based on popular perceptions, rather than simply resulting from an invention of the chronicler, although this cannot be proven outright. As the chroniclers record it, these stories already take the form of entertaining myths suitable for popular telling.

In this chapter it will be shown that although almost all texts from this time are written in either Latin or Anglo-Norman, the language of the administrators and descendants of the Norman conquerors, the chroniclers’ works echo pro-English themes, and retain vernacular elements which suggest the reflection of popular concerns. Paris for instance, recorded what Richard Vaughan has called the view of the ‘man in the street’.<sup>4</sup> A comprehensive look at the response of the chroniclers to the riots of the early 1230s is important in relation to understanding wider attitudes towards social and political disharmony in this period. There is a problem, however, in that we do not have the original text of the *Flores* of Roger of Wendover, a monk of St Albans who died c.1235. The *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris, his successor, preserves the original text of Wendover’s writings. The close relation between the texts (largely but not always copied verbatim by Paris into the *Chronica*) has meant that Wendover’s chronicle for the years immediately prior to his death has not been translated, as it is thought to be covered by Matthew Paris. For this reason an English translation of Wendover, sometimes with added necessary corrections, is provided. The reign of Henry III (1216-72) was riddled with strife. It was characterised by periods of peace interspersed by various rebellions

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<sup>1</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers 1066-1272*, Oxford 1998, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Clanchy, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, London 1958, p. 264.

and revolts. These were led by unruly nobles who at times saw England as a land which languished under the rule of local or foreign oppression and maladministration. Some of this oppression came from Rome. Henry had been the son of a deeply unpopular and tyrannical King John. Amidst the vacuum and chaos following King John's death in 1216, Henry had emerged as the papal favourite to the throne. Rome had written letters and pulled strings to help ensure that John's son would rule England.

Henry was not technically the overlord of the hierarchy which ruled over England. In 1213, King John had effectively given England to the pope in exchange for political support against powerful sections of John's unruly nobility. The agreement was perpetual and Henry had to pay an annual tribute to Rome. In addition, Italian officials began to visit England in increasing numbers, making themselves unpopular amongst English nobles whose traditional authority they began to supplant. English ecclesiastical officials were replaced, in various cases, with Italian appointees, who are generally referred to as 'Romans' in thirteenth-century texts. The image conjured up by English chroniclers, especially those from St Albans, a monastery near London, was that of a country dominated by corrupt foreigners, and not fully in the hands of its native rulers.

The previous chapter presented some of the reasons behind instability at the end of John's rule and the beginning of Henry's minority. English nobles were wary of losing their positions and even their lives. It was a time for fostering of outlaw-style archetypes. In the decades and centuries that followed, several of the agitating nobles from King John and Henry's period (such as Ranulf of Chester) entered popular legend as figures who defied a tyrannical administration.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter focuses more specifically on the writings of the chroniclers of St Albans abbey. These chronicles are important as they are the only thirteenth-century sources which provide an in-depth contemporary set of opinions regarding the anti-Roman robberies of the early 1230s. Roger of Wendover made detailed observations on the scope of the robberies in his *Flores Historiarum*, before his death in 1234. His successor Matthew Paris, who formulated his *Chronica Majora* in the years 1235-59, reflected changing sentiment regarding the image of the leader of the robberies, Robert of Thwing, as he made several alterations to Wendover's original text regarding them. Paris' writing reflects enduring memories of the robberies into the 1250s. Future agitators may have

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<sup>5</sup> Keen, pp. 194-7.

reflected back upon memories of the 1230s as something of a precedent for political protest.

## **Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris**

The St Albans chronicler Roger of Wendover was a prior of Belvoir, a Leicester cell of St Albans abbey.<sup>6</sup> Found to have spent money in a reckless fashion by the abbot of St Albans, he was deposed in 1219, and returned to live at the main monastery at St Albans.<sup>7</sup> He had established a tradition of political commentary on a scale hitherto unprecedented among English chronicles. He called his voluminous chronicle, which stretched from Genesis to 1235, the *Flores Historiarum*, or ‘Flowers of History’. His explanation for the title was that the work concentrated upon the marvellous and the intriguing.<sup>8</sup> Not at its outset a strict chronicle of recorded fact, it was rather a literary expression of strange and remarkable stories and interesting allegory. Although Richard Vaughan considered Wendover wrote the chronicle until his death in 1236, this has been challenged more recently by Richard Kay, who has argued that Wendover ceased writing in 1234 and that it was Matthew Paris who added the material for the year 1235 and thereafter.<sup>9</sup> Vaughan has however noted: ‘The style of “late” Wendover seems to bear the hallmarks of Paris’ own style, and as such it is thought that Paris himself may have penned Wendover’s work during the latter’s declining years’.<sup>10</sup>

As Wendover’s chronicling successor, Matthew Paris transcribed Wendover’s work into his own *Chronica Majora*, with some additions or alterations at the time of transcription, and then later on in the margins. He completed this work in the 1240s. He far exceeded Wendover in terms of his use of fiery expression. Paris’ work is laced with his own Anglo-centric opinions and perspectives. Paris has a love for the juicy or outrageous tale—particularly where it corresponds with his political views. He was a gossip-monger and employed repetitive formulas against those he did not like. For instance, in the case of both King John in 1215 after his forced acceptance of Magna

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<sup>6</sup> David Corner, ‘Wendover, Roger of’, *ODNB*, eds. B. Harrison, H.C.G. Matthew, Oxford 2004, online ed., Jan 2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 1: 11.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Kay, ‘Wendover’s Last Annal’, *The English Historical Review*, 84, 333 (Oct. 1969), pp. 779-85, p. 781.

<sup>10</sup> Vaughan, pp. 28-30.

Carta, and the pope in 1247 following the harsh treatment of a papal legate in England, Paris describes their personal mental anguish in the same terms. In both cases he claims that they cursed their mothers for bringing them into the world and relates that they ground their teeth in fury. He added what he could to sensationalise things, some of his own invention.

Matthew Paris was not just a historian, but a student of natural history. In 1252, the first elephant was exhibited in England, and was drawn by Paris into the pages at the beginning of his *Chronica*, among which are also contained explanations of his conventions, some contents pages, and maps of England. At the end of the *Chronica* there are pages of drawings of heraldic shields, as well as a lengthy section of *Additamenta*, which contains lengthy transcriptions of letters, many between the pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, and others. He was therefore privy to official information, and some of his transcriptions of documents are the only known source, such as the 1253 confirmation of Magna Carta.<sup>11</sup> The *Chronica* has an ‘encyclopaedic quality’ about it.<sup>12</sup>

It seems Paris originally intended the *Chronica* to end in 1250. At the end of that year he wrote a summation, stating that of all the wonders of history, more had happened in the last half century, 1200-1250, than in all the previous half centuries back to the time of Christ.<sup>13</sup> He later altered his previous intent, as he continued writing his *Chronica* until his death in 1259. Thereafter his work was continued at St Albans and elsewhere by other chroniclers.

On several occasions late in his career, Paris describes how he personally encountered Henry III, who seems to have treated Paris as if he were an official recorder of events. Once Paris wrote of the feast of Edward the Confessor, held at Westminster on 13 Oct 1247, in which Paris and Henry were in attendance. Paris writes that at the ceremony’s end, Henry was seated in his throne and recognised Paris and called for him to sit on the step before him. Henry asked if he had a firm memory of the day’s events. Paris replied in the affirmative and Henry ordered him to write down everything that had occurred: ‘that they should not be lost from future memory’.<sup>14</sup> At another time, in 1257, Henry stayed at St Albans for over a week, during which time Paris claims he was the king’s

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<sup>11</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: c.500-1300*, New York 1974, p. 361.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>13</sup> *Matthew Paris’s English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, ed. trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1854, vol. 2, p. 410.

<sup>14</sup> *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols, London 1872-1883, vol. 4, pp. 644-5.

constant companion, and says Henry dictated to him: ‘with care and affability’.<sup>15</sup> This may have been an uncomfortable situation considering that Paris had taken opportunities in his chronicle to severely reprimand Henry for perceived weaknesses.<sup>16</sup>

Paris’ views on Henry and England in the 1230s-1250s provide a social backdrop to political events of the time, which contain relevant issues pertaining to the development of an early outlaw tradition. This relates to the period and location (Yorkshire) in which myths about Robin Hood were born. Paris criticises Romans and lauds Robert of Thwing on behalf of the English. The ‘English side’ is the perspective from which tales initially relating to political situations, and later mythical situations, might have found early popularity. Politically, Paris viewed the king as naive and foolish, and considered he vigorously taxed his nobles only to squander it on frivolous gifts to foreigners, such as dignitaries from Rome, or his Poitevin relatives. Paris displays an overall cynicism towards other kingdoms and often states that diplomatic negotiations were geared to secure the extraction of money from England.

In contrast to his disappointment with Henry, Paris seems to have delighted in the tales of the political and military victories of Henry III’s cousin, the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II. Frederick was a stronger ruler than Henry, and had been involved in long wars with Rome, a city Paris despised. At the death of Frederick in 1250 Paris wrote his obituary in his *Chronica*, and blindsided his own king, in calling Frederick, not Henry, the ‘greatest of Earthly princes, the wonder of the world and the regulator of its proceedings’.<sup>17</sup> Paris identified with Frederick. He perhaps saw in him the clever and bold ruler he may have wished Henry III could have been: a man who openly opposed the Romans.

One of Paris’ inclinations is his anger about the pope’s power over England. He is ‘...bitterly hostile to papal provisions; he thinks it disgraceful that England should be a papal fief.’<sup>18</sup> Paris did not like taxation, which he often saw as causing hardship. For him, papal taxation was the worst kind, as not only did it have no benefit, but it enriched and emboldened a tyrannical power. It is this paradigm through which Paris reported most of his history. It was essentially an Anglo-centric vision of England.

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<sup>15</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 220.

<sup>16</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 566.

<sup>17</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2: 404.

<sup>18</sup> Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, p. 141.

Despite his strong opinions, Paris was not a radical. Politically he may have been something of a conservative. It has been rightly said: ‘...his anti-papalism was by no means ideological’.<sup>19</sup> Paris was not a reformist. He did not care for the new religious movements, such as the Franciscans, whose poverty-sworn monks first entered England in 1224, and whom he accused of lucrative preaching. Paris did not participate in scholastic argumentation, the great philosophical movement of the age. Nonetheless, his chronicle, kept until his death in 1259, suggests a clear evolution in attitudes from those more neutral attitudes of Wendover, in particular relating to the robberies that shook England during the years 1231-2.

## **Prelude to the robberies**

The previous chapter has suggested a context for the events preceding the corn robberies of 1231. Magna Carta (the ‘Great Charter’), a set of laws formulated and forced upon King John by aggrieved nobles in 1215, which aimed at limiting his power, was initially a failure as a movement for reform. The laws incepted endured only three months, and in that time the charter’s ideas were never fully implemented.<sup>20</sup> The time after Magna Carta was one of lost opportunity: years of uncertainty for the English nobles characterised by a political division with English and foreign factions. It was not until 1225 that most of the clauses finally became law, although there were criticisms for much of the remaining century over whether the laws were in fact being respected.<sup>21</sup>

The thirteenth-century St Albans chroniclers promulgated the view that if justice were to be truly done, the English would sometimes have to take decisive action. Their views may have been associated with the birth of the initial versions of tales about several popular rebel heroic figures, who all lived about the same time, during and just after the time of King John, celebrated for resisting him. The time of weakness is evidenced by the fact Matthew Paris would excuse obvious treason by saying that dissenters were acting in the interests of their king, and the ‘downtrodden English’ against those foreigners who sought merely their own monetary gain. Matthew Paris tried to justify anti-Roman activity in the light of this: ‘just as the barons should resist royal demands, so

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup> J. C. Holt, *Magna Carta*, Cambridge 1992, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

the bishops should resist those of the pope.<sup>22</sup> Paris added a passage to Wendover's *Flores* when it was transcribed into his *Chronica Majora*. Although Paris was but a boy in the time of King John, he inserts a passage lamenting slavery from Rome, into the supposed thoughts of dissenting nobles who realised that King John would not honour Magna Carta:

...as it is difficult for a furious man (King John) to restrain himself, these nobles discovered by many indications... that the affection of the king was estranged from them, and that his look was dejected, and they pondered the event in their minds, using these words: 'Woe to us, yea to all England, since it has not a true king, but is oppressed by a tyrant who endeavours to make his people miserable. He has already placed us in subjection to Rome and the Roman court, that we might obtain protection from it; it is to be feared that we shall find the assistance from that place injurious to our posterity. We never heard of any king who was unwilling to withdraw his neck from slavery; but this one willingly succumbs to it.'<sup>23</sup>

Paris emphasised the anti-Roman character of the noble resistance to King John. In comparison to their desire to defy King John, the English nobles were perhaps not as concerned by their submission to Rome in 1213, as they had not yet experienced the effects of the 'slavery' Paris retrospectively tries to make them rail against. However, by the 1220s, the papal administration had begun to interfere more greatly in English affairs than hitherto. This reached local levels as significant numbers of Roman appointees were sent to England. They were installed in an administrative capacity in various clerical institutions. In addition, papal tax collectors toured England, demanding money for the pope. Henry III usually had to allow this, or face the possibility of an interdict or excommunication. Over many years, huge amounts seem to have been exacted, and the barons complained bitterly. Yet, England's subjection to Rome did not mean that the English nobility, long accustomed to fighting for their rights, felt compelled to obey every direction from Rome. Ranulf, earl of Chester, militarily perhaps the strongest nobleman in the kingdom, and a veteran of wars in addition to being one of if not the

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Paris, ed. trans. Vaughan, p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 327.

main earl who inspired later stories about the Earls of Chester, seems to have acted as an authority unto himself regarding the collection of tithes. In unusually strong language, Wendover wrote of the earl's actions in 1229 regarding the charging of an unpopular tithe. Of this 'unjust' tithe, he reported: 'Ralph Earl of Chester was the only one who refused to reduce his territory to bondage, and did not permit the religious men and clerks to contribute these tithes from his fee, although England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, were all compelled to pay them.'<sup>24</sup> There are however, no myths of Ranulf reported.

It was not until the next year that another significant anti-Roman event would occur. Wendover reports on a letter of warning distributed by a secret society in 1230, which condemned the foreign clerics, who were perceived to have interfered in the lives of the English. This society is important. As later argued, in Paris' versions of stories told about it, it represents a foundation or at least contaminating influence around which early and later myths about Robin Hood could find some structure. The extent to which Paris' tales relate to later outlaw tales is not fully appreciated. According to Paris, the society complained of: 'Romans who have come here seeking to judge us, but who will not lift a finger in assistance of us', and called for punishment.<sup>25</sup> It takes the form of a fictional letter from an unidentified association (*universitas*) of aggrieved people to the bishops, stating that the farms of the Romans and those helping them would be burnt and goods seized by members of the society.

Although the text is present in Wendover's *Flores*, under the 1230 entry, there are no extant copies of that work in Wendover's own hand. This is unlike Paris' works which are largely extant in his own hand, and present in two Cambridge Corpus Christi College manuscripts (MSS 16 and 26). Paris' *Chronica* is the oldest surviving rendition of Wendover's text. It was certainly completed by 1251, but two fourteenth-century manuscripts seem to represent the *Flores* as it was at the time of Wendover's death, perhaps before Paris' interference.<sup>26</sup> These are Oxford Bodleian Library: Douce MS 207 (c. 1300), and London, British Library: Cotton MS. Otho B. v. (c. 1350).<sup>27</sup> The first of these dates to about sixty-five years after Wendover's death, and so it cannot necessarily

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2: 530.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 544.

<sup>26</sup> Kay, p. 779.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 780. The edition of Wendover's Chronicle is *Chronica Rogeri de Wendover... Flores Historiarum*, ed. trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1849.

be proven that the letters from the *universitas* were written by Wendover in the present form. This is significant because it is known that Matthew Paris seems to have had some influence upon the style of Wendover's late work and these letters do seem to bear the exaggerated tones, unilateral attitudes, and attempts at anti-Roman propaganda typical of Matthew Paris' writings, rather than the calmer, less impassioned tones of his predecessor. That Paris may, as Wendover's successor, have authored or transcribed a copy of the *Flores* further complicates the matter over authorship.<sup>28</sup> Both surviving *Flores* manuscripts of the fourteenth century are themselves thought to be based upon an earlier transcription not necessarily made by Wendover.<sup>29</sup>

It should be noted that in Paris' version of Wendover's chronicle there are only several minor changes to the actual text. He did however add large blocks of text, such as an occasional exaggerated tale, in selected locations. These instances are pointed out by Luard. Here we generally work with Paris' text, as we are investigating his perspectives on the robberies of 1231, but also with Wendover's *Flores*, edited by H. O. Coxe (1841-2), based on the later Wendover transcriptions. It should also be pointed out that the nineteenth-century translations of both Paris and Wendover are workman-like and tend to emphasise flow over exactitude, so several corrections have been made.

Paris sourced information from wherever he could find it. He had contacts among the nobility, including occasionally the king. He had access to, and transcribed many documents. When transcribing documents, he was at times guilty of 'tampering with their texts, even to the extent of deliberate falsification.'<sup>30</sup> We therefore cannot be sure that the following letters are genuine. However, they may well represent the point of view of aggrieved natives, in the face of Roman administrative oppression, and the following letter is found in Wendover's as well as Paris' chronicle:

Of the Insolence of the Roman Clergy:

About this time there arose in England a great disturbance of affairs, yea, we may truly call it an indiscreet act of presumption, on account of the insolence of the Roman clergy, which drove the nobles of the kingdom was well as the ignoble, to a rash mode of punishment, as is related in the following writing:—'To such a

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<sup>28</sup> Vaughan., p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Kay, p. 780.

<sup>30</sup> Vaughan., pp. 132-3.

bishop and such a chapter, the whole association (*universitas*) of those who would rather die than be put to shame by the Romans, greeting. How the Romans and their legates have hitherto behaved themselves towards yourselves and other ecclesiastics of England, we are sure is no secret to you, conferring on themselves the benefices of the kingdom on their followers, at their pleasure, to the intolerable prejudice and injury of yourselves and all others of the kingdom; and that they have fulminated sentences of excommunication against you and your fellow bishops and other ecclesiastics, to whom the collation of benefices properly belongs, to the intent that you shall confer no benefices on a native until five Romans, whose names are not yet known, or rather the son of Rulfred, and the sons of such and such persons, shall have been provided for in each of your churches throughout England, each of them with a revenue of a hundred pounds, besides many other burdens which they have imposed, both on the laity and nobles of the kingdom, in the matter of their advowsons and charities bequeathed by them and their ancestors for the maintenance of the poor, as well as on clerks and other religious persons, concerning their property and benefices. And not content with these things, they wish to take away from the clergy of the kingdom, to the very last, the benefices which they hold in order to bestow them on Romans, not according to what is fitting but at their own pleasure, and in this way they endeavour to fulfil that prophecy, ‘They have robbed the Egyptians to enrich the Hebrews, multiplying their people, not increasing their joy;’ and thus they heap sorrow upon sorrow on us and you, so that it seems to us to be better to die than to live to be thus oppressed. Wherefore, although it may be difficult for us ‘to kick against the pricks,’ since he who wipes his nose too hard draws blood, we, considering the severity of those who first came to Rome as strangers, but who now aim not only at judging but also condemning us, imposing unbearable burdens, against which they will not lift a finger, have, by common consent, determined, late as it is, to oppose them, rather than any longer to subject ourselves to their intolerable oppression or to endure a worse slavery. We therefore strictly forbid you, when we are endeavouring to rescue the church, as well as the king and kingdom from the heavy yoke of servitude, to interfere in the case of those who introduce themselves in matters concerning the Romans and their revenues; and rest assured that if you by any chance transgress this order,

which God forbid, all your property will be liable to be burnt, and the punishment which the Romans incur in their persons you will certainly incur in your possessions. Farewell.<sup>31</sup>

The letter begins with an important phrase which suggests that a popular wave of anti-Roman opinion existed, which nobles sought to respond to. The letter contains the message that they are seeking to save the ‘church, king, and kingdom from the heavy burden of servitude’. This seems to suggest it is a movement which sought to support a young king against greedy foreigners. The positive results of Magna Carta, its inception into law barely six years earlier, in 1225, had shown the nobles, or others, that it was perhaps necessary and correct, rather than treasonous to oppose a tyranny in a united manner.

Another shorter letter follows the first, addressed to tenants of the Romans:

On the prohibition against the paying of farms or revenues to the Romans:

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<sup>31</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 544-5, with corrections:

*De insolentia clericorum Romanorum.*

‘Suborta est hac tempestate in Anglia maxima rerum perturbatio, immo ut verum fateamur, indiscreta praesumptio, propter Romanorum insolentiam clericorum, quae tam nobiles regni quam ignobiles ad temerariam compulit ultionem, sicut in subscriptis expressum continetur: ‘Tali episcopo et tali capitulo universitas eorum, qui magis volunt mori quam a Romanis confundi, salutem. Qualiter circa vos et alias personas ecclesiasticas Angliae hactenus se habuerint Romani et eorum legati, vestram non dubitamus latere discretionem, beneficia regni suis, secundum quod eis placet, confederando, in vestrum et omnium aliorum regni intolerabile praejudicium et gravamen. In vos etiam et coepiscopos vestros aliasque personas ecclesiasticas, ad quos collatio beneficiorum pertinere dinoscitur, quod magis dignum est pro confusione notari, suspensionis sententias fulminando, ne alicui de regno beneficia conferatis, donec quinque Romanis nec dum proprio nomine nominatis, immo nato Rulfredi, et nato talis et talis, in singulis ecclesiis vestris per totam diocesim sit provisum, unicuique eorum in reddito centum librarum, alia etiam gravamina quamplurima tam laicis et magnatibus regni super gravamina quamplurima tam laicis et magnatibus regni super advocacionibus suis et eorum elemosinis, ab eis et antecessoribus suis datis in pauperum regni sustentationem, quam clericis et aliis viris religiosus regni super rebus et beneficiis, inferendo. Nec praemissis contenti, ad ultimum a clericis regni beneficia quae obtinent, ut ea Romanis conferant, non secundum quod decet, sed sicut eis placet, auferre volentes, in eis illam intendunt prophetiam adimplere, ‘Spoliaverunt Aegyptios, ut ditarent Hebraeos, multiplicando gentem suam, non magnificando laetitiam;’ sic dolorem dolori nobis et vobis omnibus accumulando, ut melius nobis videatur mori, quam vivere dic oppressi. Unde licet grave sit nobis contra stimulum calcitrare, tamen, quia qui nimis emungit elicit sanguinem, nos severitatem eorum animadvertentes, qui ab initio tanquam advenae Romam sunt ingressi, nunc autem nos non tantum judicare, sed etiam condemnare intendunt, alligantes onera importabilia quae nec in se nec in suos digito movere volunt, de communi consilio magis elegimus, licet tarde, resistere, quam eorum oppressionibus intolerabilibus amplius subjacere, seu majori subici servituti. Hinc est quod vobis mandamus, districte inhibentes, quatinus cum nos ecclesiam, regem similiter et regnum nitamus a tam gravi jugo servitutis eripere, circa eos, qui de Romanis vel eorum redditibus se intromittunt, nullas partes vestras interponere praesumatis; pro certo scituri, quod si hujus mandati, quod absit, extiteritis transgressores, quae vestra sunt incendio subjacebunt, et poenam, quam Romani incurrunt in personis, vos in possessionibus vestris indubitanter incurretis. Valete’. Roger of Wendover, *Rogeri de Wendover Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. O. Coxe, 4 vols, London 1841-2, 4: 228-30.

To all the religious men, and others who hold churches in farm from the Romans, the aforesaid association (*universitas*) [sends] greeting. Whereas, after the innumerable oppressions and injuries, which as you know the Romans have inflicted on the kingdom of England up to this time, to the injury of the king and the nobles of the kingdom, in the matter of the advowsons of their churches and their alms, and since they are endeavouring to deprive the clergy of this kingdom of their benefices, in order to confer them on the Romans, to the greater prejudice and shame of the kingdom and ourselves, we, by common consent, have determined, late as it is, to oppose them, rather than henceforth to submit to their intolerable oppression, and so to check them by withdrawing from them all their benefices throughout the whole kingdom, that they were intending to confer on others, so that they may cease from harassing the kingdom. Wherefore we strictly order you not to respond further about the the farms of the churches or the revenues of the lands which you hold from the Romans or owe to them. But have the said farms and revenues ready, and deliver them to our agent appointed by us by letter for the purpose on the Sunday on which is chanted the psalm, ‘Let Jerusalem rejoice’ [4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent], namely abbots and priors in their monasteries, and the other priests and clergy, and laity in the particular churches of the Romans; and rest assured that if ye do not obey this, your property will be liable to be burnt, and you will incur the danger to which the Romans are liable in person. Farewell.’ After this the aforesaid association (*universitas*) by means of their knights and agents promulgated these letters, sealed with a certain new seal, on which were engraved two swords, and between the swords was this inscription, ‘Behold two swords are here’ as was the custom with citations of cathedral churches of the kingdom, so that if they found people opposing them they would punish them according to their decrees.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 545, with corrections. ‘Prohibitio ne reddantur firma vel redditus clericis Romanis. Item religiosis et aliis, qui habent ecclesias Romanorum ad firmam, universitas praedicta salutem. Cum post innumerabiles confusiones et infinita gravamina, quae Romani, ut scitis, regno Angliae inflixerunt ad praesens, in praedictum regis et magnatum regni, circa advocaciones ecclesiarum suarum, et eorum elemosinas, qui clericos regni spoliare nituntur beneficiis suis, ut ea Romanis conferant, in majorem regni et nostri confusionem, de communi consilio magis elegimus, licet tarde, resistere, quam eorum oppressionibus intolerabilibus de caetero subjacere, et eos per subtractionem beneficiorum suorum per totum regnum, quod aliis intendebant inferre, sic arctare, ut a regni molestatione desistant. Hinc est quod vobis mandamus, districte injungentes, quatinus de firmis ecclesiarum, sive de redditibus camerarum,

Whether these letters have been invented by Matthew Paris is impossible to say. He might have wished to send a strong message to readers of his chronicle that the English could act if necessary. The second letter contains an actual threat which suggests the ‘association’ (*universitas*) had determined on effectively altering the status quo such that Roman authority over English revenues would be significantly impacted. The phrase ‘By common consent’ (rendered as common consent of the nobles, in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century translation of Wendover) implies an open revolt against Roman authority. Usage of the word *universitas* by Wendover has connotations of officialdom, as if it were a sworn association, in the manner of a medieval university of masters and students. The officialdom behind the word *universitas* is made all the more apparent by reference to use of an official seal.

That the chronicler suggests the society is seeking to do good for the poor in its desire to restore ancient practice seems more a secondary consideration relative to addressing the general interference of Romans seeking to place five of their own into English clerical positions. It is good propaganda however, to assist their action in winning popular support and cooperation. The primary consideration is to withdraw benefices (advowsons) from the Romans entirely, and to drive the Romans from the kingdom. J. Newman’s study suggests that among Yorkshire gentry, there had been an increasing trend during the early thirteenth century for barons to recover lands that had been bestowed upon monasteries and nunneries by their ancestors.<sup>33</sup> This reflects hostility between the English nobles and Roman officials, paralleled in the St Albans chronicles. An explanation for this is that where once benefices were appointed based upon the whims of local gentry, now Rome sought to dictate appointments and control the finances of English lands. The position of hereditary parsonage was being nullified. What might have been seen as a position for a younger son to receive an income was instead

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quas de Romanis habetis vel debetis eis, de caetero non respondeatis. Sed dictas firmas et redditus habeatis paratos in crastino Dominicae qua cantatur ‘Laetare Jerusalem’ procuratori nostro literatorie a nobis ad hoc dato, abbates scilicet et priores in eorum monasteriis, alii vero presbyteri et clerici vel laici ad proprias ecclesias Romanorum, tradituri; pro certo scientes, quod si hoc non feceritis, quae vestra sunt incendio subiacebunt, et nihilominus periculum, quod Romanis imminet in personis, vobis imminebit. Valete.’ His ita gestis, praedicta universitas misit per milites et ministros literas has, novo quodam sigillo signatas, in quo sculpti erant duo gladii, et inter gladios scriptum erat, ‘Ecce gladii duo hic,’ in modum citationum ad ecclesias regni cathedrales, ut, si suos invenirent contradictores, juxta quod provisum fuerat punirent eos’. Wendover, *Flores*, 4: 230-1.

<sup>33</sup>J. E. Newman. ‘Greater and Lesser Landowners and Parochial Patronage: Yorkshire in the thirteenth century’, *The English Historical Review*, 92, 363 (Apr. 1977), 280-308, p. 285.

appropriated by a Roman stranger.<sup>34</sup> Newman's study records various legal recoveries made. The largest of these was made by the Thwings, who sued the Guisborough priory, in 1230 and recovered the advowson of Kirkleatham, to a value of eighty pounds.<sup>35</sup>

### **‘With his purse, as it is said, emptied.’**

The very first event recorded of which the association (*universitas*) was suspected regards a very specific event compared to what would follow. It is a relatively minor detail for a chronicler to be concerned with, but it occurred not far from St Albans itself, so perhaps this is why it was mentioned by Wendover.

On 17 December 1231, at the command of the pope, a consistory court was convened at St Albans, which consisted of priors, abbots, archdeacons and ‘almost all the nobles of the kingdom.’<sup>36</sup> The aim was to find if there was good reason to allow a proposed divorce between the Countess of Essex and her husband. The official colloquium may have facilitated a more secret conference:

The day after the council was dissolved, when each person was returning to his home, a Roman clerk called Cincius, who was a canon at St Paul's Church, London, was captured through the aforesaid association (*universitas*), as it is believed, not far from the town of St Albans and carried away by armed men with heads covered. But master John the Florentine, the archdeacon of Norwich, who was present at the council, escaped capture, and, fleeing to London, hid there for several days. After the space of five weeks, Cincius was brought back to London, safe and unhurt, with his purse, as it is said, emptied.<sup>37</sup>

This statement, with the words *ut dicitur*, ‘as it is said’ in the final lines, is a claim on the part of Wendover that he is not making up this story. It seems to imply there was some

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>36</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 545.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, with corrections., ‘In crastino autem, consistorio soluto, cum singuli redirent ad propria, clericus quidam Romanus, nomine Cincius, qui ecclesiae Sancti Pauli Londoniarum erat canonicus, per praedictam universitatem, ut creditur, non longe a villa Sancti Albani captus est et abductus a viris armatis et capitibus velatis. Sed magister Johannes Florintinus, Norewicensis archidiaconus, qui huic consistorio affuit, ab hac captione evasit, et ad urbem Londoniarum fugiens delituit ibidem multis diebus. Cincius vero post quinque septimanas, crumenis, ut dicitur, evacuatis, ad urbem Londoniarum sanus et incolumnis est reductus’.

Wendover, *Flores*, 4: 231.

local gossip doing the rounds upon the events surrounding the mysterious hooded men. The final detail regarding Cincius' empty purse adds a somewhat exciting dimension to the tale which raises questions about the motives of the kidnappers. Wendover may have enhanced a story he had heard.

## **On the violence at Wingham**

Wingham is a small town in Kent, in south eastern England. To this day it contains the ruins of its medieval church of St Mary's, built in the early thirteenth century. A rather violent event occurred here during the week of Christmas of 1231-2 and on a larger scale than the kidnapping of Cincius a week earlier. It involved seizing a Roman priest's produce, and distributing it cheaply to the commons. The perpetrators of the occurrence are not mentioned save that (as in the episode about Cincius) they are men *capitibus velatis*, with 'heads covered'. The writing claims that perpetrators were excommunicated a day after the feast of Scolastica—the tenth of February.

Of the forcible seizure of the corn of the Roman clerics at Wingham and at other places.

A.D. 1232. At Christmas the King of the English Henry was at Winchester, where Peter, the bishop of that city, provided all necessities for him, and made presents of festive robes to the king as well as his court. In those days of Christmas the well-stored barns at Wingham, belonging to a certain Roman, were plundered by the aforesaid association (*universitas*), as it is thought, of a few armed servants with their heads covered. The proctor and guardian of that church, when he heard of this deed of violence, went to the sheriff of the county and informed him of this violation of the king's peace and the injury inflicted on his lord. The sheriff then sent his agents with some local knights to the place, and ordered them to discover what the matter was; on arriving at the barns the knights there saw these armed men, who were entirely unknown to them, and who had by this time nearly emptied the granaries, and sold the corn on good terms for the benefit of the whole district, and had also charitably given a portion of it to the poor who asked for it. The knights, on coming up to them, asked them whence they came, and how they dared to disturb the king's peace and commit such depredations, on

which they called the knights aside and at once showed them warrants from the king (forged and sophisticated) forbidding any one to obstruct them. When the knights heard these things, they as well as others who had come there, went away quietly. Within fifteen days these armed men having sold all the corn, went away with their pockets well filled. When this violence came to the attention of Roger bishop of London, having summoned ten bishops the day after the feast of St Scholastica in St Paul's church in London, he excommunicated all the authors of this deed of violence. He included in this sentence all those who had laid violent hands on Cincius the canon of the church at London, and also the whole of the above-mentioned association, and all those who had written and sealed the letters mentioned above.<sup>38</sup>

This is the very first statement Wendover made under the entry for the year 1232. The phrase *ut creditur* 'as it is thought', mentioned near the start implies a level of popular discussion, and is consistent with the previous *ut dicitur*, 'as it is said', regarding the events of the kidnap and robbery of Cincius by the same men with 'covered heads'. It is another claim from Wendover that he is not the initiator of the story and indicates the stories may have gone together. They may have been told to Wendover by the same people. The story is reported in a calm and relatively neutral tone, typical of Wendover's work. Had Paris written it, it may have concluded with a propagandistic invective, which would have included mention of the greed and avarice of the Romans. This may suggest

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<sup>38</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 546, with corrections. 'De distractimie bladi de Wihingeham molenta. Anno Domini MCCXXXII, Rex Anglorum H[enricus] fuit ad Natale apud Wintoniam; cui Petrus eiusdem urbis antistes necessaria omnia procuravit, et festiva tam regi quam suis exhibuit indumenta cum donativis. In illis autem diebus natalitiis distracta sunt horrea de Winghame cuiusdam Romani ditissima, per praedictam universitatem, ut creditur, a paucis armatis servientibus et capitibus velatis. Procurator vero illius ecclesiae et custos, cum talem violentiam inspexisset, venit ad vicecomitem regionis, et de violata pace regis et injuria domino suo illata ei patenter ostendit. At vicecomes mittens ad locum ministros suos cum militibus quibusdam vicinis, iussit inquiri quidnam hoc esset. Venientes quoque ad horrea milites memorati invenerunt homines illos armatos et sibi penitus ignotos, qui iam ex maxima parte horrea evacuerant, et bladum bonis conditionibus et ad commodum totius provinciae vendiderant, sed et pauperibus [partem] caritative petentibus ex animo conferebant. Milites vero qui advenerant, cum interrogassent eos unde essent, qui pacem regis offendere et talia facere praesumebant, illi continuo milites seorsum vocantes, ostendebant literas regis patentes, (adulterinas et sophisticas), prohibentes ne quis eos paresumeret impedire. At milites haec audientes, tam ipsi quam alii, qui advenerant, pacifice recesserunt. Sicque infra dies quindecim distractis omnibus, armati illi de loco recesserunt, loculis plene refertis. Tandem cum haec violentia ad notitiam Rogeri Londoniensis episcopi pervenisset, convocatis decem episcopis in crastino beatae Scolasticae [virginis] Londoniensis in ecclesia beati Pauli, omnes huius violentiae auctores anathematis sententia percussit; involventes etiam illos, qui in Cincium, Londoniensis ecclesiae canonicum, manus injecerant violentas, cum universitate praedicta et illis omnibus qui fecerunt sigillum et literas suprascriptas'. Wendover, *Flores*, 4: 232-3.

that the story, if popular, was doing the rounds before Wendover ceased writing in about c.1234/35.

The content of the story itself seems too personally oriented to be credible as fact. It includes intimate details of a close encounter between the priestly victim, the sheriff's knights and the men with covered heads. Despite this neither the names of the sheriff nor the perpetrators or Roman priest are known. Names may not have been important if the story came from a popular source. It is more important that the story is entertaining and has a satisfying conclusion. The sheriff, as a representative of authority, is prevented from carrying out his work by his recognition of a power higher than himself—letters bearing the king's seal. This presents a humorous contrast to any sheriff's typical power-play, and an irony regarding his accusation that the rioters were 'disturbing the king's peace.' The stories make no mention of the letter from the *universitas*, nor any legal dispute revealed by history. The intent seems to be to suggest that a mysterious, violent power of higher rank or cunning than the local sheriffs, made all the more mysterious by the coverings which mask the identity of the rioters, is actively seeking to ease the sufferings of the poor. The idea is too radical and different to what has come before to be an outright invention of the chronicler.

The letters from the *universitas* had stated that the aim of the conspiracy was to punish the Romans, yet the story of Wingham puts punishment aside. There is no destruction of property or burning. Rather the story is more focused on what would benefit the people—assisting them financially—something which the earlier letters did not mention as a primary consideration.

## **The movement goes nationwide**

Initially, no names are mentioned by Roger of Wendover as to who the perpetrators with heads covered might have been. It is significant however that the rebels claim they are defending king and magnates against the Romans. Following the events at Wingham, the *universitas* seems to take on the form of a nationwide movement, which replicates the events at Wingham. Under the year 1231 Wendover mentions the name '*William Wither*', who was foremost amongst the perpetrators. It is not a real name, but an Old English pseudonym which means something like: 'William the Angry'. It has also been

translated as ‘William the Avenger’.<sup>39</sup> Vincent suggested ‘William the Ferocious’.<sup>40</sup> Clanchy suggested ‘William the Opponent’.<sup>41</sup>

The use of a vernacular Old English name in a Latin text suggests Wendover wanted to record the popular element of a catchy name. It is interesting that the name *William Wither* only crops up in the context of a nationwide movement, and not earlier. Wendover may have written down his information soon after he heard it. Perhaps only a nationwide popularity had facilitated the fame of the name of *William Wither*. This is part of Wendover’s statement of the events subsequent to the disturbance at Wingham:

In the same year the corn of the Romans throughout almost all England was carried off and sold by certain armed men, still unknown, on good terms and for the benefit of many; this audacious business they commenced at Easter, and carried it through without any opposition. They were liberal in bestowing alms on the needy who came to them, and sometimes they threw money amongst the poor. The Roman clergy lay concealed in abbeys, not daring to murmur at the injuries inflicted on them, for they preferred losing all their property to being condemned to death. The agents in this audacious proceeding were about eighty in number, and sometimes fewer; and their chief was one William surnamed Wither, whose instructions they obeyed in everything...<sup>42</sup>

This is the second time that the poor are reputed to have been helped. At Wingham, only corn had been provided to the poor. Now, coins are mentioned as having been thrown to them. This detail, in addition to the scale of the robberies, shows that the story was developing and at this stage perhaps had an aggrandising momentum of its own. Another interesting detail is that *Wither* had eighty followers at his command, and that they were obedient. Knowledge of this would seem to require further knowledge of exactly what

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<sup>39</sup> J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, p. 58.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Vincent, *Peter de Roches: An Alien in English Politics, 1205-1238*, Cambridge 2002, p. 304.

<sup>41</sup> Clanchy, p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 551, with corrections. ‘De distractione frugum clericorum Romanorum. Eodem anno distracta sunt horrea Romanorum per totam fere Angliam a viris quibusdam armatis et adhuc ignotis, bonis conditionibus et ad commodum multorum; et opus, licet temerarium, in solempnitate Paschali inchoantes, sine contradictione et libere, quod inceperant, compleverunt. Largas elemosinas advenientibus distribuebant egenis, et quandoque nummos inter pauperes seminantes, eos colligere hortabantur. Delituerunt clerici Romani in abbatibus, de injuriis sibi illatis murmurare non audentes, quia elegerunt potius res suas amittere, quam puniri sententia capitali. Erant autem hujus temeritatis auctores viri quasi quater viginti et quandoque minus, qui magistrum habentes Willelmum quendam cognomento Wither, ejus per omnia obtemperabant praeceptis...’, Wendover, *Flores*, 4: 240-1.

orders they followed. This suggests popular stories mentioning his orders may have been in circulation, which Wendover did not reproduce. The powerlessness of the usually oppressive authorities to prevent the robberies as they spread around England may have had a considerable impact upon the popular imagination. A new and formidable type of avenging outlaw had appeared. Wendover continues, writing that when the pope found out about the robberies, he was incensed and reproached Henry in a letter, for allowing such rampant crimes in his kingdom, and claiming that Henry had violated an oath to maintain peace towards the clergy.<sup>43</sup>

The pope's activity in this, if true, was provoked by a belief among victimised ecclesiastics that the robberies had the king's blessing, thanks to the alleged use of the king's seal to abet the crimes, and the apparent lack of response from shrieval authority whilst the robberies were taking place. A breakdown in communications between Henry and the pope had occurred. One element of the riots which did not make the chronicles, and which the pope had complained of, was that papal messengers had been attacked, and their letters destroyed.<sup>44</sup> Wendover continues relating the letter, ordering the king to make a diligent search for the perpetrators. In separate letters, sent to Peter, bishop of Winchester, as well as the abbot of St Edmunds, they were charged to search the south. He entrusted the hunt for the perpetrators in the north of England, to the archbishop of York, the bishop of Durham, and John, a canon of York, who was Roman by birth.<sup>45</sup>

Peter, Bishop of Winchester, was none other than Peter des Roches, who had been close to King John. He was in his late sixties in 1231, and had just returned from a four year absence, while on crusade. He had been a power-player in the old days, and was briefly Justiciar of England in 1217. His power and influence had waned at the hands of an Anglo-centric faction of English nobles, led by Hubert de Burgh, who whipped up xenophobic sentiment in the early 1220s.<sup>46</sup> They had accused Peter of conspiring with aliens.<sup>47</sup> The ploy was successful, and Peter was sidelined from higher office.

The responsibility to find the perpetrators was a boon for des Roches. He had been given sweeping powers by England's overlord to enact a detailed investigation which

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<sup>43</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 551.

<sup>44</sup> Vincent, *Peter des Roches*, p. 304.

<sup>45</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 551.

<sup>46</sup> Vincent, *Peter des Roches*, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the earliest times to the year 2000*; B. Harrison, H. C. G. Matthew (eds), Oxford, 2004, online ed., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22014>, accessed 8/2/13.

would result in punishment. He would ultimately use the results of the investigation, and a new-found affinity with Henry III, to redress old issues.

## **The official response to the robberies**

The robberies had political implications for Henry's reputation as a ruler who was supposed to be in control of his kingdom. He had ordered a stop to the disturbances in the New Year, with penalties for those caught purchasing the grain that had been stolen.<sup>48</sup> Excommunication of the robbers occurred on 10 February, but they continued their actions until July.<sup>49</sup> Henry had been forced to apologise to the Count of Savoy, uncle of Queen Eleanor and one of England's wealthiest nobles, for the mistreatment of his son William, whose rents and grain were seized by the robbers.<sup>50</sup> During the two royal inquiries Henry would convene, it transpired that '*William Wither*' was a pseudonym for a Yorkshire knight, Robert of Thwing.<sup>51</sup> Under the name of *Wither*, his sympathisers 'ranged the country from Yorkshire to Hampshire'.<sup>52</sup>

Little survives regarding the proceedings, outside of what is told by Wendover, but we know that Thwing was the 'most prominent' among the robbers.<sup>53</sup> Effectively, he was their 'chief leader'.<sup>54</sup> Wendover describes proceedings before the king:

Of the inquisition made in the matter of the aforesaid robbery:

An inquisition was therefore instituted concerning this robbery by the king; the bishops and the above-mentioned agents, and by means of examinations upon oath and the production of witnesses, many offenders were discovered, some of them principals, and others as abettors; and some of these were the king's bishops and clerks, some of the archdeacons and deans, and numbers of knights and laymen. Some of the sheriffs also and their provosts and agents were, by the king's orders, taken and imprisoned for this offence, and others in their alarm consulted their safety by flight and could not be found. Hubert de Burgh, the

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<sup>48</sup> Vincent, p. 303.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Maurice Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century 1216-1307*, Oxford 1962, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Vincent, p. 305.

<sup>54</sup> D. A. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, Cambridge 1996, p. 55.

king's Justiciar, is said to have been the chief transgressor in the matter, because he had given those robbers warrants from the king and himself, to prevent anyone from obstructing them in the said robbery...<sup>55</sup>

Hubert de Burgh, who held the high office of Justiciar, and was responsible for the administration of the kingdom, was implicated 2-29 July 1232.<sup>56</sup> In the previous chapter, it was shown that Hubert may have encouraged or capitalised upon anti-foreign sentiment to strengthen his declining political influence, with some success against his adversary, Peter des Roches. Unfortunately for Hubert, the cash-strapped Henry was, by then increasingly partial to Peter's promises to make him rich, and as it was, the king spent the Christmas of 1231 as des Roches' guest in Winchester. This was just as the robberies were beginning.<sup>57</sup> As a sign of des Roches' return to power, his kinsman, Peter de Rivallis, was given rapid advancement to royal offices and awarded generous custodies by the time investigations into the robberies may have been almost completed, in the summer of 1232.<sup>58</sup>

As it was, Hubert was found to have been 'chief transgressor' in the affair, as he had assisted the endeavour by providing documents bearing the king's seal to the other transgressors, apparently to help them evade the law whilst perpetrating their crimes. This may well have precipitated a crisis of confidence within the mind of Henry. It was credible ammunition for des Roches to demonstrate to Henry just how corrupt Hubert had been.

Despite the fact that Hubert had been guaranteed the role of Justiciar, and was provided charters to that effect, the influence of Rome and of Peter des Roches proved too great a weight upon the mind of the king.<sup>59</sup> On or after 29 July 1232, Hubert de Burgh was dismissed from court, and by September at latest, was no longer considered

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<sup>55</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 551-2, with corrections. 'De inquisitione facta super distractione praedicta. Facta igitur inquisitione de violentia memorata tam a rege quam ab episcopis et executoribus praedictis, et sacramento mediante cum examinationibus et testibus productis, inventi sunt multi transgressores, quidem de facto, quidam de consensu, quorum nonnulli episcopi erant et clerici regis, cum quibusdam archidiaconis ac decanis, militibus etiam, et laicis multis. Quidam vero vicecomites, et eorum praepositi et ministri pro eodem excessu, rege jubente, capti sunt et incarcerati; et alii prae timore sibi per fugam consulentes a quaerentibus non sunt inventi. Principalis autem domini regis justiciarius Hubertus de Burgo ex hoc arguitur fuisse transgressor, quod praedonibus illis tam literas regis patentes quam proprias exhibuerat, ne quis eos de praefacta violentia praepediret...' Wendover, *Flores*, 4: 242-3.

<sup>56</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

the Justiciar, having been replaced by Stephen de Seagrave.<sup>60</sup> Rather than wait for arrest, Hubert fled the king's presence. He hid in a bishop's house, which was blockaded. Wendover's work contains a statement which reads very much as if it could have been made by Matthew Paris:

The aforesaid sheriffs then went according to their orders, and commenced blockading it [the chapel] as well as the bishop's house which was near, and dug a deep wide trench around the chapel and the house, determining to keep watch there for forty days. Hubert however bore all this with equanimity, having a clear conscience, as he said, and trusting his cause to God, continually asking of the divine mercy to protect him from all danger, as he himself had always regarded the king's honour and safety above all things. The king however paid little regard to the deserts of the man who had served him with such zeal, that he made it his only business to please him, and gave a general prohibition to all not to speak to him on behalf of Hubert, or to make any mention of him in his presence.<sup>61</sup>

Eventually Hubert decided to leave the church and trust in the king's mercy rather than die of hunger.<sup>62</sup> The king had him fettered at the Tower of London. Paris was seemingly not satisfied with any vague notion of a simple arrest and he heard or concocted a story which he related. He portrays Hubert as a hero, perhaps for his role as the organiser of Thwing's robberies.

A certain smith, who was summoned and ordered to put fetters on him, asked on whose legs he was to fasten them, on which one of them said, 'On those of Hubert de Burgh, a convicted rebel and fugitive.' The smith however said with a sigh, 'Do with me as you please; may God be merciful to my soul, for the Lord liveth, but I will die rather than put fetters on him. Is he not that most faithful and noble-minded Hubert, who so often saved England from the ravages of foreigners, and restored England to itself...?' Hubert on hearing these words, thought of the words of the gospel where it said, 'I confess to thee, Father of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden my cause from skilful and wise men, and

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<sup>60</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 558-9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 559.

hast revealed it to the poor and humble...’ But Godfrey de Craucumbe [a sheriff] and his followers paying little heed to these remarks bound Hubert and took him away.<sup>63</sup>

This sounds like a story Paris would have invented, demonising the sheriff, while presenting de Burgh as a hero. In addition to Hubert de Burgh, another royal official, Master Robert of Shardlow, who was a former Sussex sheriff and a justice of the bench, was implicated, and was given safe passage along with Robert of Thwing on 26 July, to defend himself before the king.<sup>64</sup> So were Master Roger de Cantiloupe and two royal clerks.<sup>65</sup> Shardlow was a follower of de Burgh.<sup>66</sup> His connection with the case, along with that of the royal clerks, would have helped to point the finger at de Burgh as ringleader. Another notable was Ranulf de Breton, who was banished from the realm by 15<sup>th</sup> August 1232. He had taken advantage of the violence to despoil the abbey of Missenden in Buckinghamshire and that abbey was compensated from Ranulf’s confiscated property.<sup>67</sup> These figures seem to have lurked more in the background, for the public leader of the rioters was Yorkshire knight Robert of Thwing.

Amongst the rest there came to the king, Robert de Tuinge, an energetic knight, who had assumed the name of William Wither, and with others abetting him had sold the crops of the Romans and had engaged five armed attendants to assist him in his violence. This man openly declared that he had transgressed the law in hatred of the Romans, and for a just retaliation; for these said Romans, by a decree of the Roman pontiff, were fraudulently endeavouring to deprive him of the only church which he held: he also added, that he would rather be unjustly excommunicated for a time than be robbed of his benefice without a trial. The king and the aforesaid agents then advised the knight, as he had incurred the sentence pronounced, to hasten Rome, and to urge his claim before his holiness the pope, and to prove to him that he held the church alike legally and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 558.

<sup>64</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 55.

<sup>65</sup> Vincent, p. 306.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

canonically; the king also gave him letters testimonial to the pope, and begged that the pontiff in his kindness grant the knight's request.<sup>68</sup>

The greatest 'compliment' Wendover had paid to Robert of Thwing was to call him a *miles strenuus*. His overall attitude however, with respect to his use of 'violence' in describing Thwing's actions, is negative. Prior to his death in 1236, Wendover provided two versions of the events of Thwing's activities. There was an earlier one, which may be of popular origin, in which he states that Thwing, as William Wither, commanded eighty men, while here was a more official one, asserting that Thwing had been found to have but five men under his command. It shows that there were different ideas floating around. The image of Thwing's eighty men riding around England may have been blown out of proportion of reality, and perhaps written down before news of events surrounding the royal inquiry came to Wendover's notice. This scenario allowed for the two different ideas to appear in his chronicle. In effect we have an indirect record of legendary status already accruing to Thwing's deeds. Wendover seemingly committed ideas to the *Flores* soon after learning them, and before they could be corrected with newer information.

Rather than being 'punished severely', Thwing was told to petition the pope for the release of his lands. Perhaps this was because: 'beyond emptying barns and distributing grain they did little damage, but their agitation as they moved about, armed and with heads covered, caused some alarm and was doubtless exaggerated by their victims'.<sup>69</sup> Another reason for the lenience is that Peter des Roches may not have wanted to antagonise a popular movement as this might in time jeopardise his own position. Des Roches' loyalty after all, was not to Rome—who demanded the transgressors be punished severely. He had proven that during the crusade in which he had been more loyal to the emperor. His loyalties of the past were primarily directed to those in a

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<sup>68</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 552-3, with corrections. The translation calls Thwing 'a bold man', rather than 'an energetic knight'. 'Venit praeterea ad regem inter caeteros Robertus de Tuinge, miles strenuus, qui aliis consentientibus fruges Romanorum vendiderat et Willelmum Wither se fecerat appellari, quinque servientes armatos et hujus violentiae auctores circumduxerat, protestans manifeste, quod in odium Romanorum et causa justae ultionis transgressus fuerat, qui per sententiam Romani pontificis et fraude manifesta nitebantur eum ab unica, quam habuit, ecclesia spoliare; addidit etiam, quod maluit ad tempus injuste excommunicari, quam a suo beneficio sine iudicio spoliare. Tunc rex et exsecutores praefati militi dederunt consilium, ut, qui in canonem latae sententiae inciderat, Romam absolvendis properet, et jus suum coram domino papa protestaretur et quod ecclesiam juste pariter et canonice possidebat; dedit etiam ei rex literas ad papam testimoniales de jure suo, deprecans obnixè, ut militem illius intuitu exaudiret', Wendover, *Flores*, 4: 242-3.

<sup>69</sup> Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century 1216-1307*, Oxford 1962, p. 46.

position to raise his own standard of office—and the man who could and would have most easily prevented this, Hubert de Burgh, was firmly in des Roches' line of sight. It seemed that Hubert was to bear almost all of the king's anger.

Whatever Hubert de Burgh had been plotting had severely backfired upon him. Hubert hid in various churches for sanctuary. Paris wrote that the king ordered citizens to remove Hubert from the church of Merton. The people were concerned by such an order and appealed to Peter des Roches for advice. Paris rarely criticises des Roches but states that the people were astounded to hear the bishop reaffirm the king's order.<sup>70</sup>

Paris considered that des Roches was underhandedly acting through his own motives. To exemplify the oppression of Hubert, Paris then added an apocryphal tale in which Ranulf, Earl of Chester, who had previously opposed a tithe to Rome, had a discussion with the young king, telling him what others shall say of him: 'What sort of a child is this English prince, who can thus oppress his subjects and those who have nursed him under their wing?'<sup>71</sup> This statement suggests to the reader that an honest Hubert de Burgh unwittingly brought up something of a spoiled king, who would one day turn against him, rather than rewarding him for helping to administer the country during his minority. Hubert would spend the next several years being persecuted by the king, desperately seeking sanctuary at various churches in his attempt to avoid the king's anger.

Des Roches' power-play began to rebound. It began with a purge of de Burgh's followers from court—to be replaced by men who had last held their new offices prior to des Roches' demotion in 1223.<sup>72</sup> By 1233 the king had overturned perpetual charters which granted lands and offices to Hubert and his followers. Des Roches urged Henry to emulate the example of Emperor Frederick II, by making war on rebellious nobles—in order to return to the style of strong monarchy with limited interference from nobles, which had been practiced by John. One of the victims of des Roches' enmity—Gilbert Bassett—was a vassal of Earl Richard Marshall of Pembroke. Fearing treachery, Marshall chose war over arrest and there was a brief war.<sup>73</sup> This resulted in Richard Marshall's death, causing the king to regret his persecutions, which had been based upon Peter's advice.

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<sup>70</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 556.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Vincent, 'Roches, Peter des', *ODNB*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The St Albans chroniclers affirm that Richard Marshall was a loyal and true follower of the king, a victim of intrigue.<sup>74</sup> Following this, a remorseful Henry began a rare period of resolve. Des Roches and other ‘foreigners’ were stripped of their powers and Peter was specifically ordered to no longer interfere in political affairs, in April 1234.<sup>75</sup> This was looked on favourably by Wendover and Paris as a temporary victory, and a sign that united opposition by English nobles; even in the face of royal authority, was justified for the good of the kingdom. The overriding position of Matthew Paris regarding the situation was that although Henry always exhibited naivety, and was liable to be influenced by foreigners, he was also a good man at heart and would eventually come around to seeing things from the perspective of the English nobles.

The final legacy of des Roches’ brief return to grace was not an enriched Henry as he promised, but an even poorer one. It plunged England into unnecessary civil war and—in conjunction with the financial incompetence of des Roches’ kinsman, Peter de Rivallis—had drained the treasury of its wealth.<sup>76</sup> Retirement did not sit well with des Roches, and he sought a return to the world stage, joining his old ally Frederick II and Pope Gregory IX in a war against the Roman commune. Relations were soured, however, as Henry sent letters to Frederick, warning him about des Roches.<sup>77</sup> Des Roches, who arrived back in England in 1236, in poor health, died in 1238.

Wendover and Paris present a collection of stories originating from northern England, York, in 1234. We hear of a greedy archbishop who kept corn from the starving, preferring to leave it rotting, perhaps in the hope of selling for a profit.<sup>78</sup> They lament the deaths caused by this pestilential starvation. They say that a famine had raged for three years, and a dreadful mortality began, with poor dying from hunger, and with no Good Samaritan to assist. We also hear of a dying priest of York who left a great quantity of corn to the poor as a legacy—and of those who met a man waiting outside that very priest’s house, who told all concerned that he was the devil, and had come to collect the soul of the priest. The dying priest, having been told the details of the encounter,

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<sup>74</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 576.

<sup>75</sup> Vincent, ‘Roches, Peter des’, *ODNB*.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>78</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 598.

apparently made a bedside confession that twenty years earlier he had indeed sold his soul for promise of temporal wealth.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps it is no coincidence that these stories, written down by Wendover or Paris, emerge from Yorkshire, the homeland of Robert of Thwing, where, as mentioned earlier, there seems to have also been considerable earlier hostility amongst the nobles towards greedy abbeyes, as revealed by court documents.

Paris reveals his own opinions regarding the justified theft of corn in another apocryphal tale—in which God himself appears to sanction the giving of corn to the malnourished. The tale tells how some peasants steal corn to sustain their ‘unhappy life’. As sentence is about to be passed upon them by a priest, there arise thunder and lightning and a ‘blast from hell’ which ruins all the corn, ‘destroyed as if trodden down by carts and horses’.<sup>80</sup> This propaganda, which may have been a tale circulating in the public sphere before Paris added it to Wendover’s work, demonstrates the chronicler’s conviction that if the poor steal to survive it is entirely justified, by God himself. Thus Thwing’s action in charitably giving stolen grain to the poor might have been seen as being divinely inspired.

### **A letter to the Pope, from supporters of Robert of Thwing**

There is little information available on Thwing’s career following the robberies. He seems to have gone to Rome to be absolved. He then vanishes from history until he reappears again in 1239. In that year, he went on an assigned mission to Pope Gregory IX to deliver a letter on behalf of the ‘nobles of England’, requesting that English retain the rights to advowsons, and in particular that he should have jurisdiction over his advowson of Kirkleatham. It implies Thwing was still in a position of some leadership, and that he had some diplomatic credential. Paris does not however, refer to the English nobles responsible for the letter as a ‘*universitas*’. That term was superseded. Thwing received a favourable response which purported to ‘protect lay persons against papal provision.’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 599.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 600.

<sup>81</sup> Nicholas Vincent, ‘Thwing, [Thweng], Sir Robert (III) of’, *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27418>, accessed 8/2/13.

The letter asked the pope for justice, as the archbishop of York was attempting to have part of Thwing's lands appropriated, eight years after the corn robberies. Paris provides a summary of his account of Thwing's grievance:

About Robert de Twenge, a knight, and the letters which he manfully presented against the opinion of many.

About this time, a knight, a native of the northern provinces of England, refusing with all his efforts to bend his neck to the yoke of the Romans, went to Rome concerning the patronage of a certain church which belonged to him, on which the Romans had, through the archbishop of York, laid the hands of cupidity and having laid a heavy complaint in this matter before the Pope, he obtained letters. By this it can be conjectured with what devotedness the Roman church, always grasping, always importunate, loved ecclesiastics, from whom it was lawful to take their church property, which had been bestowed on them by the fathers with a pious intention and for the support of the poor.<sup>82</sup>

This passage is important, because it demonstrates that Paris is attempting to draw Robert of Thwing's protests into ideas of helping the poor, which were a cornerstone of the robberies of 1231-2. It makes Thwing a liberator of the wretched state of England based upon a passage provided by Matthew Paris from two years before, under the year 1237. In this he claims that 'simony is now practiced without a blush ... illiterate persons, of the lowest class, armed with the bulls of the Roman church, bursting forth into threats, daily presumed, despite the sacred privileges we enjoy from our holy ancestors, to plunder the revenues left by pious men of old times for the maintenance of religious men, for the support of the poor, and to afford hospitality to pilgrims; and by thundering sentences of excommunication, they at once obtained what they demanded.'<sup>83</sup> It appears to the reader

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<sup>82</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 1: 230, with corrections. 'De Roberto de Tuenge milite et litteris Papae, quas contra opinionem multorum viriliter impetravit. Sub eisdem temporibus, quidam miles de partibus aquilonaribus Angliae oriundus, summo nisu renuens colla jugo subdere Romanorum, super patronatu cujusdam ecclesiae ad eundem militem spectante, in quam ecclesiam per archiepiscopum Eboracensem manus cupiditatis injecerant Romani, Romam adiit. Et cum gravem super hoc coram Papa querimoniam reposuisset, sub hac forma subscripta meruit literas impetrare. Per quod conici potest, qua devotione viros diligit ecclesiasticos, a quibus impune licet sua ecclesiastica bona [rapere], pia patrum intentione collata et in sustentationem pauperum provisa, Romana ecclesia, semper hians, semper importuna', Paris, *CM*, 3: 609-10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 : 50.

of *Chronica Majora* that even by 1239 Thwing is fighting those who have withdrawn charity from the poor.

According to the layout within Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 16 (Fig. 1), it would appear that Paris had only the intention of providing a brief description of Robert of Thwing's troubles and the pope's reply to this, which is included. Yet, Matthew Paris subsequently made a lengthy marginal addition to this mention from 1239.<sup>84</sup>

In the additional section, Paris goes into detail regarding Robert of Thwing's patronage of a church at *Luhumum*, in the diocese of *Eboracensum* (York), which the editor, Luard, considered to be synonymous with Thwing's *Kirkletham*.<sup>85</sup> The second paragraph goes into detail excusing the behaviour of Thwing, stating that he had violence committed against him, having been deprived of his patronage by 'violent means'.

At this time, the earls, barons, and other nobles of England, to whom the right of the patronage of churches was known to belong from times of old, becoming vexed at being deprived of their liberty, and of the right of endowing churches, by the avarice of the Roman church, whilst by the command of the pope, foreigners were enriched with them, of whose persons and condition they were entirely ignorant, wrote, late as it was, to the pope, and sent their letter by the said Robert of Twenge, who, having by the same violent means been deprived of his right of patronage of the church of Lutton, in the diocese of York, had made a heavy complaint to the nobles of the kingdom, that the archbishop asserted that he had no power, or that he wished to kick against the Roman church. The said Robert, therefore, went in all haste to the Roman court, and presented the following letter on behalf of the nobles of England...<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Paris CCC MS 016, f.129r.

<sup>85</sup> Paris, *CM*, 3 : 610.

<sup>86</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 1: 230-1. 'Ipsis quoque temporibus, comites et barones et alii magnates Angliae, ad quos ab antiquo jus patronatus ecclesiarum spectare dinoscitur, dolentes se privari sua libertate, et per cupiditatem Romanae ecclesiae jure conferendi ecclesias enormiter privari, et alienigenas praecepto Papali illis ditari, quorum personas et condiciones penitus ignorabant, licet sero domino Papae scripserunt; et ipsam epistolam [miserunt] per dictum Robertum de Tuinge militem, qui, per eandem violentiam privatus jure suo super patronatu ecclesiae de Luhumum in diocesi Eboracensi, conquestus est graviter nobilibus regni, quia archiepiscopus se asseruit nihil posse vel contra Romanam ecclesiam velle recalcitare. Ipse igitur Robertus Romanam curiam non segniter adiit, hanc epistolam ex parte magnatum Angliae praesentans', Paris, *CM*, 3 : 610.



Fig 1. Marginal addition to Paris' work about Robert of Thwing's trip to Rome.  
(Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 16: Matthaei Paris Chronica Maiora II, f. 129 r)

Paris added this to make sure it was emphasised that Thwing had been the first to suffer violence, so that his actions, whatever they might have been, might be justified. It is a curious addition, as there is no mention of violence against Thwing in 1231-32. Hitherto it seemed that he was the one committing the violence.

The possible existence of this letter highlights a political crisis: English nobles, in some form of collective action, were making an independent petition to the pope, rather than through Henry III. Thwing himself represented a community and the episode foreshadows the concept of the 'Community of England' (*communitas Angliae*) which according to Paris, would present, in later times, points of view often centered on the kingdom's interests, not the same as the king's, who looked overseas for inspiration. Robert of Thwing and Richard of Cornwall, brother of Henry III, seem to have seen eye to eye on the issue of the papal provisions. Thwing had attached himself to Richard's

household and in 1239 Thwing and Richard had been among the foremost of those who presented a letter to the pope, critiquing the provisions and asking for change.<sup>87</sup> The king had been more or less ‘forced’ into supporting the document which requested of the pope that provision of Thwing’s lands should return to Thwing’s custodianship.<sup>88</sup>

In the marginal addition which follows, the alleged text is given of the letter carried by Thwing to the Pope in the *Chronica Majora*.<sup>89</sup> It complains to Rome that the English have always enjoyed the privilege of appointing patrons to their churches. It contains the nobles’ propaganda that charity will collapse if the status quo of Roman appointee-ship to English churches is maintained.<sup>90</sup> The nobles write that they are angered and that rivalry and slaughter may arise out of the current situation. The letter goes on to single out Robert of Thwing as an example of a layperson deprived of his ancient right of patronage. It states that although he appointed a priest to his church of Lutton, this was refused by the Archbishop of York on the basis of papal refusal.<sup>91</sup>

Paris ‘transcribed’ a letter of reply from the pope, which surprisingly agreed to the nobles’ demands, rather than taking the side of the Archbishop of York in the dispute. There are no corroborative texts for these letters, and one wonders if they in fact existed, or whether Paris wished to use them to illustrate Thwing’s struggles against the Roman clergy.

One thing is readily apparent regarding the letters—the demands are similar to those in the letters to the Roman bishops and tenants of the Romans from 1231. The purported reasons behind Thwing’s anger remain complex, bureaucratic and perhaps personal. The details would not have been known or perhaps even relevant to the layperson who might have heard some legend of Thwing’s activities. It may have been more appropriate for interested persons of the time to believe that William Wither’s men threw money to the poor, not because Thwing’s own personal power was lessened by the Romans, but because some inspired correction in the moral and social order, which Robert represented, was long overdue.

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<sup>87</sup> Vincent, ‘Thwing, [Thweng], Sir Robert (III) of’, *ODNB*.

<sup>88</sup> Robert C. Stacey, *Politics Policy and Finance under Henry III 1216-1245*, New York 1987, p. 137.

<sup>89</sup> Paris, *CM*, 3: 610-2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 610-1.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 611-2.

Thwing's mission was successful in principle, because the pope made a reply to Earl Richard of Cornwall, in which he recognised the rights of lay patrons.<sup>92</sup> In practice the fight would continue. According to Paris, following his visit to Rome, Robert of Thwing prepared to go on crusade with the Earl Richard.<sup>93</sup> Nicholas Vincent considers he may never have reached the Holy Land, as he was assigned the mission of envoy to Emperor Frederick II in 1240. This was to discuss the pope's plans to delay the crusade. It was the final reference to Thwing by Paris.<sup>94</sup> It is particularly significant that Thwing of all people had been chosen by the nobles to talk to the most prominent of papal enemies. Matthew Paris heavily lauded Frederick in his writings as one who stood up to the pope. It is not known how long Thwing remained in the German court. Richard of Cornwall, the Emperor's brother in law, also resided there for several months following the end of his crusade.

We know that Robert was back in England in 1242 because he appears in a court of law in England. This was to grant his son Marmaduke of Thwing the holdings of Kilton and Kirkleatham in order to dower his wife. In 1244 in that year, Robert reportedly assaulted Richard de Sarr, a clerk of the archbishop of York.<sup>95</sup> For this assault, Robert's lands were briefly confiscated, but subsequently restored in 1245. (The soft-handedness shown towards Thwing in 1231 may have been repeated. In fact, Jobson points out that from about 1245 onwards, Henry began a policy of appeasement towards his magnates. Had he not done so, Jobson argues, the revolution of 1258, discussed in the following chapter, might have occurred years earlier.<sup>96</sup>) It is to be noted that it was also the same archbishop of York who was held responsible by the pope in 1232 for investigating the riots in the north. He may have crossed paths with Thwing on various occasions. The fact the archbishop was still in 1239 attempting to assert himself against a former rioter suggests some long standing enmity between the two men.

Robert of Thwing may have been busy in England during 1245 as his lands had come under threat a year earlier. He does not seem to have attended the Council of Lyon in which the English delegation, headed by Richard of Cornwall and Simon de Montfort, the

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<sup>92</sup> G. E. Cokayne, *et al.*, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom, Extant, Extinct or Dormant*, London 2000, vol. XII, pp. 737-8.

<sup>93</sup> Paris, *CM*, 4: 47.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> G. E. Cokayne, *et al.*, vol. XII, p. 737.

<sup>96</sup> Adrian Jobson, *The First English Revolution: Simon de Montfort, Henry III and the Barons' War*, London 2012, p. 7.

Earl of Leicester, made a strong protest. Letters from the English nobles claimed that the king was in danger thanks to his support of Roman impositions. The letters claimed that the people too were moving against the king.<sup>97</sup> The German Emperor was also excommunicated at the Council of Lyon. In that year he made an astonishing proposal to the English. Paris claims that the Emperor promised to free England from Rome, providing the English did not make any further financial payments to Rome. This extraordinary proposal, which was rejected, was based upon the emperor's knowledge of the situation in England. Thwing disappears from history after 1246, when he witnesses a concord, dated 17 June 1246.<sup>98</sup> The date of his death is unknown, but it is known that his son was in control of the family estates in 1257.<sup>99</sup>

## **Matthew Paris and the image of Robert of Thwing**

As mentioned earlier, Matthew Paris not only transcribed, but amended Wendover's work as he added it to his *Chronica Majora*. Afterwards he would also add further information into the margins, indicating he maintained a continuing interest in revising his work with new information and perspectives, almost until his death in 1259.

Whilst transcribing the section of Wendover's work from 1231, which described the official inquisition into the matter, Paris decided to alter the line which stated: 'Robert de Tuinge, an energetic knight, who had assumed the name of William Wither.'<sup>100</sup> He turned it into the following:

...Robert of Thwing, a handsome young man and energetic knight, from the northern parts of England, having a distinguished origin, who, with the agreement of others, sold the crops of the Romans, and had himself called William Wither.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Frederick Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward: The Community of the Realm in the Thirteenth Century*, London 1947, vol. 1, p. 280.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Vincent, 'Thwing, [Thweng], Sir Robert (III) of', *ODNB*.

<sup>100</sup> 'Miles Strenuus' is the usage. This may also be translated as 'hardy knight'.

<sup>101</sup> My translation, '...Robertus de Tuinge, juvenis elegans et miles strenuus, ex partibus Angliae aquilonaribus, originem praeclaram ducens, qui aliis consentientibus fruges Romanorum vendiderat, et Willelmum Wither se nominari fecerat', Paris, *CM*, 3: 218.

This is to be found in the main section of the text. It was added early on in Paris' career, while he was still labouring at copying Wendover's work into his own as a foundation for his *Chronica*, perhaps the late 1230s or at latest the early 1240s. Matthew Paris has here provided a romanticised image of Robert of Thwing, for suddenly, Robert has become 'handsome' (*elegans*). Matthew's predecessor, Wendover, had merely called Robert an 'energetic knight', who committed 'violences'. Nothing was said of Thwing's appearance and persona. That Thwing was *originem praeclarem ducens*, 'distinguished in origin', may not have been idle gossip, for Paris actually seems to have researched the case, as he later drew a picture of Thwing's heraldic shield into a page of his *Chronica Majora*.<sup>102</sup> Though the phrases boosting Thwing's image were devised by Paris, the implication is there was some reason for increasing Thwing's repute and continuing to talk about him. We witness the creation here of a legendary person surrounding an individual who is no longer presented as a dangerous threat to the ecclesiastical order, but as someone who voiced a legitimate alternative in the eyes of his admirers.

### **A marginal addition**

Thwing's assault on the Archbishop of York's clerk in 1244 marked an increased period of activities, presuming he still maintained his old anti-Roman zeal. For in 1245, there occurred, on a smaller scale, another set of anti-Roman violence. Paris states the Roman clerics had to again hide in fear of their lives.<sup>103</sup> This may have revived memories of the larger riotous robberies of 1231, and may have induced Paris to further modify Wendover's information relating to the image of Robert of Thwing. This would take the form of a marginal addition, although it cannot be proven when it was written.

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<sup>102</sup> '*scutum album cum fessa rubea et papaginibus viridibus*', Paris, *CM*, 6: 477.

<sup>103</sup> Paris, *CM*, 4: 422.

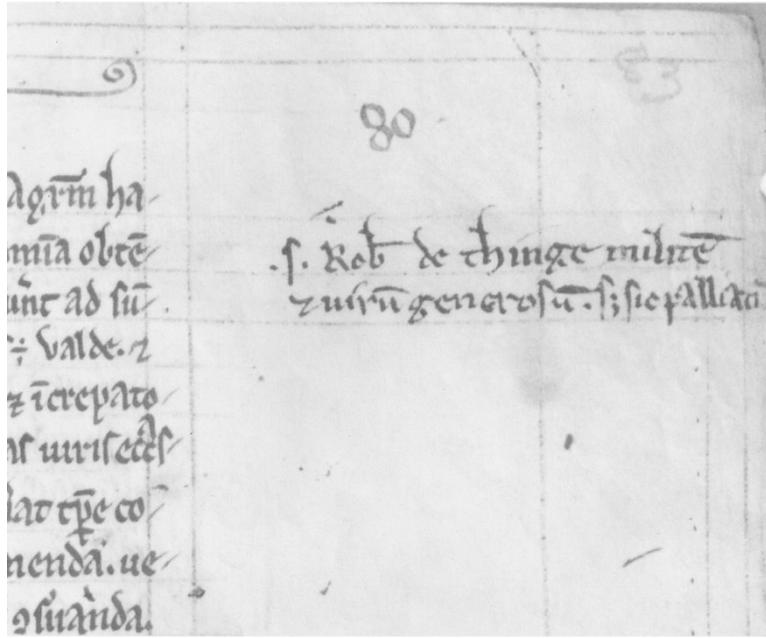


Fig 2. Extra gloss added to text about Robert of Thwing. (*Cambridge Corpus Christi College Manuscript 16: Matthaei Paris Chronica Maiora II, f. 83 r*)

This addition has never been translated by an editor, as it occurs in Wendover's section of the *Chronica Majora*, of which there exists only a translation from a separate MS shown to be more exclusively Wendover's. This addition serves, once again, to give the actual name of *William Wither*, amending a section Paris transcribed from Roger of Wendover's early *c.*1230s material. There are clear differences in the writing style to be seen in the MS leaf (*Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 16, f. 83r*), which suggests he made this addition at a later time to the transcription from the *Flores* in the main text. The marginal addition (Fig. 2) is here written in brackets and seeks to re-affirm that *Wither* is a sobriquet for Robert of Thwing:

There were, however, as authors of this audacity, eighty men and sometimes less, whose master was a certain William surnamed Wither (namely, Robert of Thing, a knight of high birth, but cloaked thus), whose precepts they followed in everything.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> My translation. 'Erant autem huius temeritatis auctores viri quasi quater viginti et quandoque minus, qui magistrum, habentes Willelmum quendam cognomento Wither (scilicet, Robertum de Thinge, militem et virum generosum, sed sic palliatum), eius per omnia obtemperabant praeceptis'. Paris, *CM*, 3: 217.

Matthew Paris, who probably made the addition, felt it was important to emphasise that Robert was *palliatum*—a term that can be translated variously as ‘cloaked, covered, or protected’.<sup>105</sup> This is actually the first time Wither or Robert is described as personally having been wearing a disguise: long after the events were over. A previous mention of hooded men at Wingham does not mention Wither. *Palliatum* can also mean ‘veiled’.<sup>106</sup> As an adjective, *palliatum* can refer to being covered by a funeral pall shroud, or simply a hood.<sup>107</sup> The best definition is ‘cloaked’. ‘To cloak, cover’ is the preferred usage for *palliare* in British sources.<sup>108</sup> Paris seems to be inserting this in order to tie Robert of Thwing to Wendover’s earlier suggestion that William Wither’s men had their heads covered, *capitibus velatis*, while they performed their robberies. The purpose is to clarify that Wither’s name was Robert, who was cloaked. In this context there is a possibility the word *palliatum* can mean he had a pseudonym of Wither. If so, then the statement contributes nothing new as this information was already written down several pages later, in the main text’s rendition of the official enquiry, which exposed Robert as the leader, who went by the name William Wither. The effect of the addition, however, even if it was not intended, is to give Robert a greater share of the credit and draw specific attention towards him as an individual, and away from the hooded men he led as Wither. His high origins are highlighted for a second time with the usage *generosum*, meaning ‘high-born’, ‘noble’, or a ‘gentleman’. ‘High-born’ seems an appropriate translation to use here.<sup>109</sup> ‘Noble’ is perhaps not appropriate as his ancestors are not higher than knights. Previous mentions call him William the Angry, and explain his bold, and perhaps rude and abrupt defiance before the king. The significance of the emphasis that he is ‘high born’ or even a ‘gentleman’ knight is something which has not been explained in terms of a wider context.

Why does Paris show an increasing interest in Thwing? The most likely explanation is due to Thwing’s journey to Europe in 1239/40 which involved a trip to the Roman court as a representative of the English nobles. Paris is clearly enthusiastic about Thwing, and the initial passage was likely written by Wendover soon after the events. Paris seems to

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<sup>105</sup> *A Latin Dictionary*, eds. C.T. Lewis and C Short, Oxford 1933, p. 1293.

<sup>106</sup> *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, ed. J. F. Niermeyer, Leiden 1997, p. 755.

<sup>107</sup> *Medieval Latin Word List*, ed. R. E. Latham, London 1965, p. 328.

<sup>108</sup> *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. D. R. Howlett, fascicule IX, Oxford 2005, p. 2087.

<sup>109</sup> *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, (eds.), vol 1, Oxford 1975-97, A to L, p. 1063.

have continued Wendover's *Flores* because later 'Wendover' entries contain Paris' flair, though this original chronicle is lost, and only later versions are known. Then, from 1240 to 1259, Paris wrote his *Chronica Majora*, which he initially concluded in c.1250, before changing his mind, and continuing it.<sup>110</sup> He retained the original Wendover passage on Wither, despite the fact he edited another Wendover passage (inserting a paragraph in order to call Thwing handsome and distinguished, *praeclarem ducens*), prior to inserting this into the main text of his *Chronica*. It can be supposed that the *palliatum* addition was made after the 1240s, when he was still busy copying Wendover's material, and hence after 1246, when Thwing was already dead. The origin of the insertion may therefore be ascribed to an enduring memory of some of Thwing's actions. We already see a legend emerging about this figure.

The addition is likely to have been by Paris. There is the puzzle of a name change. Wendover used the form 'Tuinge', transcribed as such by Paris into the *Chronica Majora*. In describing Thwing's visit to the Pope, of 1239, he becomes 'Tuenge'. In the marginal addition the name becomes 'Thinge'. The change cannot be explained. The hand of the *palliatum* addition is certainly scrappier than that seen in the main text, and although it is known that Paris' hand becomes more shaky with age, it has also been suggested that such a link is neither definitive, nor reliable and the phenomenon may also be ascribed to rapid copying.<sup>111</sup>

There is more information about the robberies. After 1250, Paris began, and completed two more chronicles, the *Historia Anglorum*, and the *Abbreviatio Chronicorum*. These are both found in Latin, edited by Madden, and are based on information in the *Chronica Majora*, with certain differences. For instance, in the *Historia Anglorum*, he summarises the story of the robberies, not losing any sympathy for Thwing but with the extra information that John, a canon and treasurer of York, had to hide himself.<sup>112</sup> Unlike the earlier tales, no hoods are mentioned. Paris centers the story on Thwing and states that as his benefice had been violently taken, he immediately flogged the Roman oppressors. Furthermore, we learn later on that there were so many

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<sup>110</sup> Bjorn K. Weiler, 'Matthew Paris on the writing of history', *Journal of Medieval History*, 25 (2009), 254-78., p. 254.

<sup>111</sup> Nigel Morgan, 'Matthew Paris, St Albans, London, and the Leaves of the "Life of St Thomas Becket"', *The Burlington Magazine*, 130, 1019 (Feb. 1988), 85-96, p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> Matthew Paris, *Matthew, Historia Anglorum sive historia minor*, ed. Frederic Madden, 3 vols., London 1866-1869, vol. 2, p. 338.

transgressors that it was safer to hush up the matter than to disturb the peace of the kingdom.<sup>113</sup> The *Abbreviatio Chronicorum* tells us a shorter version of the same story. It is among the final changes in the story about the robberies.<sup>114</sup>

Despite the chronicler's interest in Thwing, his name never again reappears with such splendour as in Matthew Paris' work. By the 1500s, the recorded versions of the oral traditions remember a different Yorkshire figure, known by that time as Robin Hood, who robbed abbots and monks.

## A political song of protest

There is one anonymous political song in the edition of Thomas Wright, 1839 (a neglected source of anonymous politically motivated protest songs), which has a good deal to complain about, entitled *Contra avaros*—‘Against the greedy’. This is originally found in the British Library MS, Harley 978, from Reading Abbey. It criticises Rome and it dates from the rule of Henry III. Of all the political songs collected by Thomas Wright, this perhaps best reflects the anti-Roman sentiment found in Matthew Paris' writings:

Rome, thrown into the chasm of disgrace,  
places stained wealth before virtue,  
fluctuating under a wave of vacillating spirit,  
demolishes, builds, changes the square to the round (coin).<sup>115</sup>

Like Paris, the author attacks Rome, associating it with avarice. A later section shows the poem refers to the power Roman ecclesiastics have over their English counterparts.

The archbishops step on the exposed necks of the clergy.  
And extort tears that they may be assuaged with presents;

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, pp 263-4.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Roma, turpitudinis jactens in profundis, Virtutes praeposerat opibus inmundis, Vacillantis animi fluctuans sub undis, Diruit, aedificat, mutat quadrata rotundis.’ Trans. With corrections, ‘square to the round’ presumably implies round coins, cf. *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England, from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Peter Coss, Cambridge 1996, p. 30.

Neither, if the poor bring few or not good ones,  
Do they accept them in good faith, or give a prize.<sup>116</sup>

The internal dissension within the clergy to which it refers could have developed any time after 1213, when the English church fell under Roman jurisdiction, a move that generated increasing resistance in the thirteenth century.

Although Thomas Wright mentioned that this song was written in the rule of Henry III, its exact date and context cannot be ascertained. The fact we have such a statement, however, which criticises archbishops for an apparent unfair rule over the ‘exposed necks’ of those beneath them, shows that notions of tyranny were perhaps not limited to the chroniclers at St Albans, and occurred elsewhere.

By 1246, it may have been apparent that Thwing’s apparently avowed ambition, as a leader of the conspiracy to save the king and kingdom from Roman clerics, had not been fully accomplished.<sup>117</sup> The Romans continued to oppress the English in various ways. Paris claims that the king averted his eyes while the Romans took six thousand marks from the English church, and that the English continued to have their enemies for their judges, echoing the words of the alleged document prepared by the *universitas* in 1231.<sup>118</sup> The anger generated by the continuing Roman impositions, down the decades, may have kept alive the memories of the deeds of Robert of Thwing.

## **The Significance of Thwing’s movement in Legend**

The survival of the political song above helps to illustrate Clanchy’s consideration: ‘the anti-Roman prejudices of the St Albans chroniclers were not a private eccentricity of their own’.<sup>119</sup> He ascribes to Thwing’s movement a dimension of populism, which endures decades into the future.<sup>120</sup> He states: ‘Tweng’s confederation can be interpreted in a number of ways. It was a nationalist movement insofar as the letters it sent out claimed to speak for the laymen and magnates of England against the Romans. The movement also claimed to represent everybody (hence it was a *universitas*) who “has

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<sup>116</sup> ‘Calcant archipraesules colla cleri prona, Et extorquent lacrimas ut emungant dona; Nec, si ferunt miseri pauca, vel non bona, Aequis accipient animis, donantve corona.’ *Political Songs*, p. 32, (trans. with corrections).

<sup>117</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 544.

<sup>118</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2: 188-9.

<sup>119</sup> Clanchy, p. 178.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

chosen to resist by common counsel of the magnates.” In these features Tweng’s confederation presages the “commune of England” which was formed to resist Henry III in 1258.<sup>121</sup> The implication of this is that future generations may have drawn upon memories from the past, of an audacious resistance to the Roman authority which resulted in the punishment of the Romans.

Politically, the nobles’ letter of 1239 to the pope, which mentioned Thwing on the subject of provisions, only resulted in a ‘temporary retreat’ by the papacy.<sup>122</sup> The problem of Roman oppression certainly lingered to the end of Paris’ life. Even in 1259, the year of his death, an anonymous St Albans chronicler added to Paris’ writings: ‘...through the infatuation and idleness of the king, England was oppressed in many ways by the domination of the Poitevins and Romans.’<sup>123</sup> In that very year a new confederation of nobles was said to have determined to drive them from the kingdom, a task which would end in a civil war which they would ultimately lose.

## Conclusions

In the chronicles of St Albans, we witness an evolution in the image of Robert of Thwing from the ‘energetic knight’ known as William Wither, to a ‘handsome young man and energetic knight’—along with the information he is high born, in Paris’ transcription of events. Later on we see a description of Thwing reiterating his being of high-born stock and also the first mention of Thwing as having been cloaked, in a supplementary margin addition; quite possibly made by Paris after his transcription of Wendover’s reports into the *Chronica Majora*. There is a transformation at work, between William Wither or Robert of Thwing of the 1230s in the *Flores Historiarum*, and Thwing of the 1240s in the *Chronica Majora*. Though it comes down to us through Paris’ bias, Robert of Thwing was transformed from a trouble maker into a heroic figure.

It is known that later outlaw legends drew upon a morass of thirteenth-century memories, and incorporated elements of oral ideas into ballads, some of which were eventually written down, in later times. Though ideas about Robert of Thwing seem to have been isolated in a specific time and place, certain events of the political crisis in the

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Stacey, p. 137.

<sup>123</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 332.

early 1230s were quite significant to people across the kingdom. Memories in subsequent decades may have contributed to popular perceptions of past resistance to tyranny. Such ideas lingered in the background—an enduring memory of a lost legacy in which rebels fought for justice.

## Chapter 4      The Complaints of England

Robin Hood stories are inventions inspired in part by memories of a combination of historical figures, who entered the popular imagination at different times during the development of heroic and outlaw myths. This chapter makes the case that the 1250s and 60s were a formative time for developing outrage against the sheriff, as well as against corrupt foreign nobles (which relates to earlier ideas), based on widespread complaints found in a variety of Latin texts. We first hear about *Robehod*, who may have some relation to Robin Hood, in the 1260s. He may have been an imitator. During this time, new enemies of the English enter the chronicles and literary texts, as well as the cultural imagination. Problems with Roman appointees, by comparison, become less significant, but memories of them may have reinforced a fresh hatred of foreigners in power, in the time of war of the 1260s. Memories of the corruption of sheriffs would linger into outlaw legend and the 1260s would later be remembered as a time of outlaws fighting back against a Sheriff of Nottingham. These outlaws were the remnants of the rebel movement of Simon de Montfort, who according to St Albans chronicler William Rishanger, fought to relieve the oppressed poor with various reforms. After their loss, many rebels took to the forests, and the outlaws of the period were thus, like Robert of Thwing a generation earlier, the relic of a movement which had sought, illegally, to bring some vestige of equity and fairness to England.

The trouble began when English nobles began to suffer at the hands of corrupt practices and preferential treatment towards several of the king's Poitevin relatives who took up residence in England, late in the 1240s. This helped to stir the barons to warfare. To the rest of the people in England, the barons' problems were perhaps of little concern. Their problem was a different one. Their enemy became an increasingly corrupt sheriff. The decades prior to the revolution of 1258, caused by a confluence of grievances, and the subsequent Barons' War of 1263-65 fought to defend it, witnessed an extension of the authority of the sheriff across England, unprecedented in the thirteenth century. Although this period of oppression is not mentioned in the scholarship regarding outlaws, the complaints, in particular relating to the sheriff, deserve examination as their details,

along with the events of the civil war that followed, contribute to understanding the evolution of outlaw myth.

Stories of shrieval oppressions highlighted in Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora* in the 1250s were not merely a chronicler's fancy. The rebel barons, later led by the Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort (1208-65), promised justice for those who were oppressed. Fighting the corrupt system was the major thrust of the rebel cause, and reforming the sheriff's tax-collection system would become a part of that. After rebel victories, all men, poor or rich, who had been oppressed by corrupt sheriffs, may have been treated as equals under law. During or soon after the battle of Evesham, Montfort was executed. He became something of an instant martyr. Many, including the St Albans chroniclers, considered him to have been a deliverer from oppression and even a saint. Surviving rebels who had stood for Montfort remained outlaws unless they paid out large bounties. Not all of them did this and negotiations were protracted. The medieval chronicler Walter Bower would later place Robin Hood in this period. Examining the history of the period helps to provide a basis for explaining why certain purported deeds of real-life outlaws of the period, such as Roger Godberd and Adam Gurdun, seem to have been integrated into the later myths of Robin Hood, as if those men were 'Robin Hood'.

## **Rebel identity**

In 1258, there occurred a political revolution which would attempt to limit the powers of King Henry III. At the same time there had been growing animosity by those considered '*de regno Angliae nati*', natives to the kingdom of England, towards those perceived as foreign.<sup>1</sup> Being 'English' was emerging as an identity. Animosity toward foreigners was one of the factors that triggered the so-called Second Barons' War, in which rebellious nobles would seek to limit the powers of the king, and drive his powerful foreign favourites from the kingdom. These were the king's Poitevin relatives, among others. It is to be said that the rebel barons were also French speaking, though they considered themselves English.

To help introduce the issue of whom the rebels thought they represented and who they were, we shall examine a document from 1264. A year before his untimely demise,

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<sup>1</sup> R. F. Treharne and I. J. Sanders (eds.), *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion, 1258-1267*, Oxford 1973, pp. 80-1.

Simon de Montfort had been at the height of his powers following the rebel victory at the battle of Lewes, on 14 May 1264, against the forces of Henry III and Prince Edward. Shortly after the battle, a long poem was composed by a cleric at Oxford.<sup>2</sup> It was inserted into MS Harley 978, ff. 107-114. It included the following assertion:

*Iam respirat Anglia, sperans libertatem... Comparati canibus Angli viluerunt; sed nunc victis hostibus caput extulerunt.*

Now England breathes in the hope of liberty... the English were despised like dogs; but now they have raised their head over their vanquished enemies.<sup>3</sup>

Those who had achieved this victory at Lewes in 1264 under the banner of Montfort may have considered that they had realised a long-standing dream of liberation from the oppression of powerful foreigners. This dream began with an injustice, as far back as the days of John, in which that king had, in 1213, delivered England and its revenues into the hands of the pope. For years thereafter, the pope had sent Roman churchmen into England, who were seen to have directed the flow of English ecclesiastic revenues towards the continent, rather than laying aside provision for English charity.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned, by the 1250s there were tyrannical sheriffs, as well as Poitevin half-brothers of the king, and the Savoyard kinsmen of the king's wife, who drew large pensions, and seemed to be immune from the law.<sup>5</sup> In order to raise revenues, sheriffs were turned from agents of the law into punitive and corrupt tax collectors. This of course would tie the problems the English nobles and gentry had with foreign nobles, to a concern the commons may have had with unruly sheriffs. This might have implied at the time that all English were being oppressed by a common foe, regardless of social class.

Sheriffs became a new breed of increasingly harsh oppressors of the people, and the Poitevin brothers of Henry themselves became something of a class of oppressors of the English nobles.<sup>6</sup> In addition to this perceived oppression, English nobles would be shaken by a new threat; by the 1250s, the pope would have found a relatively straight-

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and their Readers*, Philadelphia 2002, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Wright, *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England, from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Peter Coss, Cambridge 1996, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris's English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, ed. trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1854, vol. 2, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 262.

<sup>6</sup> Paris, (trans. Giles), 3: 279.

forward means of milking England of her riches, the infamous ‘Sicilian Business’.<sup>7</sup> This was the ‘sale’ of the Kingdom of Sicily to Henry, on unfavourable terms which Henry could not meet. The issue would have demonstrated to some radical elements that even the king was not to be trusted, and under the influence of those who were not English, and who sought enrichment at their expense. It is this, perhaps, which helped trigger revolt among the nobles, facilitating revolt among some commons, who were met with a year of drought in 1258, which was the year of the revolt.

The struggle, in the words of one anonymous clerical commentator, was necessitated because the English people had been languishing: ‘*Ut Israelitica plebs sub Pharaone, Gemens sub tyranica devastatione*’; ‘like Israel under Pharaoh, groaning under tyrannical devastation.’<sup>8</sup> Such statements are significant, because they segregate the competing parties into oppressed and oppressor, Englishman, and foreign-born overlord. The statement refers to *plebs*, or commoners, who required a political voice to express their anger at non-English, as well as sheriffs who were oppressing them.<sup>9</sup> It would be quite significant if plebs really were involved, as they may have relished in spoken tales of rebel heroic outlaws, past and present.

## **Reasons for revolt**

How do historians make sense of the conflict? Promises made by the rebel barons are found in the work of R. F. Treharne and I. J. Sanders, who compiled and translated primary baronial source material into their *Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion 1258-1267*, published in 1973. Not all the original documents survive, providing an incomplete picture of the events. Reading the *Ordinatio Vicecomitum*, ‘Ordinance of Sheriffs’, of 20 October 1258, gives an appreciation of just how corrupt sheriffs had become in the decade preceding the conflict: making it clear that reform was necessary.<sup>10</sup> It also directed the manner in which the system was to be reformed, for the benefit of the common people. Justice should be achieved speedily for rich as for poor.<sup>11</sup> More than an exercise in lofty altruism, it was a move which may have

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>8</sup> *Political Songs*, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 338.

<sup>10</sup> *DBM*, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-1.

been intended for public reception and appreciation, so that the barons might win the support of the masses. The confrontation with the king, a desire for fairness within the kingdom, provisions against sheriffs, and call for constitutional rule, relate to the events and clauses pertaining to Magna Carta. This indicates dissatisfaction with the way the kingdom had failed to hold to the ideals espoused by that document. The 1225 re-issue went out to sheriffs who held public readings of it.<sup>12</sup> Public memory of this form of liberty, a generation earlier, now trampled in the face of shrieval exaction, may have been a factor in peasants throwing support behind revolutionary ideas.

Although we can point to various forms of corruption, there are still different views on the specific origins of the revolt of 1258, complicated by a lack of evidence. The issue would be important if we wanted to know what precise event was the breaking point, in the consciousness of those around the king, and perhaps others in wider society. The papal sale of Hohenstaufen Sicily to King Henry III for an exorbitant sum was problematic. Henry had to arrange its capture or forfeit the deal, paying the price of excommunication. Furthermore, Henry was unable to meet payments which fell due. Treharne argued that Henry had feared excommunication by the pope in 1258, as he had been unable to fund an army capable of capturing the kingdom.<sup>13</sup> In light of this, Henry called upon his barons for aid, in order to extricate him from this trouble. The king's difficulty was a pretext for reform. The barons pressed upon him the *Provisiones Oxonie*, or 'Provisions of Oxford', a call for constitutional reform, which he was forced to accept.<sup>14</sup> David Carpenter has adopted a different line to Treharne, considering that Henry was forced into agreement through fear of the nobles themselves. This is evidenced by detailed statements in the Tewkesbury annals, which are more detailed in this area than even the otherwise more comprehensive works of Matthew Paris.<sup>15</sup> These state that the king found himself the de-facto prisoner of the barons and had little choice in the matter.<sup>16</sup> Henry would not have acceded to the provisions voluntarily, and with good faith, as Matthew Paris eloquently suggested.<sup>17</sup> The reason is that they included a

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph Turner, *Magna Carta: Through the Ages*, London 2003, p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. R. Luard, vol. 1, London 1864, pp. 163-5.

<sup>17</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 279.

decree for the expulsion from England of Henry's Poitevin half-brothers.<sup>18</sup> These men had effectively supplanted native nobles in many respects. Exalted by the king above all others, they were often immune from legal prosecution.<sup>19</sup>

As well as a political explanation for the events against the king, Treharne and Carpenter also had a local explanation for the events of the revolution. What did the peasantry care for the inner details of the kingdom's political agreements? If they didn't, then ideas surrounding political and social corruption would not have influenced the development of outlaw legends. However it seems that they did. The term 'Barons' War' suggests a purely aristocratic affair, but the commons would nonetheless have understood the political transitions in terms of circumstances relating to their everyday lives. Treharne's paper 'The Significance of the Baronial Reform Movement 1258-1267' argues that the reforming barons in 1258, sought to ease burdens upon people, however humble their origin.<sup>20</sup> Treharne was very specific in affirming that the events of 1258 encompassed a fully fledged altruistic revolution, involving the cooperation and support of not only barons, but knights, townsfolk and peasants.<sup>21</sup> This included the educated classes of clerks and clergy, who had seen the perhaps worsening effects of Henry's rule upon the land.<sup>22</sup> Grounded in the support of many classes, the revolution seems to have been popular. An effect of permanently cutting short a popular revolution soon after its inception (all was over with Montfort's execution at Evesham in 1265), meant that for many common people, the revolt may have been a lost ideal. With the passage of time it might have seemed something like a past golden-age moment in time, and an era of freedom. The military remnants of Montfort's shattered army were outlawed after 1265, and disinherited. Many carried on fighting in the forests, for either the lost cause, or their own cause, and until 1267 in some cases.<sup>23</sup> These forest bandits were the heirs of Montfort's lost legacy of fighting the system.

Carpenter refined and improved upon Treharne's deductions by providing specific examples of peasant activity throughout the entire conflict in a groundbreaking paper: 'English Peasants in Politics 1258-1267'. In this, he considered the involvement of

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<sup>18</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 188.

<sup>19</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 279.

<sup>20</sup> R. F. Treharne, 'The Significance of the Baronial Reform Movement, 1258-1267', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth Series, 25 (1943), 35-72, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds 1212-1301*, ed. trans. Antonia Gransden, London 1964, p. 34.

peasants in the conflict to be under-represented in the existing scholarship.<sup>24</sup> There exists some historical plea evidence from a case in the court *Coram Rege*. This suggests that there was perhaps an audience for popular tales about rebels, who gave more than vocal support to Simon de Montfort's vision for England. Evidently, four days after the death of the rebel leader, several peasants had autonomously accused a certain captain, Peter de Neville, of treason for failing to support the barons and they even attempted to arrest him, for this 'crime'.<sup>25</sup> History is therefore supportive of the idea that peasants could take a firm hand in the conflict, and that they perhaps acted to secure their interests, in a revolution in which they seem to have been participants. Everyday people might never have encountered the high-level political figures who made the decisions (the conflict is called the 'Second Barons' War'), but they did encounter the harsh reality of the sheriff and would have felt a genuine outrage to see their coins vanish into the unknown coffers of a regime they may have increasingly wanted no part in supporting, with their sweat and tears.

A key factor in popular involvement was the economy. In the lead up to rebellion, Henry III's regime had been slowly shifting into financial ruin, and required fundamental reform.<sup>26</sup> An impending bankruptcy owing to an inability to repay papal loans had severely strained finance.<sup>27</sup> This may have resulted in additional financial pressures being exerted upon the people. From 1241 until 1258, sheriffs were no longer guaranteed a commission and had to exact their gains increasingly as an increment of the goods of those from whom they collected.<sup>28</sup> This pay system had been hitherto misunderstood by Treharne and others.<sup>29</sup> Carpenter's rationalisation of the existence of this incremental mechanism for the pay structure of sheriffs in the key years leading up to the revolution, is important in our understanding of the development of the wider situation. Carpenter noted the comparatively large sums exacted in revenue collection in the 1240s and 1250s, relative to previous periods. This might explain why Matthew Paris began to rail strongly

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<sup>24</sup> D. A. Carpenter, 'English Peasants in Politics 1258-1267', *Past and Present*, 136 (Aug. 1992), 3-42, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Carpenter, 'English Peasants in Politics 1258-1267', p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *DBM*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> J. R. Maddicott, 'Magna Carta and the Local Community 1215-1259', *Past and Present*, 102 (Feb. 1984), 25-65, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

against corrupt sheriffs in his *Chronica Majora*, from the early 1250s onwards.<sup>30</sup> Since the king could not afford to pay sheriffs directly, they had to take their pay by increment from an increasingly impoverished populace, and increments continually increased for two decades until 1258, a year of famine.<sup>31</sup> This provides a historical basis for understanding discontent against popular authority at a local level.<sup>32</sup> It couples the potential involvement of peasants to the economic crisis in the years prior to revolution.<sup>33</sup> The impact upon social history is that the focus of hatreds could have branched away from Rome, towards the sheriff, whilst still re-inforcing any earlier hatreds of Romans, dating from the 1230s. The famine year of 1258 is perhaps one of the reasons Henry was forced to the bargaining table—he needed money when none was available. The peasants had been pushed to breaking point. Revolt in which they seem to have participated, could have given them hope. This may be why a provision was issued, which called for equal justice from the law for rich as well as poor.<sup>34</sup> Under such arduous conditions, when the kingdom needed true leaders, stories about popular heroes of the past could gain an audience.

Maddicott's work on the local community points out the extraordinary fact that the king received no direct financial grants from his barons after 1237. He thereupon had to rely increasingly upon local shrieval and judicial revenues, and this increased the level of resentment among local natives by mid-century.<sup>35</sup> Maddicott noted that things had become so oppressive by the 1250s that the job of 'sheriff' had in fact become one to be avoided, as he sometimes could not squeeze sufficient revenues to satisfy royal demand, and his own.<sup>36</sup>

Maddicott also found a source for some of the hatred of the king's Poitevin relations, which are described time and again by Matthew Paris. Evidence in the plea rolls of courts of the 1250s indicates that several of Henry's close Poitevin and other foreign friends had their lands barred and immune from tax collection and confiscation by sheriffs and justices of the Eyre.<sup>37</sup> It may have been seen at the time, that it was the English, rather

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<sup>30</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 283.

<sup>32</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>34</sup> *DBM*, p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> J. R. Maddicott, 'Magna Carta and the Local Community 1215-1259', p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

than the foreigners who paid the bulk of the burdensome expenses of Henry's administration, from whom the Poitevins benefited by way of lavish gifts.<sup>38</sup> This would certainly have stirred up hatred and resentment among the English nobles, as well as a broader cross-section of English society, perhaps to a lesser extent.

## **Chroniclers and the complaints of England**

There is an increasing awareness that there was a social dimension to the revolt. A 2012 publication by Jobson, aptly titled: *The First English Revolution: Simon de Montfort, Henry III and the Barons' War*, points out that the period 1258-67 is commonly known as the period of baronial reform and rebellion, but is one of the least understood periods of English history.<sup>39</sup> Not merely a private concern of the nobles, people of the day had strong opinions about the change of government. For instance we know that citizens of London grew tired of Edward and his foreign mercenaries in the city in 1261. Days before it capitulated to Montfort, the mob forced him out of London.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately social opinion is not well recorded. The strongly-worded opinions and complaints found in chronicles are one exception.

We witness an evolution in the complaints of the St Albans' chronicler Matthew Paris. Although he died in 1258, we are provided a well-opinionated lead up to the crisis. As discussed in the previous chapter, Matthew Paris had expressed a strong anti-Roman viewpoint in his writings, relating to the level of control Roman churchmen held over English lands. This tends to dominate his written ideas. In 1245 Matthew Paris was still writing complaints against the Romans for oppressing the poor of England.<sup>41</sup> In time these gave way to notions in Paris' work, of oppressors from within. At times, these were Poitevins, other continental nobles linked to the royal family, and corrupt sheriffs. Paris also criticised the king, for allowing such things to occur.<sup>42</sup>

Under the year 1246, Matthew Paris composed a list of complaints directed against the pope which arose from the fact that he had called for one twentieth of the revenue of the

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<sup>38</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 269.

<sup>39</sup> Adrian Jobson, *The First English Revolution: Simon de Montfort, Henry III and the Barons' War* London 2012, p. ix.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> *Matthaei Parisiensis Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols, London 1872-1883, vol. 4, p. 442.

<sup>42</sup> Paris, *CM* 5: 457-8.

English church for three years.<sup>43</sup> In an airing of grievances at a parliament held on March 18, 1246, some points of contention were raised between the king, nobles, bishops and abbots. According to Paris, the pope was considered to have been oppressing the people of England. As such, the parliament's output generally seems to have constituted grievances related to the Romans.<sup>44</sup> This was perhaps a precedent for things to come. In Paris' description of the event, he uses the word 'parliament' (*parlamentum*). This is the first time this word is used in surviving manuscripts.<sup>45</sup> The word gained usage and was accepted by chroniclers from 1255 onwards.<sup>46</sup> This suggests that between the 1240s and 1250s a major change in notions of representation had occurred in England: in the absence of effective leadership, people wanted to talk about what was to be done. This word did not refer to an exclusive gathering of a small number of select figures in a closed chamber. As the word *parlamentum* implies, it was a forum for discussion. One of the points raised was the decline in charity.<sup>47</sup> On this, and other grounds, the parliament was to refuse papal requests for increased financial support.<sup>48</sup> Although the king was seemingly enraged by the increases in papal taxation, he eventually conceded more money to Rome in the face of continuing demands. After this, the pope demanded between half and one twentieth of the revenues of various clergy.<sup>49</sup> Although this was refused, clerics had tightened their finances in anticipation of such a tax, as the king sometimes caved in to such demands. Eventually, a lump sum of 11,000 marks was, on 7 April 1247, agreed upon to be sent to Rome.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1250s, there is less criticism of the Romans. Paris begins to attack sheriffs. Under the year 1253, he tells a story about a corrupt sheriff who was punished after investigation by Simon de Montfort.<sup>51</sup> The date shows Montfort may have had a leading role in reforming the system even before the commencement of the Barons' War, in which he would have a similar role. Under 1258, Paris speaks of the death of a cruel sheriff, William Heron of Northumberland, 'hammer of cruelty to the poor... From

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<sup>43</sup> S. K. Mitchell, *Studies in Taxation under John and Henry III*, New Haven 1951, p. 266.

<sup>44</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2: 153-4.

<sup>45</sup> R. F. Treharne, 'The Nature of Parliament in the Reign of Henry III', *The English Historical Review*, 74, 293 (Oct. 1959), 590-610, p. 592.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> S. K. Mitchell, *Studies in Taxation under John and Henry III*, p. 266.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 187-91.

worldly avarice and thirst for wealth, he passed, as is believed, to the infernal regions, to experience the thirst of Tantalus.’<sup>52</sup> The 1250s were certainly the time in which sheriffs could enjoy Matthew Paris’ unique form of condemnation.

William de Rishanger, who succeeded Matthew Paris as chronicler at St Albans, stated that Montfort’s movement aimed to help the downtrodden poor.<sup>53</sup> The poor are also mentioned in the official baronial document of 20 October 1258, *Ordinatio Vicecomitum*, as deserving justice against the corruption of sheriffs. This document also contains other clauses to this end. According to the document, the chosen sheriffs must be local landowners and must not take any gift other than a day’s worth of nourishment.<sup>54</sup> Sheriffs were perceived as the public face of tyranny. They had an occasional visible influence upon the populace through their conduct, and therefore perhaps upon public opinion regarding Henry’s administration. A change in shrieval policy for the better may have enhanced the image of the rebels in popular eyes. Myths are maintained through repetition in the popular imagination. The involvement of peasants in the Barons’ War indicates that mythmakers might have had to pick sides.<sup>55</sup> They may have picked the side which condemned the corruptions of sheriffs, if they wanted the ears of the people.

The Barons’ War was a great inspiration to chroniclers, who had some strong opinions about the conflict. Indeed, most chroniclers of the day, namely at Bury St Edmunds, Westminster and St Albans (in particular, Matthew Paris and his anonymous successor in the 1260s, as well as William de Rishanger, the second of two chroniclers at St Albans who succeeded Paris), were propagandists for the rebel cause. Gransden states that the war caused the chroniclers to ‘discard their usual materialistic criteria and consider wider national interests.’<sup>56</sup> It is noticeable that various chronicles all conclude shortly after the conclusion of the war: the *Burton Chronicle* ends in 1261; the *Tewkesbury Chronicle* in 1262. The St Albans work *Flores Historiarum*, commenced by Wendover, was continued by various successors, till 1265 and the *Battle Chronicle* till 1264.<sup>57</sup> The war was something extraordinary. Chronicler propagandists flocked to write about it and once it

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>53</sup> *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani. Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani et quorundam anonymorum Chronica et annales regnantibus Henrico tertio et Edwardo primo*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, London 1865, p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> *DBM*, pp. 119-23.

<sup>55</sup> Carpenter, ‘English Peasants in Politics, 1258-1267’, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: c.500-1300*, New York 1974, p. 407.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 407.

was over, they simply replaced their pens, no longer interested in recording the affairs of men. Chroniclers also generally took the popular side against the ‘foreigners’ like the Poitevins. In fact the anonymous St Albans chronicler stated under the year 1263 that the accent of a foreigner was hateful to the ears of the English masses (*vulgo*).<sup>58</sup>

The chronicles were most thorough at St Albans. An anonymous chronicler wrote from Paris’ death in 1259 until Henry’s death in 1272, and another, William Rishanger, continued until 1307. Other chroniclers were generally uninterested in recording the new age following the war; perhaps owing to disappointments following the rebel defeat.

## Matthew Paris

The Angevin government has been described as: ‘essentially a centralised despotism grafted onto the stock of a primitive national monarchy.’<sup>59</sup> Mid thirteenth-century England was fraught with uprisings and attempted uprisings against this form of despotic or ‘personal’ rule. Henry III had, on many occasions, experienced the necessity of placating or frustrating, by siege, the ambitions of several remote and disquieted baronial factions. He may also have accomplished this by playing factions against each other—throughout his later career he maintained a close coterie of Poitevin relatives and advisors. This isolated the king from his native nobles, some of whom formed into other factions, loosely representing the interests of the English.

Paris occasionally dressed up his anti-foreign ideas inside fantastically spurious tales. Although it has been accurately noted of Paris’ predecessor Wendover, that he also ‘repeated with relish any story that blackened John’s reputation’, this distinction truly belongs to Matthew Paris, when he wrote up his chronicle in the 1240s.<sup>60</sup> Paris modified the record somewhat—retrospectively inserting an apocryphal tale amongst transcriptions of Roger of Wendover’s earlier work, which formed the bulk of Paris’ *Chronica* for the period prior to 1235.

Paris claimed to have heard a tale from Robert of London, a clerk, who features in the tale, and was awarded, by John, the stewardship of the St Albans abbey.<sup>61</sup> In this tale,

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<sup>58</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, 2: 481; trans. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 338.

<sup>59</sup> Treharne, ‘The Significance of the Baronial Reform Movement, 1258-1267’, p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> R. V. Turner, *King John*, London 1994, p. 134.

<sup>61</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 284.

Paris presents the nobles as wise; aware of the future consequences of their king's unwise actions, in trying to hand England over to foreigners.

The plot is as follows: King John sends a delegation to 'Murmelius', king of the Moroccans, who was then in control of an empire constituting portions of North Africa and Spain. Murmelius receives English ambassadors, who tell of John's ambition to hand him the kingdom of England, and receive it back as a tributary. To sell Murmelius on the idea, the ambassadors tell of the great wealth of England, along with a description of the English people, whom Paris states as being industrious and learned in three languages—Latin, French and English. Paris' rendition emphasises the strength of the people themselves, as opposed to the vices and weakness of its ruler. After rejecting the idea of alliance, Murmelius enquires further of John's reputation. Dismissing two of the English emissaries, he bids the third, the clerk Robert of London, whom he assumes was sent for his brains rather than his looks, to remain to answer further questions. He commands Robert to answer all questions truthfully, or Murmelius will 'never trust a Christian again'. Robert informs him, among other things, of John's tyrannical reign, his adultery with the wives and daughters of various nobles, and that he was a 'friend to strangers, a lion to his own people'. This was a concept which perhaps also resonated quite well with Paris' own era, as it reflected the actions of Henry as being a friend to foreigners, but not, evidently, his own people.<sup>62</sup>

There are more themes which parallel the mid-thirteenth-century world in which Paris was writing his chronicle, even though they are assigned, supposedly, to the beginning of the thirteenth century. As we follow the story, Murmelius enquires as to the condition of John's sovereignty. After being told various praiseworthy things regarding England's people, agriculture and climate, Murmelius' contempt for John rises:

I never heard that any king possessing such a prosperous kingdom subject and obedient to him, would thus voluntarily ruin his sovereignty by making tributary a country that is free, by giving to a stranger that which is his own, by turning happiness to misery, and thus giving himself up to the will of another, conquered as it were, without a wound.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Paris, *CM*, 2: 560.

<sup>63</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 284. 'Numquam legi vel audivi, quod aliquis rex, tam prosperum regnum possidens subjectum et obediens, suum sic vellet sponte pessundare principatum, ut de libero faceret

Henry III was guilty, in the eyes of Paris, of many of these same wrongs, in his own time. To Paris, Henry had given England over to the machinations of the pope, and his cunning Poitevin half brothers. In his direct accusations against Henry, however, Paris did little worse than to accuse him of ‘supine simplicity’.<sup>64</sup> Apocryphal Murnelius ordered Robert of London, to furthermore speak the truth regarding the disposition and nature of King John. Robert replied in various ways, that John was a tyrant and destroyer of his people, to which Murnelius answered:

Why do the miserable English allow such a man to reign, and rule over them?  
They are truly effeminate and servile.<sup>65</sup>

Matthew Paris’ recounting of the supposed story of Murnelius is more than just a recounting of a humorous tale. It is historical propaganda, aimed at shaming his contemporaries. Most importantly, it is directed to the people themselves. Paris invokes the ‘English’ and suggests that they should have a say in who rules them. Why should it also be the foreigners or the sheriffs, whom the king allows to do as they will?

## **Criticism of royal government**

In his tale of Murnelius, Paris had lamented that John had been: ‘...*fautor alienorum, leo suis subjectis*’, a ‘favourer of aliens, a lion to his own subjects.’ This related to Paris’ own time: Poitevin relatives of Henry had arrived in England after the loss of Poitou in 1246, and even earlier. They were given lands from royal escheats and drew considerable pensions, at the expense of the native nobles. Under the year 1247 Matthew Paris reported that the pope would allow the king’s relatives the benefit of English ecclesiastic revenue—a tactic Paris called: ‘bait with a hook on it’.<sup>66</sup> He declared: ‘By this tactic, the parasitical friends of the king soothed his feelings, and bound him more closely in their toils.’<sup>67</sup> England would begin the 1250s with both the pope and Henry’s half-brothers receiving a share of revenues, effectively partners in arms. These revenues came from

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tributarium, de suo alienum, de felici miserum; et se alterius tanquam sine vulnere victum dedere voluntati.’, *Ibid.*, p. 561.

<sup>64</sup> Paris, *CM*, 3 : 268.

<sup>65</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 285. ‘Quare permittunt miseri Anglici talem super se regnare et dominari? vere effeminati sunt et serviles.’ *Ibid.*, 2 : 563.

<sup>66</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2 : 207.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

lands owned by English magnates, and reached undeserving hands in the eyes of the English.

By the 1250s the influence of foreigners in financial affairs was becoming irksome, and Henry may have been seen as becoming increasingly avaricious. Matthew Paris tells us that Henry became extravagant with money, and more at the behest of his foreign friends.<sup>68</sup> The scholastic Bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253), even complained before his death that natives were being fleeced by the Romans with inordinate usury. Matthew Paris attempted to turn Grosseteste into almost an anti-Roman martyr. He claimed that Grosseteste spent his final moments on his deathbed, complaining of Roman usury and exactions. His final words were (according to Paris) that only with the sword would the English church find liberation from the Roman tyranny.<sup>69</sup> We see a similar opinion in one of the 'political songs', written in 1256 in Anglo-Norman, the language of the aristocracy. It states that Henry himself was seen in very much the same light as the 'corrupt' Romans:<sup>70</sup>

Formerly, clergy were free and on top; they were loved and cherished, nothing could be more so, now it is enslaved, and too much debased, and trodden down. By those it is disgraced, from whom it ought to have help, I dare not say more. The king and the pope think of nothing else but how they may take from the clergy their gold and their silver. This is the whole affair, that the pope of Rome yields too much to the king, to help his crown, the tenth of the clergy's goods he gives them, and with that he does his will.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from the political song that Henry himself was seen as something of an enemy of the English clergy, which is fitting because the song was in fact written, perhaps just two years before a revolution which would temporarily change the face of English politics. The English church was responsible for the relief of the poor. In a harsh

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<sup>68</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2 : 522.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 49.

<sup>70</sup> 'Jà fu clergie franche e à desus, Amée e cherie, nule ren pot plus. Ore est enservie, E trop envilie, e abatu jus; Par iceus est hunie, Dunt dut aver aïe; jo n'os dire plus.

Li rois ne l'apostoile ne pensent autrement, Mès coment au clers tolent lur or e lur argent. Co est tute la summe, ke la pape de Rume Al rei trop consent, pur aider sa curune la dime de clers li dune, De ço en fet sun talent', *Political Songs*, p. 43.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

environment with increasing shrieval oppression it would seem that some in the community saw themselves as pushed to breaking point.

Foreigners had been awarded some of the highest positions in England. Foremost amongst these were Henry's half-brothers: William and Aimer, whom Henry made Earl of Pembroke and Bishop of Winchester, after their arrival in England in 1247.<sup>72</sup> They were directed by rebels in 1258 to be banished as they had opposed the rebel provisions.<sup>73</sup> Rome was still feared by the rebels, judging by orders made 6 July 1260 to arrest any Romans entering the realm carrying papal bulls.<sup>74</sup>

The presence of the Poitevins, though irksome, was not grounds enough to remove the king from power. Another event however, was sufficient in the end to catalyse change. Between the years 1234 and 1258, Henry had maintained a questionable though tolerable personal rule over England. Two failed military expeditions against the French in 1230 and 1242 had diminished Henry's zeal for reclaiming his ancient birthright on the continent. He then turned to the European theatre in the 1250s. One project involved a papal agreement, in which he bought the rights to invade and occupy the Kingdom of Sicily, an old Norman territory, and purportedly the wealthiest country in Europe.<sup>75</sup> Henry's payment would be an annual tribute, and the sum of 135,541 marks, payable within eighteen months.<sup>76</sup> Paris called this amount: 'so immense, that it would cause astonishment and horror to all who heard it named.'<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, Sicily remained in the hands of the Hohenstaufens.<sup>78</sup> These were papal enemies, not party to the agreement. To add further embarrassment and hardship to the difficult situation, Henry's expensive 1254 mercenary-led invasion proved abortive. This became unacceptable considering England was already labouring under the burden of an unproductive and corrupt tax collection system. Thanks to a decline in official revenues, beginning in 1241, sheriffs were required to pay increasing increments over their standard revenues. Their revenues as much as doubled in some counties, in order to pay the increasingly large increments.<sup>79</sup> By the 1250s, a decline in the number of those seeking shrieval positions implies it was

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<sup>72</sup> Clanchy, p. 183.

<sup>73</sup> *DBM*, p. 93.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>75</sup> Clanchy, p. 169.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>77</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 268.

<sup>78</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 120.

<sup>79</sup> Maddicott, 'Magna Carta and the Local Community 1215-1259', p. 44.

becoming an unprofitable vocation, unless one perhaps resorted to criminal activities in the collection of revenues.<sup>80</sup> This might naturally raise the estimation, in the eyes of the public, of all those outlawed men who may have opposed payments to corrupt sheriffs. The event of the Sicilian business, as well as excessive taxation, was leading to a financial breaking point.<sup>81</sup>

Ironically the man who was one day to become a leader of the 'English' faction, the Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, was not originally English, but French.<sup>82</sup> He was, however, from Normandy rather than Poitou, and this perhaps made him seem a little less foreign. Simon's enmity for the system had deep roots. The marriage of Montfort to the king's sister Eleanor, in January of 1238 was a troubled affair. In Henry's eyes, she had been squandered upon one of the royal vassals. The king had only accepted the marriage reluctantly in order to avoid a scandal.<sup>83</sup> It was this marriage which secured Montfort the earldom of Leicester.<sup>84</sup> Montfort had had military experience in the crusades. He had been appointed governor of Gascony in 1248, but after a troubled governorship, was dismissed by Henry amid various accusations of impropriety. Paris states that Montfort had in 1253, completely quelled a rebellion of the Gascons, and yet the king then entered into a 'disgraceful charter' which seems to have been both unnecessary and insulting to Montfort. It made amends to all Gascons for the losses they had incurred by the coming of Henry's forces.<sup>85</sup> Montfort regarded this as a sign of Henry's bad faith.<sup>86</sup> Revenge may certainly have been a motive for Montfort's actions in 1258. There was also a complex financial history between the king and Montfort, perhaps made difficult by the enmity the king may have retained against Montfort regarding his sister. It appears that in 1257 the king was in debt to Montfort by twelve hundred pounds, another sign of Henry's financial problems.<sup>87</sup> A convergence of personal, popular and political issues led Montfort towards his role in the aftermath of the 1258 revolution.<sup>88</sup> He was to become a figure of forgotten heroic significance, after his death.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, Cambridge 1994. p. 147.

<sup>82</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 220.

<sup>83</sup> Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 220.

<sup>85</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 254.

<sup>86</sup> Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 147.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

## The revolution of 1258

The revolution was really driven by a combination of factors. According to Paris, Henry was perceived as a fool by his contemporaries for embarking upon the ‘Sicilian business’.<sup>89</sup> A recent interpretation by Weiler, however, disputes this. He presents the deal from a European perspective, in which such a deal does not seem to have been entirely irregular, despite Paris’ protestations of the immense expense.<sup>90</sup> The lack of receipt of the kingdom, however, damaged Henry’s reputation, and made him reluctant to proceed further. In March 1258, Pope Alexander IV threatened Henry with excommunication if he did not invade Sicily with an army which, by one estimate, needed to be twice the size of England’s feudal force. Henry also had to pay off a debt equivalent to four years’ income.<sup>91</sup>

Turning to his nobles for help in meeting papal obligations, at Oxford, from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of April, he was presented with a considerable list of demands for reform. The magnates brought with them their ‘arms and horses’ to make sure their ideas for reform were adopted. According to the Tewkesbury annals, the king was disturbed by this and asked if he was a captive. The Earl of Norfolk, Roger Bigod, one of the rebel leaders, dispelled this notion and asserted foremost that only the ‘wretched and intolerable’ Poitevins should flee from Henry’s presence, and that Henry should hand control of his seal to a council of 24 barons.<sup>92</sup>

Politically, excommunication and a fear of one’s nobles go hand in hand. Henry was also a very religious man. Treharne maintained that Henry feared excommunication more than he feared his nobles, and turned to the barons, only in order to thresh out a necessary deal.<sup>93</sup> With Henry at their mercy, they could drive a hard bargain.<sup>94</sup> Instead of receiving assistance for a Sicilian adventure, Henry was finally presented with the *Provisiones Oxonie*, the ‘Provisions of Oxford’ on 9 June 1258. Carpenter claims that the king was in fact more afraid of the barons than the pope, pointing out the display of arms suggested

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<sup>89</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 268.

<sup>90</sup> Bjorn K. Weiler, ‘Henry III and the Sicilian Business, a Reinterpretation’, *Historical Research*, 74, 184 (2001), 127-50, p. 150.

<sup>91</sup> *DBM*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>92</sup> *AM*, 1: 163-5.

<sup>93</sup> R. F. Treharne, *The Baronial Plan of Reform 1258-1263*, Manchester 1971, pp. 65-7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

in the Tewkesbury annals as evidence of an unwilling Henry.<sup>95</sup> The action was hardly legal. Matthew Paris, who supported the barons, declined to mention a display of arms used to scare the king. Just as in the early 1200s, it is baronial rebel figures, acting almost heroically and in a rebellious fashion, upon which the hopes of many may have been pinned. This could re-inforce the memory of relevant earlier legends whilst creating new ones.

The terms, which included a constitutional body of nobles being placed over the king, were perhaps unacceptable to Henry, but he had little choice in the matter, with the barons no longer willing to suffer his arbitrary rule which lent to the dictates of a small group of Poitevin, as well as Lusignan nobles.<sup>96</sup> A demand for their removal was certainly one of the reasons for that revolution of 1258.<sup>97</sup> The Savoyards, nobles of Savoy who had successfully settled in England on friendly terms, joined the barons.<sup>98</sup> They turned on the Lusignans and Poitevins.<sup>99</sup> These hated men were subsequently banished from the realm.<sup>100</sup> On 2 May 1258, the king issued a letter to his magnates, where he acceded to the demands by affirming that the realm would be ‘put in order’ by a loyal council of twenty four.<sup>101</sup>

We read a spirited and almost rebellious invective from Matthew Paris, written in 1258, just prior to his demise. It could be interpreted as something of a call for action. He asserted that the administration of the entire kingdom seemed to have been highly corrupt, and was in need of change.<sup>102</sup> Paris related this to everyone in the kingdom. He claimed that essentially the entire English people—barons, knights, citizens, merchants and labourers, as well as religious men, were persecuted by the higher ranks of foreigners. They were made to perform menial tasks by the Poitevin overlords, who cared nothing for the law of the land.<sup>103</sup> We may interpret such a statement as an implication on the part of Paris that that the revolution might have been one which had popular support. People not only appreciated certain changes of 1258, but may have

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<sup>95</sup> Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, p. 187.

<sup>96</sup> Carpenter ‘King, Magnates, and Society, the Personal Rule of Henry III – 1234-1258’, *Speculum*, 60, 1 (Jan. 1985), 39-70, p. 57.

<sup>97</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 188.

<sup>98</sup> Carpenter, ‘King Magnates, and Society, the Personal Rule of Henry III– 1234-1258’, p. 57.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 271.

<sup>101</sup> *DBM*, p. 75.

<sup>102</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 2: 510-1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 510-1.

demanded them. It is interesting to look at clause no. 17 of the Provisions of Oxford, produced June/July 1258.<sup>104</sup> This states that sheriffs should be paid out of the royal revenue, rather than via self-deducted commissions, as had been occurring. On 20 October 1258 the rebel earls produced a further document, the *Ordinatio Vicecomitum*—Ordinance of the Sheriffs. This document seems to have the idea of taking even further steps to stop shrieval corruption, than had been specified in the provisions. It seems designed for reception by a popular audience:

Since we wish and will that speedy justice be done throughout our realm, no less to the poor than to the rich, we will and command that the wrongs which have been done in our time in your county, no matter who has done them, be reported to the four knights whom we have appointed for this purpose, if they have not already been so reported.<sup>105</sup>

Significantly, the concept that justice must be done speedily for all is reiterated twice in the *Ordinatio Vicecomitum*. This suggests that the barons courted popularity for their cause. It indicates not only a feeling of a need for social cohesion in this time, but also that the barons were—or wished to be seen as—on the same side as the commons: the *Ordinatio* is a response to social concerns. The end of the 1250s was an era in which there was a pressing need for reform of the legal and taxation system at a local level. The important role of peasants in acquiescing to, or facilitating changes may have been traditionally understated by scholars due to a lack of surviving evidence. The role of peasants in that civil conflict was a substantial one, as is indicated by Carpenter, who suggests that certain peasants actively opposed loyalists and supported the ‘community of England’.<sup>106</sup> Inevitably, those who may have felt mistreated might have loved the idea of nobles acting outside the law by seizing the opportunity to force a change for the better. From 1236-41, sheriffs received allowances from royal coffers in addition to increments of goods seized.<sup>107</sup> The allowances ceased thereafter and Henry began to rely increasingly upon judicial and county revenues.<sup>108</sup> Increases on the increments in turn forced sheriffs to extract increasing amounts from ‘turns fees’ and ‘rights of

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<sup>104</sup> *DBM*, p. 96.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>106</sup> Carpenter, ‘English Peasants in Politics 1258-1267’, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 173.

<sup>108</sup> Harding, *England in the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge 1993, p. 208-9.

hospitality'.<sup>109</sup> Sheriffs had to deduct their profits as a commission of goods seized and this would perhaps have increased their greed and corruption, adding to hardship, as increments continued to increase until 1258.<sup>110</sup> By the famine year of 1258, there may have been little left to take, hence the need for a revolution to sort out Henry's finances and reform the system. According to Magna Carta, only certain goods could have been seized. Horses and carts of free men, used for transport, are not to be taken, under clause 30. Clause 39 states that no man shall be victimised except by lawful judgement of his peers. Though it in a way related to the encounter at Runnymede between King John and barons, the revolution called not for a re-issue of Magna Carta, however, but a whole new series of documents, suggesting there was disenchantment with that old idea.

Under the year 1258, Matthew Paris devotes a considerable section to a justification of the *Ordinatio Vicecomitum* of 20 October 1258. He speaks of how sheriffs hitherto rode around with large retinues exacting goods by any means, clearly a violation of Magna Carta. In order to limit their corruptions, he tells how gifts to sheriffs could henceforth only contain food and drink provisions.<sup>111</sup> It was a clause paraphrased from the *Ordinatio*.<sup>112</sup> Sheriffs may always have been hated by the oppressed, but it is the desire to suppress the corruptions of sheriffs in the context of officially stated shrieval corruption in the 1250s which shows not only that reforms to the system were pressingly required—but also that myths regarding retribution against sheriffs, such as those recounted by Paris, would perhaps have enjoyed popularity.

In his own words, Henry had been stripped of his powers and was being treated as a minor under the wardship of the nobles.<sup>113</sup> His discomfort did not bother Matthew Paris, who seems to have been sympathetic to Simon de Montfort. In 1258, Paris sets a scene of a cheerful and helpful Montfort at the king's side. After a thunderstorm, Henry broke everyone's confidence, when he told Montfort and others that although the thunderstorm which had occurred that day was over, he feared another impending thunderstorm: a hint at future warfare. This was followed by Henry further shattering the mood of the assembly by informing Montfort that he feared him more than anything.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>110</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 172.

<sup>111</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 306.

<sup>112</sup> *DBM*, p. 121.

<sup>113</sup> R. F. Treharne, 'The Significance of the Baronial Reform Movement - 1258-1267', p. 35.

<sup>114</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 295.

The revolution did not last. There had been some developing enmity between Montfort and the Earl of Gloucester, who was criticised by Montfort over his lack of support for a new series of reforms of February 1259.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore the barons' council was divided into 'right' and 'left' factions who differed in their levels of support for the king.<sup>116</sup> Whilst in France and free from compulsion, the king commanded that the parliament should not meet in his absence, and despite the protests of Montfort, no parliament appears to have been held. The idea of 1258 that parliaments should meet regardless of the presence of royal authority had been successfully undermined.<sup>117</sup> The king also successfully received money and was able to return to England with mercenaries, by which time Edward had deserted Montfort.<sup>118</sup> By 9 December 1261, Montfort had fled into exile in France, and royal sheriffs had been appointed to replace those appointed during the rebellion. Royal power was once more on the rise.<sup>119</sup> It seemed the rebellion was over.

## **Exile and return of Montfort**

The pope assisted Henry's plot to undermine the Provisions of Oxford by revoking them in 1261.<sup>120</sup> As a result, Henry was able to recover most of his previous powers for two more years.<sup>121</sup> This was a time in which Montfort lived in continental exile, before returning to England, and seizing control in 1263.

Matthew Paris died in 1259, before the dramatic and sweeping events of the Barons' War. His work was at once taken up by two chroniclers. One was an anonymous chronicler of St Albans who considered himself unworthy to 'loose the latchet' of Paris' shoe, and neglected to insert his name.<sup>122</sup> The other successor was William de Rishanger, another monk of St Albans. Both were less proficient chroniclers than Paris but shared

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<sup>115</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 244.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>120</sup> Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, p. 233.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>122</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 330.

similar views. Rishanger mentioned that the decree for the expulsion of foreigners of 1263 included the following text.<sup>123</sup>

...Moreover, that aliens must leave the realm, never to return, except for those faithful men of the kingdom who are accepted by unanimous consent.

Since eliminating Henry III would be difficult, rebels perhaps thought it was easier to simply remove Henry's foreign advisers. The Tewkesbury annalist stated: 'aliens of whatever nation, Romans and others, possessing, devouring and dissipating the greatest part of the goods of England, and behaving by the king's side as second kings, should be removed as exiles from England.'<sup>124</sup> After this, royal castles which foreigners had occupied were placed in the hands of native-born nobles.<sup>125</sup> The whole thing is an echo of the sentiments of the *universitas*, whose popular face was William Wither, thirty years earlier. The outlaw rebels who thus attacked the king with warfare were the successors to that older tradition. They were the new face of the resistance. In fact we see a potential combining of several older traditions, in this time, due to similar political events. For instance, the sheriffs who violated Magna Carta relate the cause of Fouke Fitz Warin and others, against John, to this time. The idea of revenge against the sheriff however, seen in the later traditions, may have arisen independently in this time, mixing with other ideas as stories were told.

### **A sermonising poem—'Song of Lewes'**

Simon de Montfort returned from his exile in France in 1264. A military leader, he raised an army and achieved a great victory at Lewes in the same year. He made the king a prisoner, and Montfort became virtual ruler of England. The ideas behind the battle are told ecstatically by a follower of the English cause in a 'song of Lewes', written in the aftermath of the Battle of Lewes, 14 May, 1264.<sup>126</sup> This poem praises Simon de Montfort and talks of the previous oppressions. The poem is found in British Library, MS Harley

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<sup>123</sup> '...Insuper, quod exeant alienigenae a regno, ulterius non reversuri, exceptis illis quorum moram fideles regni unanimi assensu acceptarent', *The Chronicle of William de Rishanger of the Barons' Wars. The Miracles of Simon de Montfort*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell, London 1840, p. 13.

<sup>124</sup> *AM*, 1, 174-5; cf. Carpenter, (trans.), *Reign of Henry III*, p. 264.

<sup>125</sup> D. A. Carpenter, 'King Henry III's "Statute" against Aliens: July 1263', *The English Historical Review*, 107, 425 (Oct. 1992), 925-44, p. 929.

<sup>126</sup> *Political Songs*, p. 71.

978 (fol. 128 r.), a considerable medieval miscellany that contains the ‘cuckoo song’ written in English, among other musical texts, as well as medical texts in Latin and Anglo-Norman, and satirical ribalds attributed to an unknown ‘Goliath’. It is the work of more than one, perhaps three hands.<sup>127</sup> The relevant song is written in a style which suggests the third quarter of the thirteenth century.<sup>128</sup> Specifically, it seems to have been written sometime in the 1260s at Oxford.<sup>129</sup>

The Song of Lewes provides a great deal of information on the nature of the struggle, seen from the perspective of a sympathiser to the English cause. It is a euphoric song of struggle and vindication at the evidently recent victory which has transpired. It begins with triumphant exuberance:

Write quickly, O pen of one who, writing such things as follow, blesses and praises with his tongue, thee, O right hand of God the Father, Lord of virtues... Now England breathes in the hope of liberty... the English were despised like dogs; but now they have raised their head over their vanquished enemies. In the year of grace one thousand two hundred and sixty-four, and on the Wednesday after the festival of St. Pancras, the rebellion of the English bore the brunt of a great battle at the castle of Lewes...<sup>130</sup>

In this passage we see that the English (*Angli*) were perceived, not through class distinction, but as a united entity, for no distinction is made between noble and peasant. All are seen as victims of past oppression. Notably, we see Montfort’s forces actually called ‘the army of the English’. This distinction implies that Henry’s army is seen to be the foreign army, not representative of the interests of the English. It also states the church ‘honoured the victors as saints.’<sup>131</sup> The implication is that the English church was a most interested party in the war—one can only surmise that certain church leaders saw Montfort as working in their interest. This would explain why virtually every chronicler was sympathetic to the rebellion. Notions of the oppression of the English church by

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<sup>127</sup> Taylor, p. 83.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 85, 94.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Calamus velociter scribe sic scribentis, Lingua laudabiliter te benedicentis, Dei patris dextera, domine virtutum...Iam respirat Anglia, sperans libertatem... Comparati canibus Angli viluerunt; sed nunc victis hostibus caput extulerunt. Anno sexagesimo quarto, quarta quoque Feria Pancratii post sollempnitatem, Valde gravis prelii tulit tempestatem Anglorum turbatio, castroque Lewensi’, Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

Henry's forces, which reflect foreign interests, echo the longstanding ideas of the oppressions of the English church by foreigners. If they could be recalled, one might surmise that stories about Wither may have been popular in this time.

Later on in the song, we read the author's opinion of what the king should have done in order to have avoided war. This section expresses political views regarding the king's role which appear to be particular to notions of an English community with the king as a 'peer' rather than an overlord. It speaks of the oppression of the commons as a cause of God's wrath—with the implication that the commons will be pleased at the victory.

For the king's clemency and the king's majesty,  
ought to approve the endeavours, which so amend grievous  
laws that they be milder, and that they be,  
while less onerous, more pleasing to God.  
For the oppression of the commons pleaseth not God,  
but rather the commiseration whereby the commons may have time to think upon  
God.<sup>132</sup>

Considered tyrannical by the common people, this important passage shows us that the laws themselves are not pleasing. It is the common people who are therefore annoyed by the king, and so they seek relief. To contrast the anger of the commons, we see praise lauded upon Simon de Montfort.

May the Lord Bless Simon de Montfort!  
and also his sons and his army!  
who, exposing themselves magnanimously to death,  
fought valiantly, condoling  
the lamentable lot of the English who, trodden underfoot  
in a manner scarcely to be described, and almost deprived  
of all their liberties, nay of their life,  
had languished under hard rulers,

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<sup>132</sup> 'Nam regis clementia regis et majestas, Approbare studia debet, quae molestas / Leges ita temperant quod sunt mitiores, Et dum minus onerant Deo gratiores. Non enim oppressio plebis Deo placet, Immo miseratio qua plebs Deo vacet'. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

as the Israelites under Pharaoh,  
groaning under tyrannical devastation.<sup>133</sup>

This is political propaganda. The phrase *Cunctis libertatibus*, corrected to *immo, sua vita*, ‘nay, of their life,’ gives a tone of this being something of a political speech. It is a justification for the war. The poem is important because it appears to be claiming to speak for all the English—not just English nobles. In the following passages we see the ongoing theme continued and reiterated.

Again, let him know that the people is not his but God’s,  
and that it is profitable to him as his help:  
and that he who for a short period is placed over the people,  
soon, closed in marble, will be buried in the earth.<sup>134</sup>

With the words *populum* and *populo*, the author speaks for all the people, not just a trivial few. This is a reference to the emotional involvement of the more common people.

Towards them, let him make himself as one of them;  
let him regard David joining the dance of the maids.  
I wish one similar to David may succeed the king  
—a prudent and humble man who would not injure his people;  
in truth, who would not hurt the people who is subjected to him,  
but would exhibit towards them a loving regard,  
and would aim at their prosperity;  
the commons would not allow him to suffer wrong.<sup>135</sup>

The passage highlights an ideal view of what one form of the rebel constitution may have been. The author considers that a harmonic relationship between the king and the

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<sup>133</sup> ‘Benedicat dominus .S. de Monte-Forti! Suis nichilominus natis et cohorti!  
Qui se magnanimiter exponentes morti, Pugnauerunt fortiter, condolentes sorti  
Anglicorum flebili, qui subpeditati, Modo vix narrabili, peneque privati Cunctis libertatibus, immo sua  
vita, Sub duris principibus languerunt ita, Ut Israelitica plebs sub Pharaone, Gemens sub tyrannica  
devastatione’. Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Rursum sciat populum non suum sed Dei, Et ut adminiculum suum prosit ei: Et qui parvo tempore  
populo praefertur, Cito clausus marmore terrae subinfertur’. Ibid., pp. 107-8.

<sup>135</sup> ‘In illos se faciat ut unum ex illis; Saltantem respiciat David cum ancillis. Regi David similis utinam  
succedat, Vir prudens et humilis qui suos non laedat; Certe qui non laederet populum subjectum,  
Sed illis impenderet amoris affectum, Et ipsius quaereret salutis profectum, Ipsum non permetteret plebs  
pati defectum.’ Ibid., p. 108.

common people (*plebs*) would be a positive change. In this way, king and commons could look after one another, equal justice being done for all.<sup>136</sup> The passages continually highlight harm done to the people by the regime.

The author is at pains to stress loyalty to the king's person. This is not idle talk. The anonymous St Albans chronicler wrote in 1264 that Montfort drafted what seems to have been a desperate letter to the king.<sup>137</sup> Montfort assured him that he had always and would always protect his royal person. Montfort argued that men close to the king's person were conspiring to ruin the peace of the kingdom. The chronicler considered Montfort's letter to be reasonable. The king's reply was that Montfort was not observing due fealty and was acting as a rebel. This, the chronicler considered to be a contemptuous reply.<sup>138</sup> The chronicler so suggests that the king's adherents, loosely classed as the foreigners, as well as loyal barons, were responsible for the continuation of unnecessary warfare.

Unfortunately for the rebels, the victorious aftermath of the battle of Lewes, in favour of Simon de Montfort, did not spell the end of the conflict. Things had been going relatively well for earl Simon and his followers until 1265, when Prince Edward, who had been captured at Lewes, escaped from his captivity at the castle of Hereford on a swift horse.<sup>139</sup> An enmity had grown between leading rebels Montfort and Gilbert de Claire, the Earl of Gloucester. Gloucester and Edward joined forces, and the royalists were able to quickly regroup. Under Prince Edward's leadership, they defeated Montfort in the battle of Evesham in the following year. Montfort's forces had been cut off from those of his son, Simon the younger. His small army was destroyed after an uphill charge into the royalist forces and Montfort's body was dismembered on the battlefield. In a political song which laments the circumstance of his death, Montfort is proclaimed to have been *Protector gentis Angliae*, 'protector of the English nation'.<sup>140</sup> He was for some time thereafter venerated as a saint and two hundred miracles were recorded.<sup>141</sup> These purportedly occurred at his tomb between the years 1265 and 1279.<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, the

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<sup>136</sup> *DBM*, p. 119.

<sup>137</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 344-5.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 345-6.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>140</sup> *Political Songs*, p. 124.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

<sup>142</sup> *The Chronicle of William de Rishanger of the Barons' Wars. The Miracles of Simon de Montfort*, James Orchard Halliwell (ed.), pp. 67-111.

title-page to the manuscript which records the miracles was deliberately defaced.<sup>143</sup> The manuscript however, remains. Veneration of Montfort's 'sainthood' was forbidden by a post-war treaty known as the Dictum of Kenilworth of 31 Oct 1266.<sup>144</sup> This shows there was a popular aspect to the rebel cause which was dangerous or distasteful enough that it had to be suppressed.

The popular aspect to the Barons' War has perhaps been understated by scholars in the past, not least because of the name assigned to this conflict. There is some evidence that during this period, peasants too, on their own, were politically active in the fight for greater freedoms and justice. A court in 1266 made mention of an incident of 8 August 1265, in the days following the battle of Evesham and death of Montfort, in which certain commoners at the village of Peatling Magna in Leicestershire attempted to detain, by force, a royalist by the name of Peter de Neville, who was leading a cart and some horses. The court was told:

He [Neville] and his followers were accused of treason and other heinous offences because they were against the welfare of the community of the realm and against the barons.<sup>145</sup>

In this respect, the 'welfare' of the commons was seen as highly significant. This official information correlates with monastic ideas in which Montfort's movement was seen to help the poor. William Rishanger, who succeeded Matthew Paris, seems to have maintained much the same view as his predecessor, though expressed with markedly less passion. Of Simon de Montfort's character:

Thus this magnificent man, Simon, an Earl, completed his efforts; he applied not only his own possessions but himself for the sake of the oppression of the poor, the assertion of justice, and the rights of the kingdom.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>144</sup> *DBM*, p. 323.

<sup>145</sup> Carpenter (trans.), 'English Peasants in Politics, 1258-1267', p. 3. 'Inponentes ipsi et hominibus suis seditiones et alia opprobria, eo quod fuerunt contra utilitatem communitatis regni et contra barones.' Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> There is no available English translation of Rishanger's chronicle. 'Sicque labores suos finivit vir ille magnificus, Simon, Comes; qui non solum sua, sed se, impendit pro oppressione pauperum, assertione justitiae, et regni jure'. *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani. Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani et quorundam anonymorum Chronica et annales regnantibus Henrico tertio et Edwardo primo*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, p. 36.

This statement is very significant for the study of the outlaw, considering Robin Hood was later placed in this time. Rishanger was writing some thirty years later, in the period of repression following the death of Montfort. He confirms that Montfort was something of a figure for the masses. In a way, Montfort was their representative. It seems these masses had no-one else to represent their cause other than the surviving outlawed vestiges of Montfort's army. Rishanger's colleague, the anonymous chronicler at St Albans, wrote that Earl Simon 'gave up not only his property, but also his person, to defend the poor from oppression, and for the maintenance of justice and the rights of the kingdom.'<sup>147</sup> He mentioned a prophecy of Robert Grosseteste, in which that bishop placed his hand on the head of Montfort's eldest son and stated: 'My well-beloved child, both thou and thy father shall die on one day, and by one kind of death; but it will be in the cause of justice and truth.'<sup>148</sup> This almost divine cause did not necessarily die with Montfort. The memories remained, and rebel armies and their sympathisers could take to the hills and bushes, and become forest outlaws. The memories helped foster a tradition. Montfort's rebellion had apparently aimed at helping the poor. This period would later be remembered as one in which a heroic outlaw emerged called Robin Hood.

## **The lost cause**

Montfort's followers were disinherited after the battle at Evesham in 1265. The St Albans chronicler claims that a parliament was convoked by Henry at Westminster to reward his allies. In addition, the defeated rebels seem to have held their own 'parliament': 'the disinherited parties thereupon assembled together, and indulged in pillage and incendiarism in all directions.'<sup>149</sup> Even after the death of Simon, his followers: 'carried on the hopeless struggle with a reckless and desperate courage behind the mighty defences of Kenilworth and in the pathless swamps of the Fen country'.<sup>150</sup> Forced disinheritance of those who had fought the king is recorded in the *Chronica Buriensis*, of the monastery of Bury St Edmunds (St Edmundsbury). This is a major contemporary source for the adventures of the disinherited followers of Simon de Montfort. John de Taxter was the most famous of its chroniclers. He worked on the

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<sup>147</sup> Paris (trans. Giles), 3: 355.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>150</sup> Treharne, 'The Significance of the Baronial Reform Movement: 1258-1267', p. 51.

chronicle until 1265, when it was taken over by an apparently unknown monk, ‘at least as competent’ who continued it until the year 1295.<sup>151</sup> Taxter himself wrote of events not too long after they occurred, as suggested by a vivid description of the rains following the aftermath of the battle of Evesham.<sup>152</sup> The *Chronica Buriensis* is also a useful source as its home town, Bury St Edmunds, was used as an outpost, both by the disinherited and the royalists. In examining this chronicle, we are able to follow the actions of the rebel party.

The author of the *Chronica Buriensis* tells us that many of the disinherited hid in their town, Bury St Edmunds, in 1266.<sup>153</sup> From there they conducted an unsuccessful raid on the town of Lynn during Easter. The chronicler states that by the vigil of Pentecost, the disinherited had collected in the town of Chesterfield, and were resting when they were set upon by the king’s men. Attacked unawares, they inflicted great casualties and the rest managed to flee, albeit somewhat poorer, for ‘many spoils’ was taken.<sup>154</sup> On 22 May 1266, William de Valence, the King’s brother, as well as Earl John de Warenne, arrived at Bury St Edmunds. He summoned the abbot and burgesses, and accused them of facilitating the ‘King’s enemies’, who had been able to sell their plundered goods in the town without obstruction.<sup>155</sup> To preserve the liberty of those involved, two hundred marks were immediately paid. These were to be followed by a further one hundred pounds. The chronicler states that those disinherited who escaped collected together in the woods (*nemora*). They were more dangerous to encounter than ‘she-bears whose cubs had been taken’, and they ‘seized everything from everywhere, which they saw as useful’.<sup>156</sup> This is the most significant period of outlaw activity in the entire chronicle.

The *Chronica Buriensis* does not mention any names of less famous outlaws, but two historical outlaws from the 1260s were Adam Gordun and Roger Godberd. As will be pointed out in a subsequent chapter, the chronicled description of an alleged encounter with the king, ascribed to Gordun’s fame, seems to have found its way into the late medieval *Gest of Robyn Hode*, told as if it had happened to ‘Robin’. Gordun’s name was forgotten by then but the tale endured. Godberd was another famous outlaw of the time.

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<sup>151</sup> V. H. Galbraith, ‘The St. Edmundsbury Chronicle, 1296-1301’, *The English Historical Review*, 58, 229 (Jan. 1943), 51-78, p. 53.

<sup>152</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: c.500-1300*, p. 396.

<sup>153</sup> *Chron. Bur.*, p. 34.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

Like Gordun, he had been a follower of Montfort.<sup>157</sup> This was one reason behind their outlawry. Godberd's historical location near Sherwood and fighting with the sheriff certainly raise eyebrows in terms of possible association with later Robin Hood. Like the tale regarding Gordun, stories of Godberd may have blended with other outlaw legends, because they were popular.<sup>158</sup>

## The Isle of Ely as a redoubt

The chronicler of Bury St Edmunds goes on to say that those who had remained hidden in the woods invaded the Isle of Ely on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1266. This bastion in the midst of swamps had not been properly defended.<sup>159</sup> The outlaws then ravaged the surrounding countryside, and took Norwich on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, apparently capturing one hundred and forty wagons, laden with goods.<sup>160</sup> The St Albans chronicler tells a similar story but does not mention that the rebels who occupied the Isle of Ely came out of the woods.<sup>161</sup>

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 1267, King Henry arrived at St Edmundsbury.<sup>162</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup>, the papal legate Ottobono arrived, and excommunicated the disinherited, giving them fifteen days to submit. By offer of reconciliation, pardoned rebels could buy back their holdings, if they paid the king, within three years, the value of the land for a seven year period, otherwise the baron would be forever disinherited. A further clause in this, angered the outlawed, the Earl of Gloucester, Gilbert de Clare.<sup>163</sup> Depending on their level of involvement, barons would have to wait between one and seven years to be granted full rights to their lands.<sup>164</sup> Unhappy with the terms, the war dragged on into 1267. The barons continued their defiance, and the king besieged the Isle of Ely for the duration of lent.<sup>165</sup> The royal forces were evidently unwilling to attack through the swamps which had apparently swallowed some of King William's army two centuries before, when that

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<sup>157</sup> Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, p. 195.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>159</sup> *Chron. Bur.*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>161</sup> Paris (trans. Giles.), 3: 361.

<sup>162</sup> Chronicles disagree on the exact dates. These dates are those provided in the *Chronica Buriensis*.

<sup>163</sup> Clive H Knowles, 'Clare, Gilbert de, seventh earl of Gloucester and sixth earl of Hertford (1243–1295)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the earliest times to the year 2000*; eds. B. Harrison, H. C. G. Matthew, Oxford 2004, online ed., <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5438>, accessed 8/2/13.

<sup>164</sup> *Chron. Bur.*, p. 36.

<sup>165</sup> *Chron. Bur.*, p. 37.

king had attempted to defeat English rebels. Henry was even forced to lift the siege on 9 April 1267 as Earl Simon the Younger had seized London, ‘supported by its citizens’.<sup>166</sup>

An attempt to remove the deadlock, the Dictum of Kenilworth, originally propounded on 30 October 1266 by royalist forces, was initially popular with neither side.<sup>167</sup> It was, however, finally officially instituted. It allowed, in clause five, with exceptions, a complete pardon for all involved.<sup>168</sup> It allowed the restitution of the inheritances by the cumbersome payment system mentioned earlier. An effect of the dictum was that it ‘transferred the civil war from the battle field to the law courts’.<sup>169</sup> On 11 July, Prince Edward entered the Isle of Ely, and accepted the surrender of the defenders.<sup>170</sup> By later July 1267, most of the disinherited had accepted the terms.<sup>171</sup>

What is important about all this is that the rebel nobles had had a precedent for their resistance at Ely. This would perhaps allow the events of 1266 and the resistance at Ely to become linked into the mythology surrounding outlaw myth for future generations. The resistance on the isle already had a deep significance for memories of outlaw activity. Hereward the Wake (*fl.*1070-1071) was a Saxon nobleman who in his time furiously resisted the Normans. He too had retreated to the Isle of Ely for a time to continue his resistance.<sup>172</sup> He was a popular outlaw hero and plot elements of the romantic *Gesta Herewardi* (Deeds of Hereward), written in Latin, French and English, would, by the dissemination of popular adventures and the passage of time, ‘remain vital until the later Middle Ages’.<sup>173</sup> People aware of this legend may have compared the outlaws of Ely of the 1260s with those of the legendary traditions then active.

Eventually, the defenders of the Isle of Ely would end up having to pay the redemption of five years’ annual value in order to reclaim their lands.<sup>174</sup> Clause twenty-six of the Dictum states that ‘laymen’, who spread sedition and supported the rebels, should pay twice the annual value, and clause twenty-seven states that the ‘powerless’ (*impotentēs*) or those coerced to battle or plunder by fear, but who otherwise remained in

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>167</sup> *DBM.*, p. 57.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 320-1.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>170</sup> *Chron. Bur.*, p. 39

<sup>171</sup> *DBM.*, p. 60.

<sup>172</sup> David Roffle, ‘Hereward the Wake’, *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13074>, accessed 9/3/13.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *DBM.*, p. 325.

their homes, should pay one year's value. It has been mentioned that stories about the miracles of Montfort were suppressed. This suppression was an official clause of the dictum. Clause eight states that under pain of corporal punishment: '...vain and fatuous miracles told about him by others should not be related by any lips'.<sup>175</sup> Perhaps this was successful. Ideas of a saintly Simon de Montfort are lost. Nevertheless, he did become the subject of later songs. Edward II's household in September 1322 was entertained by the singing of Alice of Whorlton, who told tales of Montfort: presumably heroic tales, but they could have been disparaging.<sup>176</sup> Montfort would not become the stuff of ballad legend. Ideas of corrupt sheriffs and the battles around Nottingham in the 1260s seemingly did. Since the attacks on Nottingham were led by men who had flocked to Montfort's cause (led by Roger Godberd), perhaps it was thought that they too shared a 'Montfortian' vision of England.

## Conclusions

For a decade prior to the revolution of 1258, the people of England languished under an uncharacteristic oppression. They had endured years of shrieval inefficiency and tyranny. Maddicott's findings on the difficulty of the sheriff's job are supported by readings of Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*, which indicate the sheriff was ruthless in his dealings. The famine of 1258 may have helped the people to secretly welcome the revolution, with its treasonous political changes. The barons' 'Ordinance of Sheriffs' related directly to their lives in a time of intense hardship. Carpenter's discovery of the extent and reasons for the hardship helps to illustrate the troubles which would have afflicted the commons in the years preceding revolution.

The rebellion against foreigners and also against a corrupt system resonates with earlier tales regarding Robert of Thwing, while introducing new ideas of the sheriff into the mix. In 1265, William Rishanger wrote a eulogy for Montfort, calling him a man who had 'laboured for the oppressed poor'.<sup>177</sup> Many dreams and visions for a future England would come to an end with his defeat. All who had opposed the king were deemed

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<sup>175</sup> 'et mirabilia de eo uana et fatua ab aliquibus relata nullis unquam labiis proferantur'; clause 8, in *DBM*, p. 322.

<sup>176</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, p. 112.

<sup>177</sup> *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani. Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani et quorundam anonymorum Chronica et annales regnantibus Henrico tertio et Edwardo primo*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, p. 36.

outlaws until they were reconciled by fiscal payment according to the Dictum of Kenilworth. The lost legacy of the future vision of a fairer England therefore fell into the hands of those remnant rebels—men who were essentially outlaws who had fled to the forests and to the Isle of Ely, which was a traditional bastion of English resistance. The recorded veneration and sainthood of Simon de Montfort shows there was a popular element to the cause following defeat. The outlaws and disinherited would live on after Simon's death; Roger of Godberd and his men in the Sherwood region, as well as fighting in the forests, while the king's men and sheriffs returned to their old places. In such a world people could only dream of what might have been.

## Chapter 5      Early stories about heroic outlaws

The key theme and argument in this chapter is change. There were changes during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in the way audiences received stories about heroic rebels or outlaws. The audience changes were not large enough to destroy the thirteenth-century inspired plots which found their way into fifteenth-century ballads, but their origins became very much obscured.

Stories about ‘Robert Hod’ clearly evolved before they could be recorded in writing, even during the thirteenth century. We know that thirteenth-century England was marred not just by the dramatic robberies of 1231, but by the social chaos of the baronial wars and other conflicts. In the previous chapter it has been shown that late thirteenth-century rebel noblemen may have sought to deliver some benefit to the poor, perhaps in exchange for military support for the baronial conflict of the 1260s. This mantra, and others like it, may have assisted in making various rebel outlaws the recipients of enduring affection, in terms of heroic tales about them. During the early fourteenth century, tales of high adventure seem to have been about the noble outlaws of the previous century. A change however in the nature of the popular hero was underway, and this may have been partly based upon a shifting political situation in England. Central government had strengthened and monarchs became more respected in their own time, than John and Henry III had been. The old world was gone. Edward I is celebrated in the *Political Songs* collected by Thomas Wright, as Henry III and John never were.<sup>1</sup> As monarchs became popular, the outlaw tale in which John was portrayed as a bad king changed. In the later Robin Hood stories, the king becomes a highly respected figure. This is one of many changes between the earlier romances and later ballads. It was suggested in the first chapter that the image of Robin Hood evolved long before his appearance in the extant ballads. Understanding the evolutionary trends helps to explain why the ballads, described in the next chapter, have certain points of view towards

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Wright (ed.), *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England, from the reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Peter Coss, Cambridge 1996, p. 128.

aspects of hierarchy which might relate to old political situations. This chapter argues that profound changes took place in the image of the outlaw, between the earlier fourteenth-century outlaw tales and the fifteenth century, when Robin Hood stories were first recorded.

In the thirteenth century, Latin chroniclers lauded certain stories about heroic outlaw-like figures. In this earlier tradition, epitomised by Matthew Paris, a heroic rebel was lauded by certain educated classes despite promoting violence, because of polarisation within that elite between those with pro-English and pro-foreign opinions. Later on this was not the case. In fact, from after the first truly definitive mention of Robin Hood in the later 1300s, there are subtle criticisms made about him, including several in fifteenth-century English and Latin chronicles, which also criticise rebel participants in the civil war of the 1260s. These end after about the 1460s, when a new ballad form of Robin Hood story written for a different audience, appears. There is a long pattern of criticism which ends in the closing decades of the middle ages.

One of several implications is that there seem to be many developing sets of outlaw traditions relating to Robin Hood among the masses, some of which are seen as crude by others. Therefore there may have been many different traditions once available, for later writers to draw upon. This great shift from the rebel as a romantic hero to a petty villain, (or hero of peasants) affected the Robin Hood story considerably. We know that Robin Hood stories in their ultimate form are mixed with those of other heroes. In the fourteenth century, it is suggested that the lost rhymes may have been very like the form of tale found as the *Tale of Gamelyn*, a fourteenth-century tale which exceeds later ballads in its violence and hatred of officialdom. The chronicler Walter Bower only likes one Robin Hood rhyme. The writer William Langland simply associates such rhymes with sloth. One manuscript of Wyntoun seems to disparage Robin, something which has never been pointed out. Finally a recently discovered English manuscript claims Robin 'infested' Sherwood: the final criticism. Robin Hood was simply not liked. Stories about him must have changed, for the audience changed. A stratum of elite who supported Simon de Montfort in the wars was gone forever. The elite no longer liked the idea of Robin Hood, if they ever did, during and after that war of the 1260s.

There were historical mechanisms at work causing changes of perception as to who the primary heroic figure should be. We know that the latter half of the fourteenth century was defined by a major revolt amongst the peasantry. Some peasants sought to

remove all nobles from power, save for the king, who was respected. This is quite the reverse of the situation in the 1260s in which barons were sometimes perceived as assisting peasants to win freedom against their monarch. In *Piers Plowman*, written by William Langland in the 1370s, just before the Peasants' Revolt, a character called 'Sloth', a priest, refers to popular songs about two celebrated outlaws:

*I kan noght parfityly my Paternoster as the preest syngeth,  
But I kan ryms of Robin Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre,  
Ac neither of Owre Lorde ne of Owre Lady the leeste that evere was maked.*<sup>2</sup>

No 'ryms' or ballads survive about Randolf (or Ranulf), of Chester, while those of Robin Hood are first recorded in ballads from the late fifteenth century. What was the language of the 'ryms'? 'Ryms' may certainly have been told in English as it was the main vernacular language.<sup>3</sup> Langland himself is part of the alliterative tradition. He liked to use native English words. English was not however the only vernacular and rhymes in the thirteenth century are known to have been written down in French.<sup>4</sup> Stories regarding the Earl of Chester found their way into the Old French prose outlaw romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, as this chapter argues.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, this suggests independent tales of the Earl of Chester were also told or written in French, but when those heroic rebel tales were written down for the upper classes, they became moribund. In the hands of the flexible popular rhymer, or the balladeer, older materials would continue to develop. Scraps heard by peasants based upon all sorts of heroic themes may have been made into rhymes. For the elite, French would lose favour, and the extant Robin Hood rhymes of the fifteenth century, are all in English. There may have been some rhymes in English in the time of the Peasants' Revolt, though they may have also begun earlier in French, in the thirteenth century. We may never know. We do know that a fusion of themes and therefore a confusion of origins seems to have occurred.

Profound political changes occurred which altered perception of an earlier heroic tradition. The question arises of what relationship there may have been between the

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<sup>2</sup> William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-text Based on the Trinity College Cambridge MS B. 15. 17*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London 1995, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Scanlon, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, Cambridge 2009, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, p. 687.

‘ryms’, and the political unrest that swept through England in 1381. Did the ‘ryms’ of Ranulf of Chester disappear because they belonged to an earlier age, no longer relevant to a generation hostile to noble privilege or were they recited for the sake of the oppressed peasant? In 1377, the nobles were seen by many as the oppressors. By contrast, in the 1260s, it had been rebel barons who were thought by St Albans Chronicler, William Rishanger, to have been fighting to counter ‘the oppression of the poor’ (*oppressione pauperum*).<sup>6</sup> Alongside the image of a more popular Robin Hood, traces remain of earlier traditions designed for different audiences. There may have been a ‘noble’ archetype which contributed to later legend. It is an interesting fact that almost every celebrated popular outlaw based upon a thirteenth-century archetype was a heroic rebel who was at least a member of the gentry. The name ‘Robert Hod’, was also used in the thirteenth century, so there may have been legends told with a similar ‘romantic’ format. There are in fact traces of an elite courtly tradition, interpreted by modern scholars as the result of ‘gentrification’ (because it seems to elevate Robin’s social position) which shall be tackled in later chapters. Recollection of a high-born outlaw figure may have been unacceptable to some peasant ears in 1381. This is rationalised because there was a gradual shift away from respect awarded to the nobleman outlaw, towards the outlaw without land to his name, who sympathised with the condition of the peasant.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of his origins, ‘Robin Hood’ sounds a lot less a figure of the establishment than ‘Ranulf, Earl of Chester’, and it is the tales of Robin Hood rather than the earl tales, which have survived. The elite French and Latin tales were done away with and popular English tales took their place. At the same time the elite despised the new English rhymes of the commons. The change in language itself and the class stratification this represents is a sign of the development of an alternate set of traditions to what had come earlier. Robin Hood seems to have lost the sympathy of the elite, becoming part of a different set of traditions in the 1400s, which perhaps criticised the baron and landowner in general, rather than more selectively as in the thirteenth century. This means the stories had to change.

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<sup>6</sup> *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani. Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani et quorundam anonymorum Chronica et annales regnantibus henrico tertio et edwardo primo*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, London 1865, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, p. 79.

Oral traditions about the outlaw in the Middle Ages were fluid and dynamic. As times changed, and political circumstance altered, stories had to evolve to retain their popularity and relevance, or vanish. Prior to the late fifteenth-century publication of the first Robin Hood ballads, in which Robin is lauded, there is evidence for the presence of a rather different tradition which may have been more violent than that which survives. Literate people, who seem to have felt that Robin was based upon a historical archetype, considered that whilst Robin was lauded by the masses, he was perhaps not worthy of it. This sheds light on the earlier unknown traditions of Robin Hood. This is particularly evident in the *Scotichronicon* of Walter Bower, written perhaps ten years before the first extant Robin Hood ballad. He claimed in c.1440, that it was the *stolidum vulgus* (foolish commons), who celebrated Robin as a hero, and considered only one story to be worthy of note, which he transcribed in his own way. This raises the implication that the ballads which do survive, from the latter half of the fifteenth century may be a sanitised form of the popular tradition, designed for the gentry and yeomen. The *Gest of Robyn Hode*, most prominent of the early ballads, dating from c.1500, is addressed to ‘gentilmen’. In this ballad, Robin orders his men to attack bishops and archbishops. He says they must be beaten and bound.<sup>8</sup> It sounds a little like the treatment meted out in the violent *Tale of Gamelyn*, c.1350, which shall be investigated. Though we cannot be sure, details of this may have proven too shocking for a refined audience for, surprisingly, nothing further of this is heard in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, or any other Robin Hood ballad from the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. Robin simply has no interest in bishops and archbishops, despite his angry statement.

Rhymes of the fourteenth century, which may have been told in English, or the English ballads of the fifteenth, did not have to be accurate to an earlier form. They merely had to entertain their target audience. Images of the outlaw certainly evolved considerably after the thirteenth century. These were based on several historical precedents and archetypes, mixed with imagination. Their content was regulated to match the tastes of the audience, which shifted so much, that the elite or middle-class audience went from a healthy disrespect for Robin Hood ideas, towards a great love for them.

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<sup>8</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 92.

There is a problem over the unknown early audience of the Robin Hood stories, before they appeared in ballad form. Most of the study of the early Robin Hood tradition, throughout history, has centred on debating the idea that events of the ballads, in particular *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, contain ideas which can be related right back to an earlier tradition.

Mentioned in the first chapter was a debate which related to two ground-breaking articles, published in 1958 by Rodney Hilton and in 1960 by James Holt, which offer opposing interpretations regarding the audience of the early ballads of Robin Hood. Hilton considered the outlaw ballads of the fifteenth century, which are based upon an earlier oral tradition, to be the product of a peasant tradition, with the hero as a peasant.<sup>9</sup> Holt considered the ballads were addressed to an aristocratic audience.<sup>10</sup> Yet there also existed *rymes* of Robin Hood, as mentioned in *Piers Plowman* which would have had a more vernacular audience. The surviving ballads may reflect more than one type of earlier tradition.

As mentioned in the opening chapter, significant new evidence was uncovered in 1984 by David Crook. His argument, supported by James Holt, is that Robin Hood was mentioned in 1262 by a scribe who attached the outlaw's name to a criminal formerly called William son of Robert le Fevere.<sup>11</sup> This suggests the name was already somewhat famous in that time.<sup>12</sup> If true, the two-hundred year discrepancy between the date of that early mention and the appearance of the early ballads of the fifteenth century, suggests the possibility of earlier and perhaps different forms of the stories having developed in the intervening period. These may have been different to both the ballads and the pre-Peasant Revolt era *rymes* of *Piers Plowman*. This possibility allows us to envisage an early form of outlaw myth, which relates to surviving stories, and track the evolving format of the outlaw tale.

We know from previous chapters that Matthew Paris of the thirteenth century had no problem with attacking greedy sheriffs or lauding figures who attacked churchmen. We will discuss the suggestion that Robin was sometimes looked on with disdain in the

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<sup>9</sup> R. H. Hilton, 'The Origins of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 14 (Nov. 1958), 30-44.

<sup>10</sup> J. C. Holt, 'The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 18 (Nov. 1960), 89-107.

<sup>11</sup> David Crook, 'Some Further Evidence concerning the Dating of the Origins of the Legend of Robin Hood', *The English Historical Review*, 99, 392 (Jul 1984), 530-4, p. 532.

<sup>12</sup> R. B. Dobson & J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Introduction to the English Outlaw*, London 1976, new ed. Bridgend 1997, p. xxx.

fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. There seems to have been an evolving myth from earlier times in which heroic rebels of the thirteenth century, perceived as chivalrous and just by the educated, were replaced by a different tradition, and a different audience. By the late fourteenth and early to mid fifteenth centuries, scorn was being poured upon memories of some of the 'newer' outlaws.

## **The heroic rebel**

Tales of thirteenth-century civil-war events etched harsh memories into the minds of subsequent generations. The heroic rebel, usually a nobleman outlaw, perhaps a popular figure of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, became the doer of 'justice' when times were trying. Grand stories regarding their purported exploits were written in the form of romances. The mythical wars of these characters were fought against corrupt kings. The archetype might be defined as, typically, a powerful military figure perceived as performing heroic deeds against an unpopular king, usually King John. In myth, the outlaw is strong enough to go unpunished for years, but he is not strong enough to topple the regime against which he fights. There is thus a tragic element to his story. Noble outlaws typically exhibit some form of loyalty. Although they are ruthless, they exhibit chivalry to a level usually exceeding that of the representatives of the incumbent king against whom the battle is waged. Justice, not blind benevolence, is dispensed, and the natural order, subverted for years by cupidity, is finally put right. Certain attributes of two of these heroic outlaw rebels whose stories originated in the thirteenth century, figure strongly in the myths about Robin Hood. A description of their stories belongs in this chapter because their stories survive from the fourteenth century, about the time the *Gest of Robyn Hode* was composed. They are used here to illustrate the ultimate changes which would occur in the celebrated outlaw tradition.

## **Fouke Fitz Warin, Eustache the Monk**

*Fouke le Fitz Waryn* is a romance written in French about a series of historical earls of the Welsh march. Very significantly, it was also an oral tradition, and in this form may have mixed with stories about Robin Hood. Robin may have acquired some early gentrification from ideas relating to Fouke, or other ideas. The romance focuses around

the purported life of a heroic figure, Fouke Fitz Warin III, a prominent baron in the time of King John. It was composed as early as 1258-65.<sup>13</sup> It is a French tale which survives in works which are dated to c.1325-40.<sup>14</sup> It was also available in an English version, known to John Leland in the sixteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Containing verse fragments, it is like an ancestral romance, concerning itself largely with recounting Fouke's deeds in opposing King John during the civil war, but is also very much like an outlaw tale. Rock calls it a 'legalistic romance of the outlaw type'. Although written in Old French, it is a characteristically English sort of outlaw tale which does not exist on the continent.<sup>16</sup> The rendition of the tale which survives has long been demonstrated to be historically unreliable.<sup>17</sup> It does, however, share some similarities to reality. In the romance, after battling the king's men, Fouke finally secures a pardon from John. This may be based upon Fouke's real-life pardon of 1203, where he and forty of his men, 'who had assisted him in his outlawry' were pardoned.<sup>18</sup>

The main hero is based upon the historical Fouke Fitz Warin III, who historically took the barons' side in the conflict. Fouke III was a figure who resisted the impetus of John, and strove to rectify injustice done to his own person, with no mention of Magna Carta in the romance. This is testament to the idea, developed throughout this work, that politics in relation to culture was only relevant in the formative phase of the development of outlaw legends. Later listeners wouldn't understand the details and didn't need to.

The romance contains the characteristic elements of family romance. As enunciated by Keen and Ohlgren: '1) the hero is the founder of the family; 2) he is exiled to foreign lands; 3) he undertakes fantastic adventures, such as fighting a dragon; 4) he is reconciled to the king in the end and reclaims his inheritance; 5) since genealogy is important, his marriage and relations are carefully recounted; and 6) he is buried in a monastery that he founded.'<sup>19</sup> Painter considered that it was unlikely that the tale was composed by someone with access to family information. Rather, it was based upon

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<sup>13</sup> Frederick Suppe, 'Fitzwarine family', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the earliest times to the year 2000*; B. Harrison, H. C. G. Matthew (eds.), Updated ed., Oxford 2004, online ed., <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45482>, accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>14</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 687.

<sup>15</sup> R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, London 1952, p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine A. Rock., 'Fouke le Fitz Waryn and King John: Rebellion and Reconciliation', Alexander L. Kaufman, (ed.), *British Outlaws of Literature and History*, Jefferson 2011, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Sidney Painter, 'The Sources of Fouke Fitz Warin', *Modern Language Notes*, 50, 1 (Jan. 1935), 13-5, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine A. Rock., p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 688.

popular Shropshire legends, and dressed up as a romance.<sup>20</sup> Presumably, popular tales continued to be told in English, though the nobles and gentry preferred French for their romances. There seem to have been two audiences for the tales of Fouke. One set of tales may have circulated for a time among the general populace, while the other was written down in French for literate consumption in the style of the family romance. This splitting of traditions according to language may have extended to early ideas of Robin Hood.

As evidence that the surviving work is not a true family history, Painter showed that the author committed a litany of errors. He misnamed the husband of Sybil, a sister of the wife of Fouke II.<sup>21</sup> He also provided the name of an earl marshal who never existed.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that although the piece took the purport of a family history, composed at the behest of the family, it was in fact based upon a fusion of popular ideas and educated guesswork. Even an earl might have been lauded and celebrated by the masses as an outlaw-type figure. This could theoretically have been carried forward into later oral tradition, had the adventures been sufficiently entertaining.

There are shifts in the text which seem to indicate it was compiled from different sources, such as a skilful comedy prose, or play, which has been added into the 'romance'. Part of the romance is a tale recounting John de Rampayne, a friend of Fouke, who paints himself black and ingratiates himself into John's presence as an 'Ethiopian'. King John starts a conversation:

'What do they say of me in foreign realms?' 'Sire', said he, 'you are the most renowned King in the whole of Christendom. It is your great renown that explains my visit to your court.' 'Sir' said the King, 'you are very welcome'. John thanked him briefly, then added quietly that the King was renowned more for his wickedness than his goodness. Of course the King did not hear the last remark.<sup>23</sup>

The last two sentences are a cumbersome addition to the romance. They do not fit the prevailing flow of the preceding direct remarks, which are in the first person. The off-hand remarks seem abrupt and condensed, and the entire fragment seems as if it were based upon a play of some sort: perhaps for elite reception. An originally witty flow, in

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<sup>20</sup> Painter, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 706.

which statements were perhaps more thoughtfully laid out, may have been lost. Perhaps there was another comedy of some form, which may have in fact originally related to an encounter between King John and a jester—the ‘Ethiopian’. ‘John de Rampayne’ is earlier described as ‘a fairly skilful musician and juggler’.<sup>24</sup> The broader romance is in no way a comedy and furthermore, no comedy of Fouke is extant. This comedic part may be the remnant of an oral tradition, a story told, or performed as entertainment, even for the masses.

The mythical tales of Eustache the Monk became famous in the years after the First Barons’ War in the thirteenth-century romance *Wistasse li Moine*. Historically this mythical character was based upon a French monk, Eustache Busket, who lived c.1170-1217. He was a son of the peer of the Boulonnaise province. Historically, his father was killed and Eustache spent some time revenging himself on the Count of Boulogne. He thereafter became a pirate of the English Channel. After 1205, he was a mercenary sea captain in the service of King John. In 1212 there occurred a war between John and the French. Eustache was captured when his ship was surrounded and boarded by the English, and he was beheaded.<sup>25</sup> In legend, he is something of a magician, and a master of disguise.<sup>26</sup> Maurice Keen described Eustache’s reputation thus: ‘In legend he takes on the combined roles of Fouke, Friar Tuck and John de Rampayne.’<sup>27</sup> Like Fouke Fitz Warin, he was, in myth, seen as a noble outlaw celebrated for his deeds in a great war between barons and king. This theme just wasn’t relevant after the Peasants’ Revolt.

## **The Ryms of Ranulf, Earl of Chester**

We might know of the extant tales of Eustache and Fouke, based upon historical archetypes of the early thirteenth century, but we do not know the romances or ‘ryms’ dedicated to another nobleman of that same time. He was Ranulf, Earl of Chester, c.1172-1232. It was Langland’s late fourteenth-century character, *Sloth*, who knew rather well the ‘ryms of Robin Hood, and Randolf, Earl of Chester’.<sup>28</sup> Although we do not have any ‘ryms’ of Ranulf, several tales regarding his purported deeds appear to have

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 705.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 671.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 671-2.

<sup>27</sup> Keen, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> Langland, p. 82.

survived. It is known that perhaps once-popular stories are to be found in the romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. In legendary terms, despite being an enemy of the barons and friend of King John, Ranulf is presented in that romance as highly chivalrous and trustworthy. He is presented as a hero. He looks after Fouke's sick brother after a battle, despite being his political enemy.<sup>29</sup>

Other stories about Ranulf belong to a mythical realm, including fighting a giant in Ireland. Things would change. The oral tradition regarding people like Ranulf and Fouke was perhaps less relevant to an audience in the later fourteenth century, more concerned with injustices towards the poor. It was perhaps impossible to fully turn Ranulf or Fouke into heroes suitable for peasants, as these outlaws were themselves earls, in myth and history, and were thus some distance away from the peasant's situation. Since Ranulf is mentioned alongside Robin in *Piers Plowman*, one wonders if early stories of Robin Hood did not also start as romances or comedies, before being altered for peasant consumption by the time of the Peasants' Revolt. Stephen Knight considers that the most comprehensive of the Robin Hood ballads, the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, of c.1500, contains 'romance aspirations'.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the *Tale of Gamelyn*, c.1350, which we shall presently get to, does seem to have been a romance of some sort, but was perhaps refined for popular consumption. At some stage storytellers changed the noble outlaw tradition. They did away with the older names of the outlaw earls and knights. They replaced the names with Robin Hood. Perceptions of the law of *Trayllebaston* may have assisted in this. A criticism of the law appears to celebrate the outlaw as a common man unjustly targeted, perhaps for the first time.

### **'Outlaw's Song of Trailbaston'**

The 'law of Trayllebaston', was a punitive set of regulations imposed in 1305, amid wartime conditions.<sup>31</sup> Ironically it was intended as a law aimed at providing greater justice for the disadvantaged. It is written about in a work of an anonymous Westminster monk, long referred to, erroneously, as 'Matthew of Westminster', who perhaps wrote of

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<sup>29</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 715.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, Oxford 1994, p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Harding, ed., "Early trailbaston proceedings from the Lincoln roll of 1305", 144-68, in R. F. Hunnisett and J. B. Post, eds., *Medieval Legal Records Edited in Memory of C. A. F. Meekings*, London 1978, p. 147.

events up until the year 1308.<sup>32</sup> The Westminster monks, who wrote of the law of Trayllebaston, believed that it should have targeted petty tyrants: ‘against all who intrude into the property of others, and who, presuming on the fear of owners who complained, alienated their estates and lands, making them the property of more powerful persons.’<sup>33</sup> According to the Westminster chronicler, its aim was to target those who had possibly committed assault and other offences against their underlings, disinheriting them from their properties as punishment.<sup>34</sup> The law seems to have been carried out to unreasonable excess however:

...Against all such infringers of peace, and ravishers, and incendiaries, and murderers, and opposers, and false judges, different justiciaries are sent throughout England, by this commission, to exact vengeance among the poor people, and severely to reprove the rich. And by this commission, many were executed, many were found guilty, and a few were found not guilty. So rigidly did the justice of this coercion proceed, that the father did not spare his own son, but reprovved and chastised him. And many, being terrified and alarmed, of their own accord went into banishment, and the treasury prospered in consequence of their flight, and the redemption of themselves by money.<sup>35</sup>

The law, enacted in spring 1305, was problematic. It seems to have been associated with a perception that innocent people could be potentially victimised and disinherited, even for something as minor as chastising an apprentice. This is to be seen in the ‘Outlaws’ Song of Trailbaston’, edited by Thomas Wright from an Anglo-Norman MS (Harley 2253). This manuscript contains several other poems criticising law courts and taxes.<sup>36</sup> Dating from the end of the reign of Edward I (1272-1307), the narrator claims to have written the song in a forest and to have left it for a traveller to pick up. Apparently, the song found popularity in literary circles and law courts.<sup>37</sup> The author seems to have been

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<sup>32</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England: c.500-1300*, New York 1974, p. 378.

<sup>33</sup> *The Flowers of History, especially such as relate to the affairs of Britain. From the beginning of the world to the year 1307. Collected by Matthew of Westminster...* ed. trans. C. D. Yonge, 2 vols. 1853, vol. 2, p. 557.

<sup>34</sup> *MW (trans.)*, 2 : 577.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Ohlgren (ed.), *Medieval outlaws: twelve tales in modern English translation*, West Lafayette 2005, p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Hilton, p. 38.

quite informed regarding legal procedures.<sup>38</sup> Due to its relevance to the outlaw story, Dobson and Taylor even include sections of it in their *Rymes of Robyn Hood*. When it was written, stories about outlaws in Sherwood would have been around, and would have already started to mix with vestiges of the first stories about Robin Hood. The unpopular law was against those who trespassed in game parks (potential poachers or outlaws), and it was even the intention of the author to himself become an outlaw:

Sire, if I wished to chastise my lad,  
 with a slap or two, to amend him,  
 he will ask a bill against me, causing me to be arrested,  
 and to give a great ransom before I escape from prison.  
 Forty shillings they take for my ransom,  
 and the sheriff comes for his fee  
 that he may not put me in deep prison.  
 Now consider, lords, is this right?  
 For this cause I will keep myself among the woods, in the beautiful shade,  
 where there is no falseness and no bad law,  
 in the wood of Beauregard, where the jay flies,  
 and where the nightingale sings always without ceasing.<sup>39</sup>

At this stage, the unfairly targeted author vows numerous acts of revenge against those responsible for his predicament.

He will become a robber who was never so before,—  
 who for fear of prison dare not come to peace,  
 it is necessary to have livelihood every day as it comes,  
 he who commenced this thing, undertook a great task...  
 You who are indicted, I advise you, come to me,  
 to the green wood of Beauregard, there where there is no plea,  
 except wild beast and beautiful shade;  
 for the common law is too much to be feared...  
 Therefore it is better to dwell with me in the wood,

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<sup>38</sup> *Political Songs*, p. xlvi.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-2.

than to lie cast in the bishop's prison.  
 Too much is the penance, and hard to suffer;  
 he who has the opportunity to select what is better,  
 is a fool if he does not make the choice...<sup>40</sup>

The poem is important, for it resonates with elements of later outlaw tradition. The sheriff is maintained as an enemy, as is the bishop. Both are potential enemies of a just kingdom in Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*, completed half a century earlier.

The poem speaks of disinheritance from judicial injustice and living in the forest as an outlaw. It also states that one only needs to be accused by a neighbour of knowing some archery, and one is accused of being a member of a company who go to shoot in the woods.<sup>41</sup> These relate to elements found in later stories of Robin Hood. We see the Anglo-Norman *vert boix*, Anglicised as *Greenewode*, in the Middle English of the outlaw ballads of the following century. This would become Robin Hood's place of refuge.<sup>42</sup> The *Song of Trailbaston* posits the idea of outlaws flocking to a forest location, not merely to escape injustice, but to become robbers, but ironically due to the law itself. This shows that some of the ideas behind the 'early' ballads of Robin Hood, which would arise later, were in existence two centuries before most of the early ballads would be written down. The elements were there, but they needed a suitable outlaw hero to make them come alive in ballad. The *Song of Trailbaston* may not have been an orally transmitted tale, but parts of it could have been, particularly considering that legends of Robin Hood, which contain very similar elements, may well have been available after c.1262 with the mention of William son of Robert le Fevere as a *Robehod*. Significantly the tale expresses sympathy for the life of the outlaw, by an educated person. This could mean that Robin Hood had an audience among the educated classes, in 1305. At the end of the last chapter it was mentioned that Simon de Montfort, who was condemned to be forgotten in the 1260s, was a character in performance before royalty in 1322. If Montfort, why not Robin Hood? Later chroniclers, perhaps mistaking Roger Godberd of Sherwood for Robin Hood, would place Robin and Montfort in the same time period. On the other hand, a name turns up: Gilbert Robynhod, in Sussex in 1296. This was a man of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 233-5.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Harding, p. 146.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 158.

little distinction. He was a commoner with the extremely unusual name of a popular outlaw, suggesting the masses were interested and may have been reciting their own stories. In addition to this speculation, Holt alternately considers he may have simply performed plays of Robin Hood, or his father was called Robert Hood.<sup>43</sup> There is more than one explanation and it's hard to say anything definitive with so little evidence about the nature of the early tradition.

The idea of men who were not noble, escaping to the 'greenwood' to escape injustice and become outlaws in a bucolic setting (in the style of later Robin Hood adventures) is one which found some traction at the beginning of the fourteenth century but relates to an earlier time. There are for instance notions of disinherited rebel outlaws hiding in forests from the landed gentry, in the 1260s. The *Song* seems to be associated with an evolution of the notion of the social position of the outlaw, in earlier ideas of which he was mainly the disinherited nobleman, such as Fouke Fitz Warin who had escaped to the forest, or Eustache the Monk. Even in his regular home, Fouke, as a marcher lord, was almost in the wilderness. The 'march' was considered land outside of the usual legal jurisdiction and its lords had correspondingly greater power over those within it. There was an implicit promise of royal non-interference in exchange for expanding English influence in difficult borderlands.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Fouke, we see a lord celebrated in later tradition, not for abusing his position, but as a sort of heroic figure, fighting a just guerrilla-style campaign against King John, who sought to interfere with Fouke's inheritance, by seizing his lands for another. Roger Godberd near Sherwood was a different type of outlaw.

Another development beyond the romantic theme is the notion of violent revenge enacted against the authorities. The author of the *Song of Trailbaston* actually wants to find the judges and break their backs and remove their tongues.<sup>45</sup> That is not seen in a typical medieval romance. It is the first time we see this idea highlighted in an 'outlaw tale'. We see it again over a generation later in the *Tale of Gamelyn*. It appears to be a tale made for common ears, and is based on a story of a knightly household.

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<sup>43</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Ralph Hanna, 'The Matter of Fulk: Romance and History in the Marches', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 110, 3 (July 2010), 338-9.

<sup>45</sup> *Political Songs*, p. 233.

## ***The Tale of Gamelyn, c.1350***

*The Tale of Gamelyn* is very different to the heroic outlaw romances of former times. It is the rhyming story of a son, Gamelyn, deprived of his inheritance. Unlike earlier tales, it tells of a breakdown in family relations.<sup>46</sup> It also describes Gamelyn's struggle, and ultimate vengeance against a corrupt sheriff, judge and jury.<sup>47</sup> Although *Gamelyn* has something of the form of a romance, the reader or listener is intended to take delight in Gamelyn's savage vengeance against figures of authority. Thus, the tale may have been addressed to a peasant audience. The unfairness of Gamelyn's situation suggests that the system is not working.

*Gamelyn* is the earliest of English outlaw ballads and seems to have been current in its present form in c.1350.<sup>48</sup> It is extant in twenty five early manuscripts.<sup>49</sup> Not only did it circulate prior to the Peasants' Revolt, but it is also told from the peasants' side. There is a moral. There is to be no mercy for members of the legal system. All representatives are to be executed.

Written in English, *The Tale of Gamelyn* is effectively the earliest extant outlaw tale in 'ballad' form. Gamelyn is as mysterious as 'Robin Hood'. There seems not to be any firm historical archetype around which the story might have been inspired. Rather than taking the standard ballad form of later times, it is written, as Keen observes, as a 'metrical romance, but there is nothing romantic about its tone or style.'<sup>50</sup> The tale of Gamelyn as it survives is perhaps a story in transition. It is moving from romance, to ballad. Most of the evidence for transition lies in the fact that the tale seems to be about a disinherited aristocrat, though one would hardly know it. The opening sequence shows that Gamelyn is the youngest son of a knight, 'Sir John of Boundes'.<sup>51</sup> Gamelyn is thus a member of the landed class, and thus the ballad is something of a family romance, except it is missing the romantic and chivalric details. Furthermore, in its surviving form, the ends of the lines rhyme with each other in succession. Is this then, one of the 'rymes'

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<sup>46</sup> T. S. Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, New York 2010, p. 141.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, pp. 194-219.

<sup>48</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> Keen, p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 194.

which were extant in 1377, and similar to those alluded to by Langland in *Piers Plowman*?

As it survives, the *Tale of Gamelyn* is not really a romance for the refined aristocratic household. It is more of a ribald rhyme. Gamelyn is the youngest of many sons. His father has decided to undermine convention and provide him with land upon his impending death from sickness. Thereafter, Gamelyn is deprived of his share of inheritance by John, an elder brother. He is tricked and imprisoned before he takes back his rights by force, and exacts revenge. As a youngest son, Gamelyn could not historically expect much in the way of landed inheritance, but his father nevertheless gave him parks with deer, and ‘fare okes’.<sup>52</sup> This makes Gamelyn sound a lot like a nobleman, but curiously, titles seem to be largely absent in the tale, except for Gamelyn’s one good brother and benefactor being called ‘Sir Ote’. As such Knight and Ohlgren state that the ballad is somewhat gentrified.<sup>53</sup> The tale resonates with the anti-shrieval sentiment found in later Robin Hood and represents a desire to see justice done by hanging all the members of the legal establishment after a ferocious struggle in which Gamelyn is the victor:

*The Iustice and the sherreve both honged hye,  
To weyven with the ropes and with the winde drye.  
And the twelve sisours (sorwe have that rekke!)  
Alle they were hanged faste by the nekke.*

The Justice and the sheriff both hanged high,  
To spin by the rope and desiccate in the breeze,  
And the twelve jurors (sorrow to those who care!)  
They were all hanged tightly by the neck.<sup>54</sup>

The whole legal apparatus is considered rotten. The justice and jurors belong to the court of the nobleman, so they must be done away with, that injustice can never again prevail. The tone is quite incendiary. Gamelyn is not required to act in the manner befitting of the earlier Ranulf of Chester, in order to be respected by the audience. He is permitted to be

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>54</sup> My translation, Ibid., p. 218.

merciless. Peasants and lesser gentry alike might have rapturously listened to the unusual details of not only a sheriff and judge being executed, but the corrupted jury as well. If fourteenth-century rhymes of Robin Hood were written in a similar style, this may go some way to explaining why Robin was initially disparaged by the educated elite, as will be demonstrated. In the tale, Gamelyn and his men are not even punished for their treasonable offences, but are forgiven by the king. Gamelyn and Sir Ote, his brother, are granted high office and Gamelyn is made chief justice of the 'free forest.'<sup>55</sup> Hilton noted that forgiveness by the king is something which seems to have been expected by members of Wat Tyler's revolt. Some perhaps saw their monarch, not as another nobleman, but the seat of justice on earth.<sup>56</sup>

*The king loved wel Sir Ote and made hym justise.*

*And after, the king made Gamelyn in est and in west,*

*The cheef justice of his free forest;*

*All his wight (brave) yonge men the king foryaf her gilt, (forgave their guilt).*

*And sithen in good office the king hath hem pilt (put).<sup>57</sup>*

The method in which Gamelyn seeks revenge is important because it demonstrates there is a significant break between the form of the tale of Gamelyn and that of the earlier heroic rebel. Keen considered that the tale of Gamelyn tells of the 'total corruption of justice and the law, and of the grasping and unscrupulous methods of the average landlord.'<sup>58</sup> Gone is chivalry, in the face of an intransigent and evil King John. Now the king becomes good, and his gentry-dominated legal system is to be considered evil. The situation is somewhat the reverse of the earlier romances against King John.

Gamelyn was made 'cheef justice' of the forest. The tradition of Gamelyn seems to have lost popularity after the fourteenth century, to be replaced with Robin Hood, who also seems to have been accorded some significant title of 'forester'. Almond and Pollard consider that the 'yeoman' title, found widely in Robin Hood may have referred to 'yeoman of the forest.'<sup>59</sup> Issues pertaining to the 'yeoman' title shall be discussed further

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<sup>55</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 218.

<sup>56</sup> Hilton, p. 42.

<sup>57</sup> *The Tale of Gamelyn* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 218.

<sup>58</sup> Keen, p. 91.

<sup>59</sup> R. Almond; A. J. Pollard, 'The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England,' *Past and Present*, 170 (Feb. 2001), 52-77, p. 58.

in the next chapter. Gamelyn's title provides us with an early parallel archetype to the tales of Robin, which may have been current when the existence of *ryms* of Robin Hood was mentioned in *Piers Plowman*.

### Fourteenth-century *Roberdesmen*

Scholars have little comment on the curious appearance of an early fourteenth-century Middle English word, *Roberdesmen*. The word seems to apply to a certain class of criminal. It seems to be extant as early as c.1331, where it is found in an act of parliament. We read the words:

*Diverses roberies, homicides, & felonies, ont este faitz einz ces heures par gentz qi sont appellez Roberdesmen, Wastours & Draghlaçche.*

Diverse robberies, homicides, and felonies, performed in times past, from those who are called Robert's men, Wasters and Latch-drawers.<sup>60</sup>

This statement provides us with three, almost 'official', classes of thieves. One of them, *Roberdesmen*, has a usage which predates mention of Robin Hood in *Piers Plowman* by nearly half a century, though there is no evidence of a link, merely a possible similarity. The word seemingly refers, not to 'robber-men', but 'Robert's men', though it can perhaps also go both ways. It is as if it is referring to a gang of ruffians led by someone named 'Robert'. A *wastour* seems to be one who generally lays waste, as well as to people's goods. A *Draghlaçche*, is a 'Latch-drawer', one who breaks and enters. At any rate, the grouping of *Roberdesmen*, likely to be men who commit robberies, with wasters and burglars implies that this class of criminal was also viewed in a negative light.

One of the reasons that the word *Roberdesmen* seems to be of significance is that it has a literary usage as well. We see a mention of 'Robert's men', in c.1394. This occurs in the anti-monastic comedy *Pierce the Plowman's Crede*. The story emulates the earlier style of *Piers Plowman*. This work however, may have been written by another author. The story lampoons the four monastic orders, consisting of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and Carmelites. Its plot consists of narration by a curious layman who

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<sup>60</sup> 5 Edward III, cap. 14, *Statutes of the Rhealm*, vol.i, 1810, p. 268., *op. cit.*, 'Roberdesmen', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., June 2010; online version, February 2013, accessed 5/2/13., my translation.

hopes to learn a *crede*, or affirmation of faith, to complete his religious studies. In pursuit of this, he visits these orders of monks and friars. Instead of learning his creed however, he hears from each a scathing barrage of criticism regarding the other monastic orders. Fed up with the monastics, he finally learns the *crede* from ‘Pierce’, a humble plowman. In the first of the lampoonings, made by a Franciscan friar, we read of his rivals:

*Ry3t as Robertes men [they] raken aboute, At feires & at ful ales & fylle ye cuppe.*

Right as Robert’s men, [they] gather about, At fairs and ale drinkings, they fill the cup.<sup>61</sup>

This passage is important because it tells us that ‘Robert’s men’ may have been perceived as rowdy louts. No mention is made of robberies. It is unknown whether this negative and certainly educated view of ‘Robert’s men’ refers to Robin Hood. It may well, however, refer to a parallel tradition associated with outlaw tales. An association which occurs far later in time, and is therefore not to be taken as strict evidence, was nonetheless concocted or deduced by the lawyer and antiquary, Coke, in c.1633:

*What this Robin Hood was that hath raised a name to these kind of men called Roberdsmen, his followers.*<sup>62</sup>

Coke considered that ‘Roberdsmen’ and Robin’s (outlawed) followers were synonymous. It is not certain however, that ‘Roberdsmen’ refers to some primitive manifestation of Robin Hood. We can say that ‘Roberdsmen’ are some kind of outlaw class, and they are not considered favourably in *Pierce the Plowman’s Crede*. Again this is an opinion of an educated, literate person. We do not have the peasants’ voice regarding what a Roberdesman was.

### **‘Roberdes knaves’ and ‘Robert the Robber’ in *Piers Plowman***

In William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, of c.1377, we have the first definitive mention of Robin as ‘*Robyn Hode*’. As we shall see, Langland also appears to use ideas about an

<sup>61</sup> *Piers. Pl. Crede* 72. 1395, *Op. cit.*, ‘Roberdesmen, n.’, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., June 2010; online version, June 2011, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/166605>, accessed 5/2/13.

<sup>62</sup> Coke, *On Littleton*. (1648). *Op. cit.*, ‘Roberdesmen, n.’, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

outlaw or criminal ‘Robert’ which are not aggrandising. There is nothing chivalrous or moral associated with the apparent mentions of the outlaw in *Piers Plowman*. He is not someone to be applauded. This would indicate the existence of a viewpoint, or tradition regarding the outlaw, which differs from that of the popular *rymes*.

The name ‘Robert’ is used rather often in *Plowman*. As early as the prologue, the narrator embarks on a dream into the nether-regions of perdition. Among *beggerers* and those who engage in *glotonye*, we read of ‘*Roberdes knaves*’, who are: ‘*risen with ribaudie*’.<sup>63</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definitions for the early use of ‘ribaldry’: ‘1. Debauchery, lasciviousness, vice, (*Obs.*); 2. [also in earlier times] Obscenity or coarseness of language, a coarse tale, a rude composition...’<sup>64</sup> *Roberdes knaves* may be a reference to *roberdesmen*, or might rather be translated as ‘*Roberdes fools*’ who might harken to Robert’s ‘coarse tales.’ The meanings and contexts are altogether rather obscure, but again we see that the educated and literate author might well have a dim view of the proceedings.

Further mentions of Robert are confined to the fifth *passus* of *Piers Plowman*, which, interestingly, concerns itself with an allegorical presentation of the seven deadly sins. Robin is mentioned, not for his own sake, but so that the sin of the priest Sloth might be exposed. Sloth admits to a figure called ‘Repentance’ that he spends his days in taverns, gossiping, and having a good time. He claims to often go a year without making a confession, and admits that during Lent, he lies in bed with his mistress in his arms. The most famous passage relating to Robin Hood is:

*I kan noght parfityly my Paternoster as the preest syngeth,  
But I kan ryms of Robin Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre,  
Ac neither of Owre Lorde ne of Owre Lady the leeste that evere was maked.*<sup>65</sup>

‘Repentance’ asks Sloth to repent. Sloth agrees, and claims that from now on, he will live as a monk. The reader is left to assume that his new religious conviction will take precedence over him learning more *ryms* of Robin Hood, which are associated with the sin of sloth. The confession of Sloth the priest, who first mentions *Robin Hode*, abruptly

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<sup>63</sup> Elaine M. Treharne, (ed.), *Old and Middle English c.890-c.1400: an anthology*, Oxford 2004, p. 549.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Ribaldry, *n.* and *adj.*’, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., June 2010; online version, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/165457>, accessed: 6/2/13.

<sup>65</sup> Langland, p. 82.

changes into the lamentation of ‘Robert the Robber’, a character who regrets his sins bitterly. The abruptness of the shift in the text might be explained as potentially due to a hypothetical intermediate text, which was lost in an early transliteration.<sup>66</sup> Holt considers at the very least that legends of the two may be intermingled.<sup>67</sup> Instead of a full confession from Sloth, we instead have a weepy confession from Robert the Robber, who is upset that he has committed evil. He knows he will not go to heaven unless he repents, and in the name of Jesus, implores not to be condemned at doomsday. If this is an early allusion to a parallel of the archetype of Robin Hood, it is damning indeed, for the profession of Robert the Robber is that of a thief and a vagabond, with few redeeming qualities and little chivalry. This is hardly inspiring stuff. It illustrates the possibility that Robin’s popularity was perhaps not universal, even if he had been mentioned with the likes of Ranulf of Chester.

The *Piers Plowman* tradition was influential, as testified by further works relating to it. The following is taken from a work called *Dives and Pauper*, written c.1405-1410. The author attacks people who:

*gon levir to heryn a tale or a song of robyn hode or of sum rubaudry than to heryn messe or matynes.*

go to hear a tale or a song of Robin Hood or of some debauchery than to hear mass or matins.<sup>68</sup>

The author seems to have read the prologue of *Piers Plowman*, which directly compares ‘Robards knaves’ to those who practice *rubaudry*, or debauchery, or recite some debauched tale, as per the definition mentioned earlier. The word highlights this author’s opinion in this, the second earliest of history’s references to the early ballads, and incidentally about forty years before the appearance of the first extant ballad, the handwritten *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450. This attitude of educated disdain may also help explain the absence of a written ballad or rhyme from before c.1450, despite their apparent popularity, described in the B-text of *Piers Plowman* in c.1377. Educated men were required to write down ballads. If the rhymes were unpopular among the

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<sup>66</sup> Albert C. Baugh, Kemp Malone, (eds.), *A Literary History of England: Vol 1: The Middle Ages to 1500*, New York 1959, p. 246.

<sup>67</sup> Holt, ‘The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> Dobson & Taylor, p. 2.

educated because they may have been unsavoury, then they were neglected. It was acceptable to write romances about noble outlaws, as these were perhaps heard and read by the elite. On the other hand, it may have been less than acceptable for the elite of the fourteenth century to laud Robin Hood. Another reason for the apparent neglect was suggested by Jay Williams. He stated that the name 'Robin Hood' might have been generic to all fugitives who took to the woods.<sup>69</sup> Ruffians calling themselves after a popular figure would have tarnished the image of the mythical archetype. This view is perhaps borne out by Langland's reference to bidders and beggars who 'rise with ribaldry, like Robert's children' and by the mentioned early statute which call outlaws and highway-men 'Roberdesmen.' It must be pointed out that hostility did not eliminate the legend of Robin Hood. It may simply have been a reaction to an increasingly popular set of tales.

## Revolt in 1381

The historical background of peasant political action, provides a parallel to the stories of rabblers in *Piers Plowman*. In 1381, peasant leaders demanded the end of serfdom and the execution of nobles, yet they seemed to respect their king. By openly revolting and going to London to speak with the king, the peasants were themselves something of the outlaw of a later ballad. They intended to defy the law and then get absolution from the king. At the end of the *Tale of Gamelyn*, as in Later Robin Hood, the king forgives the outlaw. This is what medieval peasants may have been counting on in real life. Maurice Keen proposed a concept of justice with the king as universal arbitrator, in the minds of medieval peasants. Keen hypothesised upon their naive aspirations: 'They only knew that the king was the ultimate repository of a law whose justice they acknowledged... If they could only get past his corrupt officers, whose abuse of the trust reposed in them amounted to treason in itself, and bring their case before the King, they believed that right would be done.'<sup>70</sup>

The faith the peasants placed in the king was misguided. In 1381, their leader, Wat Tyler was killed by one of the king's bodyguards. Their protests were thereafter

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<sup>69</sup> Jay Williams, 'More About Robin Hood', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 65, 257 (Jul – Sep 1952), 304-5.

<sup>70</sup> Keen, p. 156.

dispersed. In their rioting, they can hardly perhaps have been expected to bolster and maintain the knowledge of earlier heroic outlaws such as Fouke Fitz Warin, or even Ranulf of Chester. These were of an enemy social class. They may have been more amenable to humbler figures such as Roger Godberd, or any of other unknown ‘Robehods’, or even ‘Roberdesmen’, who graced the period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, if these figures ever achieved celebrated status in their own right.

### **Andrew of Wyntoun’s *Originale Chronykil*, c.1408-1420**

Andrew of Wyntoun was a chronicler who lived c.1350-1420. He was the prior of Loch Leven from c.1390 until his death. His *Originale Chronykil* c.1408-20 is written in Middle English.<sup>71</sup> Of the nine extant manuscripts of his chronicle, two are exceptional for their completeness and quality. They are translated side by side in an 1890 edition by F. J. Amours. They are the *Wemyss* MS, the earliest of all the extant manuscripts (named after Wyntoun’s patron Sir John of Wemyss and housed at Wemyss Castle), and the later British Library: MS, Bibl. Cotton, Nero, D. XI. Wyntoun may have heard similar ‘*ryms of Robyn Hode*’, to those perhaps known to Langland, if they existed. One of the more interesting aspects of Wyntoun’s chronicle is the apparent mis-spelling of ‘hude’ as ‘rude’ in the earliest source, the *Wemyss* MS. This is unmentioned in the literature surrounding Robin Hood, and may be of interest.

*Than litill Iohne and Robyne rude*

*Waichmen were commendit gud*

*In Yngilwod and Bernysdale*

*And vsit þis tyme þar travale.*

Then Little John and Robin the uncouth,

Were hunters, highly regarded.

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<sup>71</sup> J. R. Maddicott, ‘The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, *The English Historical Review*, 93, 367 (Apr. 1978), 276-99, p. 277.

In Inglewood and Barnsdale  
 And practiced trouble at this time.<sup>72</sup>

The form, ‘*Robyne rude*’ if accurate, raises certain issues which need to be addressed. Holt transliterates it as ‘hude.’<sup>73</sup> This is not in keeping with the opinion of Amours, who provided an explicit interpretation for this particular MS. In fact, ‘hood’ is rarely written with a ‘u’ at this time. ‘Hode’ is invariably the prevailing form in early mentions. This is important because it suggests the MS author, or scribe, could have been disrespecting the myth of Robin Hood. We can examine the word ‘rude’ as it exists in Middle English. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it has a variety of meanings, but all with a similar flavour. These include: ‘dull witted’, ‘coarse’, or simply ‘uncultivated’. It may also mean ‘stalwart’, ‘harsh’, ‘violent’. The *OED* quotes another of Wyntoun’s uses of rude, namely ‘of mind’, in the passage: ‘Ruyde is my witt, And semple to put all in wryte’.<sup>74</sup> This implies that Wyntoun perhaps holds simple ideas which are easy to write down, presumably because they are truthful and not unnecessarily convoluted. We also have the phrase: ‘Of euill and rude extortions’.<sup>75</sup> This refers to financial matters. We also see it defined as: ‘rough’ or ‘uncertain’; i.e.: ‘Thus eftir a rude begynnyng, Thai maid a soft and gud ending’.<sup>76</sup> It is safe to say, perhaps then, the meaning is rather pejorative, with connotations of primitive harshness, trouble and crude misguided simplicity, in use. In other words, the view two to three decades after the Peasants’ Revolt is that Robin seems to be a rough and ready peasant.

It is important to see how a word is defined if we wish to gauge the author’s opinion. ‘Waich’ is considered in the *OED* to be a potential alternate spelling of ‘waith.’ The *OED* recognises a specific usage of ‘waithman’, based solely upon this very usage, to mean ‘outlaw’, for the reason that it clearly refers to Robin Hood.<sup>77</sup> There is a small problem with this. Firstly, we do not see the term ‘waithman’ used elsewhere as pertaining to a class of criminal. Secondly, the primary meaning of ‘waith’ is hunter,

<sup>72</sup> My translation, Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun: Printed on Parallel Pages from the Cottonian and Wemyss MSS., with the Variants of the Other Texts*, F.J. Amours (ed.), 6 vols, Edinburgh, London 1903-1914, vol. 5, pp. 136-7.

<sup>73</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> ‘rude, *adj.* and *adv.*’, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Online ed., June 2010, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/168501>, accessed 6/2/13.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> ‘Waithman, *n.*’, *OED*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1989, online ed., June 2010, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/225147>, accessed 6/2/13.

‘esp. applied to forest outlaws.’<sup>78</sup> Wyntoun himself calls the Biblical figure Nimrod—known in Genesis as ‘a mighty hunter before the Lord’—a ‘waith man’, with no implication whatsoever of outlawry.<sup>79</sup> The implication perhaps is that Little John and Robin were, in a broad sense, ‘hunters’. Whether they hunted for game, or for clerics to rob, is unclear. They do not seem to be described as ‘hunters’ in later traditions. ‘Waith’ does more precisely refer to the game taken in a hunt, so interpreting this as ‘hunter’ or ‘poacher’ might be another way of looking at the word, rather than ‘outlaw’. Holt considered the term meant: ‘forest outlaw’. For Knight and Ohlgren, it was simply ‘outlaw’. Interestingly, as archery is more or less essential for hunting in this time, the word *waithmen* would have perhaps also included connotations of archery. If so, this is the first allusion to Robin’s later famed skill in this regard. Interestingly, the word is not necessarily optimistic or praiseworthy. Poaching in the king’s forests was illegal. A *waithman* is thus a lawbreaker.

There is nothing here regarding any of Robin’s praiseworthy acts, save to say that he was praised. This is significant because it could tell us that for the literate, Robin was simply a ‘forest outlaw’ but for the poor he was ‘commended well’. There were thus, perhaps, two points of view current in Wyntoun’s time.

The *Wemyss* MS provides the earliest extant form of Wyntoun’s work. In the later Cottonian MS, we are provided with the following alteration, where in the place of *rude*, *Hude* is written.

*Litul Iohun and Robert Hude,  
Waythmen war commendit gud;  
In Ingilwode and Bernnysdaile  
Pai oyssit al þis tyme þar trawale.*

Little John and Robin Hood,  
Were hunters, highly regarded;  
In Inglewood and Barnsdale,  
They practiced their troubles all this time.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> *Genesis*, 10:9.

<sup>80</sup> Wyntoun, vol. 5, pp. 136-7., my translation.

Most striking is that here, in this later MS, both 'Litol' and 'Hude' are written with the initial character capitalised. They are thus perhaps to be taken as proper names, whereas in the earlier *Wemyss* text, neither 'litill' nor 'rude' are capitalised. This might be important, for it may imply a higher level of respect from the writer of this MS, over the original. This may imply a further development of the legend by the time it was written, towards a more respectable Robin for the literate classes. Wyntoun was, after all, writing in the shadow of the Peasants' Revolt, which by definition would not perhaps have had the support of all of the educated. The statement, 'they practiced their trouble all this time', also seen in the *Wemyss* MS, from whence it originated, may have had a negative implication, but this is uncertain.

We have seen that this seems to be the first time Robin is praised, namely by being 'highly regarded.' Although Wyntoun is saying the people regard him highly, Wyntoun is not saying that *he* regards Robin highly and this is significant. The Scottish chronicler Walter Bower seems to have taken much the same attitude, with the exception that he presents two clearly conflicting traditions on Robin Hood, one in which he is praised, and one in which he is condemned.

## Walter Bower

Walter Bower c.1385-1449 was a profuse chronicler, as well as an abbot of Inchcolm abbey. He is significant for this study as he placed the activity of Robin Hood in c.1265-66. Furthermore, he records two different, seemingly chronicled, traditions on Robin Hood. He records a partly favourable one under 1265 and a very unfavourable one under 1266. In this regard it seems Walter Bower may well have read of the 'disinherited' from those Baronial War years described in the thirteenth-century *Chronica Buriensis*. This chronicle was written at the abbey of Bury St Edmunds. The chronicle lists various battles and skirmishes of the disinherited rebels, and how they formed outlaw bands in the woods in 1266-1267. Writing in c.1440, Bower greatly enlarged the *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* of his predecessor John of Fordun, who flourished in the late fourteenth century. He supplemented that work, which contained nothing on Robin Hood, with the following information:

At this time, there arose from among the disinherited and outlaws and raised his head that most famous armed robber Robert Hood, along with Little John and their accomplices. The foolish common folk eagerly celebrate the deeds of these men with gawping enthusiasm in comedies and tragedies, and take pleasure in hearing jesters and bards singing [of them] more than in other romances.<sup>81</sup>

Here Bower states that there is comedy regarding Robin Hood as well as tragedy. It is uncertain what he means by this. The ballads seem to contain elements of both. Bower's text also describes Robin as a *sicarius*. We are unsure of the precise meaning of this word. Holt provides 'murderer'.<sup>82</sup> For Knight it is a 'cut-throat'.<sup>83</sup> *Sicarius*, is a word with a strong meaning. It refers not just to someone who has killed. It seems to refer to a more professional form of murderer, such as an assassin, or one who commits murders as a result of his robberies. The implication is therefore not that Robin was driven to commit murder out of misunderstanding, or necessity, but that he is someone who kills for a living. This is a damning opinion, which flies in the face of future perceptions of Robin's apparent ideals. Nevertheless, it seems similarly close to Wyntoun's simple *waithman*, or 'hunter'—someone who kills in the woods.

This dim view of Robin's occupation is immediately and curiously contradicted, however, by the text which follows, which is neglected by scholars. This is perhaps because it is not extant in all of the *Scotichronicon* manuscripts.<sup>84</sup> Fortunately, in Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 171 of Incholm abbey, the lengthy additional text is present. The antiquary Joseph Ritson put the relative absence of this text in other MSS, down to the clerics who disagreed with promoting a figure whose enmity of avaricious clerics was legendary.<sup>85</sup> There seems no reason to discount this view. Whatever the explanation, the text is exceedingly important as it is the first extant story of Robin Hood. It occurs approximately ten years before the estimated compilation date of the first ballad—*Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450. As well as being the first, it is the only tale

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<sup>81</sup> Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*. ed. trans. D. Watt, 9 vols, St Andrews 1977-1997, vol. 5, p. 354, 'Hoc in tempore de exheredatis et bannitis surrexit et caput erexit ille famosissimus sicarius Robertus Hode cum Litoljohn' et eorum complicitibus, de quibus stolidum vulgus hianter in comediis et in tragediis prurienter festum faciunt, et super ceteris romanciis mimos et barbanos cantitare delectantur'. Ibid, p. 355.

<sup>82</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 40.

<sup>83</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Ritson, (ed.), *Robin Hood: A collection of all the ancient poems, songs, and ballads, now extant, relative to that celebrated English outlaw*, ed. Joseph Frank, London 1832, vol. 1, p. li.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

of Robin found in Latin, and it differs significantly from the early ballads which follow in the subsequent half-century. In this text, Robin is no longer a *sicarius*, but is heavily lauded, which makes its apparent inclusion by Bower all the more mysterious:

Yet some of his exploits thus recited are commendable, as is clear from what follows. Once when he was in Barnsdale, avoiding the king's anger and the prince's rage, and was hearing mass most devoutly as was his habit—he was unwilling to interrupt the service no matter the pressure he was under—when he was thus hearing mass one day, he was tracked down to that secluded woodland spot where he was hearing it by a certain sheriff and king's officers who had often proved themselves his enemies in the past. Some of his men who spotted this came to him and advised him to make every effort to escape. But because of his reverence for the sacrament which at that moment he was most devoutly worshipping, he absolutely refused. While the rest of his men were trembling in fear of death, Robert having great trust in Him whom he was worshipping, with those very few who happened to be there with him fearlessly took on his enemies and easily beat them. Being much enriched with spoil and ransom money taken from them, from then onwards he always chose to hold the ministers of the church in even greater veneration. For he paid heed to the common saying: God listens to the man who hears mass often.<sup>86</sup>

This seems to be but a remnant of some popular ballad, or rhyme, which is no longer extant. Bower was not interested in learning the rhymes by heart, so he merely retold the tale as he knew it. We see the first mention of a sheriff, yet the setting is Barnsdale in Yorkshire. This is far from Nottingham, which is not yet mentioned in the tradition. Despite Bower's disapproval, it seems he finds Robin to be at least admirable for his

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<sup>86</sup> Bower, vol. 5, p. 354., 'De quo eciam quedam commendabilia recitantur, sicut patuit in hoc quod cum ipse quondam in Barnesdale iram regis et fremitum principis declinans missam ut solitus erat devotissime audiret—nec aliqua necessitate volebat interrumpere officium—quodam die cum audiret missam, a quodam vicecomite et ministris regis eum sepius per prius infestantibus in illo secretissimo loco nemorali ubi misse interfuit exploratus, venientes ad eum qui hoc de suis perceperunt ut omni annisu fugeret suggererunt. Qui ob reverenciam sacramenti quod tunc devotissime venerabatur omnino facere recusavit. Sed ceteris suis ob metum mortis trepidantibus, Robertus in tantum confisus in eum quem coluit inveritus cum paucissimus qui tunc ei forte affluerunt inimicos congressus eos de facile devicit, et de eorum spoliis ac redemptione ditatus ministros ecclesie et missas in majore veneratione semper et de post habere preelefit. Attendens quod vulgariter dictum est: Hunc Deus exaudit qui missam sepius audit.' Trans, D. Watt., p. 355.

piety. We have seen that Bower's opinion of Robin is somewhat low, so the purpose seems rather to promote the positive effects of attendance at mass. In the opinion of Watt, the purpose was likely to provide material for a sermon.<sup>87</sup> This seems plausible. We thus already see two opinions of Robin drawn by the same chronicler. What follows, however, is the opposite of the story of Robin's devotion and piety.

## **Robin is associated with disinherited earls**

The *Scotichronicon* contains a further section on Robin Hood under the following year. This passage is totally different to that which showers acclaim upon Robin in the previous year. The passage, written under the year 1266, was recorded by Child for his 1860 edition, *English and Scottish Ballads*.<sup>88</sup> It has rarely been discussed since. It is not mentioned in Knight and Ohlgren's *Robin Hood and other Outlaw Tales*, despite its inclusion in the original Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 171, which seems to have been written by Bower himself.<sup>89</sup> Bower re-introduces Robin here afresh, as if he had not been mentioned earlier. This provides a clue that Bower might have been transcribing something from another chronicle, whose author despised memories of Robin Hood. If so, that chronicle is no longer with us, save for the following text in Bower's chronicle:

In that year also the disinherited English barons and those loyal to the king clashed fiercely; amongst them Roger de Mortimer occupied the Welsh Marches and John d'Eyville occupied the Isle of Ely; Robert Hood was an outlaw amongst the woodland briars and thorns. Between them they inflicted a vast amount of slaughter on the common and ordinary folk, cities and merchants.<sup>90</sup>

The passage is most disrespectful to various rebels of the Baronial War, as well as 'Robertus Hode'. Far from being favoured by God for his devotion, as previously, Bower now makes it clear that Robin is associated with widespread destruction. Bower speaks

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<sup>87</sup> Bower, vol. 5, p. xviii.

<sup>88</sup> Francis James Child (ed.), *English and Scottish Ballads*, 8 vols, Boston 1857-9., vol. 5, p. xi-xii.

<sup>89</sup> Bower, vol. 1, p. xiii.

<sup>90</sup> Bower, vol. 5, p. 358., 'Isto eciam anno grassati sunt acrius Anglie barones exheredati et regales; inter quos Rogerus de Mortuo Mari marchias Wallie, Johannes Dayvillis insulam de Hely occupabant; Robertus Hode fructecta et dumeta silvestria exulabat. Inter quos quam maxime strages communibus et plebeis, civitatibus et mercatoribus ingreuebant', Bower, vol. 5, p. 357.

of a dangerous outlaw, and by highlighting the ‘briars’ of the *silvestria*, he almost makes it seem that Robin is too savage to live anywhere else. The view is precisely the opposite of that which asserts Robin to be a figure of piety, so it seems Bower was dealing with two sources which placed Robin but a year apart. This explanation is facilitated by the fact that mention is made of Robin’s banishment to the woods. This is in spite of the fact that Bower alleges Robin was already active a year before in a secret woodland hideout. It therefore seems that there are two traditions mentioned by Bower, possibly from different chronicles or another source. One passage projects a favourable image of Robin’s place in the forest as a ‘hideout’ where one might hear mass. The other passage creates an image of the forest as a harsh and thorny wasteland of lawlessness. In addition, talk of causing great destruction seems far worse than someone being a mere *sicarius*, for whilst the robbery or even murder of travelling merchants might be expected from an outlaw in his forest lair, the statement written down under the year 1266 describes a more wholesale form of destruction—that against commoners and cities. The ‘1266’ story seems to be almost suggesting that Robin may have been a commander who led an army in pillage. Again, this is quite the opposite of the idea that it was Robin who was innocently enjoying mass when he was interrupted by the sheriff. It suggests that early tales of Robin Hood may not have been looked upon favourably by the literate.

The two sets of ideas found in Bower suggest different roles for Robin. In the ‘1265’ story of Bower’s, Robin is something of a humble common outlaw, who happens to have an elite army. In Bower’s ‘1266’ tradition, Robin Hood is a rebel destroyer, during the Baronial War, and perhaps even a member of the gentry, since he is able to harass cities and commoners on a large scale. I would suggest that this becomes possibly the first mention in history of Robin as someone more than a peasant. This conflicts with notions that Robin was a ‘yeoman’ in the ‘earliest’ tradition, for this neglected passage certainly pre-dates the ballads.<sup>91</sup> Neither the idea regarding the interruption of Robin’s mass, nor the idea of Robin as the waster of cities seem to have survived Bower. These are early ideas, not found in the ballads which arrive later.

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<sup>91</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 37.

## ***Polychronicon***

In 2009, Julian Luxford made the discovery of a new Robin Hood reference in a primary source. Argued to be a uniquely wholly negative viewpoint, the reference is found as a marginal addition in the Eton MS 213, which contains the *Polychronicon*, a universal chronicle compiled by Ranulf Higden (1280-1364) in the fourteenth century.<sup>92</sup> The MS itself, a copy of Higden's chronicle, was made in *c.*1420.<sup>93</sup> Luxford considers the item of note regarding Robin, below, to have been inserted in the *c.*1460s.<sup>94</sup>

Around this time, according to popular opinion, a certain outlaw named Robin Hood, with his accomplices, infested Sherwood and other law-abiding areas of England with continuous robberies.<sup>95</sup>

This annotator, who placed Robin in the mid to late 1290s, did not look favourably upon Robin's reputation. This seems to be another instance in which Robin is accorded a less-than-favourable judgement by a member of the educated classes. It would seem that this is merely the continuation of a pattern which sees Robin viewed unfavourably from the time the myth is first mentioned, in *Piers Plowman*, in the years preceding the Peasants' Revolt. It is, however, the last of the unfavourable medieval mentions regarding Robin Hood.

## **Conclusions**

Stories about the heroic outlaw changed in language and audience over the centuries. There is scope for a Robin Hood-type figure in the thirteenth century to have been awarded respect by the educated classes but the vanishing of Latin or French stories about heroic figures might be associated with the rise of disrespect for such an outlaw figure by an elite. This lasted until the time of the writing of the early ballads. Whatever

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<sup>92</sup> J. M. Luxford, 'An English chronicle entry on Robin Hood', *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009), 70-6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Circa h[ec] temp[or]a vulg[us] opinat[ur] que[n]da[m] exlegatu[m] dict[um] Robyn hode cu[m] suis co[m]plicib[us] assiduis latrocinijs apud shirwode & alibi regios fideles Anglie infestasse', Trans. Julian Luxford, pp. 72-3.

ideas existed about Robin Hood in earlier times, perceptions were sometimes unfavourable in the fourteenth to mid fifteenth centuries.

There are three medieval chronicle sources we have available which discuss Robin Hood. All are from the fifteenth century. In these, Robin is a mysterious figure, who lived in the late thirteenth century, and was perhaps disinherited in the aftermath of the Barons' War. He lives out a perilous forest existence as a 'waithman' or 'sicarius'. In one chronicle he is said to live among the 'thorns and woodland briars', and in another he is said to have infested Sherwood. These chronicles seem to recognise that Robin is lauded, but refuse to accord him high praise. By the late fifteenth century, however, as soon as the literate stop attacking Robin, the early ballads appear in written form. Formerly they may have been tales for the 'foolish commons', as suggested by Bower. They became stories for the emerging middle class and the elite, and this is the form in which they survive, though the next chapter shall demonstrate that there remain vestiges of earlier ideas. It is apparent that there is a 'gentrification' at work which shall also be explored in the next chapter, and thereafter.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the outlaw hero was of noble origin. He was 'Randolf, Earl of Chester', and he was also the marcher lord, 'Fouke Fitz Warin', as well as a mad but resourceful monk called 'Eustache', who had been cheated out of a substantial inheritance on the continent. 'Robin Hood'—an anonymous outlaw with a reputation but no noble name—would come to absorb the best parts of many of the adventures of his outlaw predecessors, after their names lost their popularity or relevance with audiences. On the other hand, it is an implication of this work that if Robin Hood was famous earlier on, as a thirteenth-century outlaw, he may have been made to fit the heroic rebel tradition at an early stage, so gentrification may in fact be a relic as well as a development. We have seen, for instance, that in the *Tale of Gamelyn*, c.1350, written in English as a very early form of rhyming ballad, which might make it synonymous with *ryms of Robyn Hode*, that Gamelyn is something of a member of the gentry. He is the son of a knight. Unlike in the case of tales of earlier noble outlaws, he does not exhibit chivalrous mercy, but exacts a savage vengeance in light of a critical situation. This vengeance may have been popular with audiences of the time. Gamelyn is not described as 'Sir' when he reclaims his lands and is pardoned by the king after killing a sheriff, judge and jury. He is merely 'Gamelyn'. The case of Gamelyn indicates that mythical outlaws may not have always been upwardly mobile in the evolution of their tales. In the

thirteenth century, the popular outlaw may have been more likely to have been of noble origin than in the fourteenth. The unprecedented vulgar form of the tale of Gamelyn suggests that an evolution of the heroic figure's position in society was already taking place in the mid fourteenth century, a time when tales of Robin Hood perhaps existed, but are not now known. The implication is that ideas of Robin Hood may have also been changing.

There was an earlier image of the outlaw which differed significantly from later ideas of Robin Hood in which he was praised. In the work of Walter Bower there are alternative perceptions as to who Robin is. On the one hand he is a character who is quite pious, decent and brave. On the other hand he is something of a cut-throat or murderer, and also one who takes part in general destruction and pillage. Furthermore, Robin is thrown in with prominent rebel earls of the Barons' War, as if he had been a leading member of the rebels, or someone who took advantage of chaos to sow further discord, and commit robberies. This leaves Robin's social origins open-ended. Peasants do not usually become commanders during a war. Someone who starts out with an army however, can easily turn it towards pillage in place of payment. Uncertainty regarding Robin's origin made him something of a universal outlaw. The tradition incorporated earlier adventurous traditions and archetypes, into a larger mythical story.

The story of the outlaw keeps changing. In the sixteenth century, Robin would even be seen as having been a member of the nobility. The next chapter probes the question of his origins in relation to the early ballads, extant from the mid fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, which seem to point to an early varied tradition. Robin does not belong to any exclusive class because the myth was based upon multiple outlaw archetypes at perhaps a very early stage. However, many of the elements of the Robin Hood ballad myths suggest parallels with stories found in the St Albans chronicles of the thirteenth century. This is important because it shows that idealisation of heroic figures generated by the social and political turbulence of the thirteenth century may have survived and evolved to influence the later Robin Hood tradition.

## Chapter 6 Robin Hood—Yeoman

The early ballads of Robin Hood, from the mid fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, were first recorded at a time of political crisis. The middle decades of the fifteenth century were ones of deep recession and hardship, leading to the prolonged civil wars of the Roses, 1455-85.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this series of conflicts a tendency emerged towards the centralisation of authority and bureaucracy around a powerful monarch. The ballads were written in Middle English as entertainment. They reflect a desire for centralisation of authority around a powerful king, lauded in the ballads, who is seen to exhibit a mutual respect and affinity with the outlaw. The audience for the ballads was a varied one, and included both the masses and, towards the close of the fifteenth century, ‘gentleman’.<sup>2</sup> An examination of the changing audience and its effect on the ballad is not the only function of this chapter. The ballads are representative of a development upon an earlier literary and oral tradition which didn’t necessarily involve an early Robin Hood. They are based upon myths, and myth-making rather than sources for historical evidence. The myth-makers were able to draw upon a broad area of heroic tradition, not just relating to the strict definition of an outlaw who lived in Sherwood Forest, as inspiration for their stories. To this end, the argument owes much to those who have worked out that Robin Hood myths are based on stories about various earls, as well as a Yorkshire and a separate Sherwood outlaw element originally based on the outlaw Roger Godberd from the 1260s. It contributes the idea that while there was evident evolution in this literature, there are some neglected but striking parallels between the ballads and earlier traditions about outlaw-type heroic figures based on chronicled Latin stories which have not been noted (even if these manuscripts were not available in print before the sixteenth century). They support a general theme, that by the 1500s, many earlier heroic rebel and outlaw-type figures are clearly blended, perhaps based on a greater variety of earlier heroic and outlaw myths than is realised. A secondary argument is that the word ‘yeoman’ as found

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context*, New York 2004, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, Oxford 1994, p. 71.

in the ballads relates to an earlier medieval usage, as well as a later medieval usage of the word. Historians like Holt or others almost categorically state Robin Hood is likely to be only one type of yeoman or another. In fact because Robin Hood is based on so many myths, most forms of the term, including earlier usage, seem applicable in various time periods. This earlier usage of that word, which will be discussed, is implied by the balladeer to a greater extent than is perhaps given credit, and allows Robin to be seen as a sort of page or even a sort of king's archer or household attendant, rather than as simply a middling-class small landowner, which is the later definition.

The popularity of various types of heroic figures rose and fell over time. The emergence of Robin Hood as the dominant type of outlaw in the fifteenth century occurred at the time of a decline in popularity of the noble outlaw hero, in favour of an independent figure, standing up to a corrupt king and administration. In the ballads, Robin loves his king. He stands up to petty tyrants like the avaricious Abbot of St Mary's, and evades the Sheriff of Nottingham, finally capturing, ransoming, or killing him, depending upon which ballad is read.

The forests of the north seem to have been places which served as a metaphor for remoteness in the late Middle Ages. Sherwood was first introduced between 1400 and 1425 in a scrap of a surviving rhyme.<sup>3</sup>

*R. H. in scherewod stod, hohud and hathuh hosut and shod.*<sup>4</sup>

R. H. in Sherwood stood, hooded and hatted and hosed and shod.

These words on Robin Hood's dress are not repeated in later fully-extant ballads. After two generations the stories had changed, or this one has simply been lost. The Nottingham sheriff is also a development of the ballads. The town of Nottingham itself is introduced for the first time in the first of the early ballads, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450. Its inclusion serves a possible secondary purpose in bringing Robin down from the north, and closer to a London audience. Wyntoun stated Robin was originally in Inglewood, a forest near the Scottish border. For Bower, Robin was in Barnsdale, Yorkshire. Barnsdale is indelibly of the earlier 'Yorkshire' Robin Hood tradition which

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

has been partly usurped by later stories of Nottingham, Sherwood and its sheriff.<sup>5</sup> Holt stated that whilst the geography of Barnsdale is very precise in the ballads, Sherwood by contrast has the remote imprecise feel of ‘a wood near Athens’ of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.<sup>6</sup> Vague ideas of an outlaw further south may have been added to an earlier tale crafted by first-hand knowledge of local geography.

The early ballad, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, was printed in the closing years of the fifteenth century. Far from being a peasant’s tale, it was addressed to yeomen and gentry and seems to have been supportive of the social order, rather than subversive, as the earlier ‘ryms’, spoken of in *Piers Plowman* may have been. The petty tyrants Robin tries to deal with seem to exceed their earthly authority, and Robin brings them down to size, but he is on good terms with his monarch. A friendly meeting between Robin and the king in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, convinces the reader that Robin has the tacit approval of an admiring king who has heard of his exploits.<sup>7</sup> People may have sought comfort in the idea of a strong monarch who was able to challenge and win over the outlaws of the north. After Henry VII reached the throne, royal propaganda maintained he had saved the south of England from robbery and despoilment from those in the north.<sup>8</sup> Later on, Henry VII responded to a tax revolt in Yorkshire in 1489 by saying that rebels would destroy the south part of the kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Pollard writes: ‘Men and women, one is supposed to believe were lying awake at night in fear of these wild savages from the north’.<sup>10</sup> The ballads are a product of their age—the fifteenth century, but just how far back do they, or some of the ideas they are based upon, go?

Despite the presence of aspects of the ballads which reflect fifteenth-century life, such as the address of ballads to an audience of yeomen, relations can be observed between the presentation of Robin Hood in ballads from the late fifteenth century, and ideas suggested in monastic chronicles of the thirteenth century. In particular two ballads, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, c.1500, and a seventeenth-century derivative, *Robin Hood and the Butcher*, relate thematically to a 1230s myth, recorded in the St Albans chronicle of Matthew Paris perhaps no later than the 1240s, when Paris was completing his

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<sup>5</sup> A. J. Pollard, ‘Robin Hood, Sherwood Forest and the Sheriff of Nottingham’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 52 (2008), 113-30, pp. 120-1.

<sup>6</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, p. 88.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context*, p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

chronicle. In it, stolen foodstuffs are sold to the public for reduced prices. Something like this may have passed into the later Robin Hood legend. In addition we propose that two ballads, known as the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, c.1500, and *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450, parallel literary events and ideas of the 1260s, regarding discussion of sheriffs. A section of the *Monk* echoes a chronicle tradition which may have been popular after the 1230s. The early ballads draw upon stories which may originate, not in the late thirteenth century, as suggested by Holt, but in the political trouble of the first half of the thirteenth century as well.<sup>11</sup>

How early are the ‘early ballads?’ *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, c.1500, and *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450, may well be among the earliest surviving ballads referring to Robin Hood, but they are certainly not ‘early’ in terms of the overall English outlaw tradition, or even the Robin Hood tradition itself. The ballads cannot be the same as the ‘*Ryms of Robyn Hood*’, mentioned in *Piers Plowman*, of c.1377. In the previous chapter we have seen that there is indeed a quite early ballad, c.1350, regarding the outlaw *Gamelyn*, which is of the rhyming sort. Yet the ‘early ballads’ of Robin Hood, from over a century later, do not quite follow the same style. They seem to have been written for a more elite audience. Another issue regarding the earlier form and reception of the ballads, mentioned in the previous chapter, was that Walter Bower described two versions of Robin Hood. There was one in which Robin is attacked by a sheriff in his forest hideout in Barnsdale, and this is a story not found in the ballads. It appears to be representative of an earlier tradition. After Nottingham is brought into the mixture in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450, Robin is thereafter generally located in Sherwood Forest when he is close to an encounter with the sheriff. The early ballads as they come down to us from c.1450 with the appearance of *Robin Hood and the Monk*, onwards, are thus not the earliest form of the Robin Hood story—Sherwood Forest ‘infected’ a Barnsdale tradition.<sup>12</sup> Rather they are the most comprehensive summary of modified remnants of a tradition current in the fifteenth century. It is important to test the mould of using the ballads as the ‘formative Robin Hood’, if we are to refine our notions of the origins of this outlaw tradition.

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<sup>11</sup> James Holt, ‘Hood, Robin’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the earliest times to the year 2000*; B.Harrison, H.C. G. Matthew (eds.), Oxford 2004. online ed., Jan 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13676>, accessed 6/2/13.

<sup>12</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 87.

In fact, not even the lost *c.*1377 ‘Ryms’ tradition of Robin Hood mentioned in *Piers Plowman*, is the original ‘early’ tradition. Even this date is about a century later than the *c.*1262 mention of ‘Robehod’, discovered by David Crook in 1984, and discussed in earlier chapters.<sup>13</sup> Holt considered this a date when the Robin legend was apparently *already* famous.<sup>14</sup> Thus the ballads cannot be relied upon to provide accurate information regarding the early tradition of Robin Hood. There is however, a way of approximately dating various components. The content of the ballads could be correlated to that found in early sources, such as from the St Albans’ chroniclers of the thirteenth century, in order to perhaps hypothesise on which additions were genuinely early, original and more intrinsic to the original unknown tradition.

I argue for a thirteenth-century origin for many of the elements of the ballads, even if they were first put into writing in the fifteenth century. As such, the historiographical discussion will deal with attempts to probe the antiquity of the ballads, as well as various attempts to place the origin of the ballads within a historical framework pertinent to Robin’s status as a ‘yeoman’, whatever that might have meant. In examining this we shall ask questions such as, ‘what is Robin’s social standing in the ballads?’ The answer is important if we are to make sense of some of the aspects which contributed to the tradition in early times. If the ballads contain elements of romantic tradition, they might contain components of origin from long before the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, in which nobles were unpopular. If they are instead tales of revenge and brutality, such as the tale of Gamelyn, they might appeal to an audience who despised authority.

## Historiography

Even in their own time, the ballads of Robin Hood, extant from the mid fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, described a bygone age. An examination of the historiography regarding the ballads reveals a wide disparity of opinion regarding their origins, as well as their audience. In the nineteenth century, a compiler of ballads and translator, Francis Child, noted of Robin: ‘yeoman as he is ... has a kind of royal dignity, a princely grace and a gentlemanlike refinement of humour.’<sup>15</sup> In the following century, Steadman

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<sup>13</sup> David Crook, ‘Some Further Evidence concerning the Dating of the Origins of the Legend of Robin Hood’, *The English Historical Review*, 99, 392 (July, 1984), 530-4.

<sup>14</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> Francis James Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols, Boston 1888, vol. 3, p. 43.

developed seemingly the opposite opinion: ‘There are no elements of romance in these early ballads, no *fiants*, distressed damsels, lost relatives, or noble queens; they are heroic, not romantic, in spirit.’<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century there was a debate between two well-respected historians, Rodney Hilton and James Holt. This debate echoed an earlier disparity of opinion. The controversy dwelt, somewhat, upon the interpretation of ‘yeoman’—an obsolete term widely used in the ballads. It is used in reference to Robin’s men, as well as the audience of the ballads. Robin is himself described as a yeoman in the early ballads, which date from the mid-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries. The issue of the debate centred on the origins, as well as audience of the early ballads, and therefore, upon the definition of ‘yeoman’.

Which definition of ‘yeoman’ did the ballads refer to? The older medieval definition, from the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century, pertains to a household officer in the service of noblemen or royalty. These were *valetti* and could be drawn from gentle families.<sup>17</sup> The ‘newer’ definition from the end of the Middle Ages, the time of the writing of the ballads, was of a yeoman as a free man who may have owned some land. Hilton considered a yeoman to be a ‘wealthy peasant farmer.’<sup>18</sup> He considered peasants to be the audience of the ballads. Holt disagreed. He affirmed that the ‘social historians’ had been in error, as there is nothing in the ballads which supports the killing of landlords. On the contrary, he stated that Robin is not a peasant and there is no mention of any feeling of hostility to landlordism in any ballad.<sup>19</sup> Holt stated that there is also nothing relating to the events of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. In addition, Holt maintained that the fact that Robin of the ballads considers a knight to be a worthy friend is quite dissimilar to ideas behind the peasant uprising. That uprising seems to have encouraged the destruction of the gentry and nobility as a class.<sup>20</sup> Holt pointed out that the ballad known as the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, is actually addressed to ‘gentlemen’ and the language of the ballad is that of fourteenth-century bastard feudalism.<sup>21</sup> It was thus developed perhaps at the time of the peasant unrest, but not by peasants. If the ballads

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<sup>16</sup> J. M. Steadman, Jr. ‘The Dramatization of the Robin Hood Ballads’, *Modern Philology*, 17, 1 (May. 1919), 9-23, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> R. H. Hilton, ‘The Origins of Robin Hood’, *Past & Present*, 14 (Nov. 1958), 30-44, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

had been developed by peasants, they might be considerably more peasant-oriented than they seem to be. Thus, Holt generally considers the ballads of Robin Hood to be tales for the noble household. Interestingly, he leaves open the possibility of a thirteenth-century definition for yeoman, and states that the ballads were perhaps performed for household yeomen.<sup>22</sup> He also states that the appellation ‘yeoman of the crown’, seen in the first of the early ballads, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450, might have been possible in a thirteenth-century context.<sup>23</sup> This is an idea which shall be developed in this chapter.

In 1976, Dobson and Taylor edited a compendium of Robin Hood material in their *Rymes of Robyn Hood*. They considered Robin to be a ‘yeoman hero for a yeoman audience’.<sup>24</sup> They hold that the late medieval audience of the ballads was being asked to identify with a character of social status in-between a knight and a peasant.<sup>25</sup> This is the later definition for yeoman. Interestingly, they note that the early definition of yeoman continued to be used until the end of the Middle Ages, and beyond, in addition to the latter definition, which relates to yeoman as a middling social class.<sup>26</sup> There was perhaps some permissible flexibility which an audience may have enjoyed in their interpretation of the ballads.

Dobson and Taylor hold that Holt’s position for the gentle audience of the ballads is overly reliant upon the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, and the other ballads to a lesser extent.<sup>27</sup> They maintain that the stories might not have survived if they were only directed to the gentry. Rather, they seem to have flourished due to a wider appeal.<sup>28</sup> The complexity of the term ‘yeoman’ is embraced by Peter Coss, in his 1985 study ‘Aspects of Cultural Diffusion’ in *Past and Present*.<sup>29</sup> Coss suggests an elegant and flexible scenario in which a yeoman refers to a broad social gradation between peasant and knight without the necessity for identifying the type of yeoman, which, in the tradition of Robin Hood, is seemingly ambiguous, for there seem to be several different subclasses.<sup>30</sup> For Coss, Robin is a generic ‘yeoman’ who merely finds himself in a forest situation.

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<sup>22</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> R. B. Dobson, J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, London 1976, new ed. Bridgend 1997, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> P. R. Coss, ‘Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood’, *Past and Present*, 108 (Aug. 1985), 35-79, pp. 73-4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

More recently, Almond and Pollard have sought to be more specific in determining the type of yeoman the myths describe. They take one of the literal definitions described in the ballads, in which Robin is described as a ‘yeoman of the forest’ or forester.<sup>31</sup> Pollard says that the audience would have interpreted Robin as a forester because that provides a link between someone who is equally at home in rural life, as well as in household service. Interestingly, this seems to refer to Robin in the context of the earlier definition, as a royal servant.<sup>32</sup> Pollard does make allowance for both types of yeoman being seen in the ballads and points out that previous scholars tended to assume that all the ballads referred to one type of yeoman or the other.<sup>33</sup> He points out that the older definition was still in use at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Pollard’s 2004 work, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context*, continues along with this line of interpretation, with the ballads interpreted from the fifteenth-century perspective in which they appeared. Stephen Knight, whose 1994 work, *Robin Hood: A Complete History of the English Outlaw*, may have inspired Pollard’s approach, takes a cautious path. Knight avoids making the sweeping claims of the historians regarding the search for origins, and sticks to an analysis of the ballads in the context of how they relate to each other, as part of an evolving literary tradition.

Examining the context of the use of the ‘yeoman’ definition is one way to make an attempt to roughly ‘date’ the ballads. It is perhaps an erroneous method to even attempt the answer to the question of ‘when’ what was originally perhaps a flexible piece of oral poetry was composed. There have nonetheless been several different methodologies employed for doing so. In a 1978 paper, J. R. Maddicott selected the 1330s as a time of composition, based upon historical considerations. He considers the villain, ‘the abbot of St Mary’s,’ found in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, to have been inspired by a historical money-lending abbot of the early fourteenth century, Thomas de Multon.<sup>35</sup> He considers a contemporary John de Oxenford, sheriff of Nottingham, to have been suitable for the sheriff of the ballads.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> R. Almond, A. J. Pollard, ‘The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 170 (Feb. 2001), 52-77, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>33</sup> Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> J. R. Maddicott, ‘The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, *The English Historical Review*, 93, (Apr. 1978), 278-99, p. 282.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

There are other ways of interpreting origin. Oral ballads contain both story and language. D. Gray suggested the *-e* endings of words, found in the ballads, indicate a dating *c.*1400.<sup>37</sup> In their book of edited ballads, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, Dobson and Taylor have suggested that hopes held for discerning secrets through linguistic examination, are ‘over-optimistic.’<sup>38</sup> This could be true. Oral compositions shift with language. Archaisms, fallacious or real, might have been added by the balladeer to give the appearance of age. These could be hard to distinguish from genuine remnants.

Pollard developed his approach of viewing the *Gest of Robyn Hode* from a fifteenth-century audience’s perspective at about the same time as another investigator, Thomas Ohlgren, was putting his finishing touches on his own interpretation—interpreting Robin from the perspective of an early fifteenth-century audience consisting of members of a London cloth guildhall. Like Knight and Pollard, Ohlgren does not agree with the approach of comparison with historical characters, but is inclined to drawing parallels. For instance, he considers that ‘Edwarde’ of the *Gest* is Edward III. One of the reasons is that the king who meets Robin incognito in the tale, was known in popular tradition to have met commoners incognito.<sup>39</sup> This may not be the original Edward the tale referred to in an earlier form. Ohlgren’s goal is not to find the ultimate inspiration of the legends. Rather as a literary historian, it is to find the date of composition and original audience of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, which is long considered to have been assembled at an unknown time, from pre-existing tales.

Ohlgren notes that the *Gest of Robyn Hode* has several references to cloth and livery, and even that Robin is called ‘master’ like the leader of a guild. Among other names, his men are called ‘brethren’, and ‘felowes’. The medieval guild was a ‘brotherhood’ and ‘fellowship’.<sup>40</sup> Ohlgren notes that the tale as written appears to be one in transition: ‘a... “change in consciousness” from the courtly-knightly ideology of adventure to a new mercantile self-awareness... where the virtues—martial prowess, active risk-taking, solidarity, patriotism, and largesse—previously embodied in the landed nobility have been conserved, imitated, and adapted by the urban merchant classes, who are the

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<sup>37</sup> D. Gray, ‘The Robin Hood Poems’, *Poetica; an International Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies*, Tokyo, 18 (1984), 1-39, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Dobson & Taylor, p. xv.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas H. Ohlgren, ‘Edwardus redivivus in a “Gest of Robyn Hode”’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 99 (Jan 2000) 1-28, 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

producers and consumers of the early poems and plays of Robin Hood'.<sup>41</sup> There is an evident re-fashioning of earlier material. Tales for an earlier audience have been collected to be performed for merchant yeomen. What were these earlier tales about?

Maurice Keen noted a sequence of historical events and personas involved in the war of the 1260s, which had been hitherto alluded to by Powicke as relating to the Robin Hood tradition.<sup>42</sup> The actual history relating to these persons seems to relate to plot events found in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, which was not published until after about 1492.<sup>43</sup> The implication is two-fold. Firstly, it is apparent that a story behind part of the plot of what would become the *Gest of Robyn Hode* may have been compiled as early as the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. This is sufficiently early for the deeds of an obscure Sherwood character called Roger Godberd, *fl.*1260s, a member of the disinherited rebels, to have remained fresh in the minds of relevant listeners. A second implication is that Roger Godberd was confused with Robin Hood as prominent outlaws were perhaps already called 'Robehod' in the 1260s, indicating the legend was pre-existing. Keen's work compares history with legend, yet achieves a surprisingly good match. Somehow, certain historical deeds of Roger Godberd seem to have infiltrated the Robin Hood tradition. This work has recently been expanded by David Baldwin, in his 2010 work, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked*, where he suggests that although there seem to be many archetypes for Robin Hood, Roger Godberd seems to come closest to the myth.<sup>44</sup> Godberd is not however the original Robin Hood archetype, because the earlier story was based in the Yorkshire environs, not Nottingham.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing provided to link Godberd to the name 'Robin Hood', save that the *Gest of Robyn Hode* seems to be for a major part, about Godberd's adventures under the name of 'Robin Hood'. Unlike the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, other early Robin Hood ballads never mention 'Sir Richard atte the Lee' (comparable to Godberd's historical ally, a rouge knight called Sir Richard Foliot) as a friend of Robin. The tradition recorded in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* appears to be incompatible with that in the other ballads, where Little John is

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward: The Community of the Realm in the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols, Oxford 1947-50, vol. 2, p. 530.

<sup>43</sup> Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, pp. 195-7.

<sup>44</sup> David Baldwin, *Robin Hood: The English Outlaw Unmasked*, London 2010, p. 176.

<sup>45</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, pp. 86-7.

Robin's best ally. Godberd's name is not found in the Robin Hood tradition. The name of the outlaw is 'Robin', or Robert—Robertus Hudus, as Bower wrote in Latin.

The major complication when it comes to dating the traditions of the ballads is that it appears more than one inspirational archetype has been employed. It has been noted that there are several locations for the geography of the Robin Hood ballads. Various localities have been stitched together. In the words of Holt: 'the sheriff of Nottingham intrudes into Barnsdale, where he has no business to be, and both he and the outlaws move from Barnsdale to Sherwood at a speed beyond the fleetest of horses.'<sup>46</sup> There is even a Lancashire element which may have intruded after Yorkshire and Nottingham stories were joined together.<sup>47</sup> Maddicott went as far as to suggest, quite reasonably, that based upon geographical considerations, as well as unique elements, one of the compilers of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* was a Yorkshire individual who took local geography into consideration.<sup>48</sup> Importantly, neither Barnsdale nor Nottingham is the setting of any of the earlier 'noble outlaws.' This might suggest that the ballads are not a mere re-hashing of existing ideas. Rather they are based upon unique locations which do not seem to occur elsewhere in outlaw literature. In addition, they seem to draw upon multiple sources. There seems to be more than one tradition behind the ballads. Over time, these traditions somehow became inter-woven.

### Older traditions in the early ballads

As can be seen, the historiography presents us with varying opinions about the origin of the Robin Hood ballads. In the past, historians have generally favoured a fourteenth-century origin for the tradition, because the 'ryms' are first mentioned by Langland. As mentioned, the discovery of an outlaw, William son of Robert le Fevere, being renamed to William *Robehod* as early as 1262, seems to throw the question of early traditions of the outlaw considerably further back. In 1262, a legendary archetype of 'Robin Hood' may already have been a popular notion.<sup>49</sup> This chapter extends this argument by tracing parallels between the ballads and older material, some dating to the thirteenth century.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> J. R. Maddicott, 'The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood', *The English Historical Review*, 93, 367 (Apr. 1978), 278-99, p. 282.

<sup>49</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 191.

Although none of the ‘Ryms of Robyn Hode’ from the era of *Piers Plowman*, c.1377, are thought to have survived, a rhyming fragment regarding Robin, which dates to c.1410, about 33 years after the writing of *Piers Plowman*, shall be discussed. What is very interesting is that this seems to have been incorporated into the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, as an accessory introduction. This is important as it suggests that the *Gest* contains part of what may have been related to a rhyme of Robin Hood, from the days of Langland.

The task of dating the origins of ballads themselves is difficult. It is perhaps not correct to seek a specific composition date for any of them, as we are fundamentally working with something which has developed orally. If a date of origin exists for the ballads, it is likely to be very late, perhaps close to the time in which the ballads themselves appeared. As argued in the previous chapter, persons of literary ability do not seem to have appreciated Robin until that time. Nevertheless, the ballads contain very early stories. The definition of ‘yeoman’ is also subject to debate. In this chapter the lead of Holt is followed in showing that an early form of the usage of the term *yeoman* seems to be in force in the early ballads, perhaps in conjunction with a later form, from the end of the Middle Ages. Since there may be more than one historical inspiration for Robin Hood, the usage of two definitions for ‘yeoman’ might well occur in the ballads. We need to briefly examine an obscure early ballad to illustrate a divergence in tradition, even at an ‘early’ stage.

### ***Robyn and Gandelyn***

Robin Hood is presented in different ways in different early ballads. This is important because it suggests that there is more than one stream of a wider tradition at work. A curious divergent tradition from the standard account of Robin occurs in a ballad called *Robyn and Gandelyn*. This is found only in Sloane MS 2593, written in a ‘mid-fifteenth century hand’.<sup>50</sup> This ballad is so strange that it has been described as a ‘mysterious poem.’<sup>51</sup> ‘Robin Hood’, as such, is never mentioned. The ballad merely mentions a certain ‘Robyn’. ‘Gandelyn’, not found in the other ballads, is Robin’s follower who avenges Robin’s sudden death, after he is slain in the forest by an arrow shot by a certain ‘Wrennok of Donne’. One connection with actual Robin Hood is that a similar-sounding

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<sup>50</sup> Dobson & Taylor, p. 255

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

‘Roger of Donkesly’ (Doncaster) is a character in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*.<sup>52</sup> He is one of Robin’s enemies who appears at the end of the story. In the *Gest*, Robin, as a sick man, goes to Kirklees abbey to have his blood let. Roger of Doncaster is a lover of the *pyroesse* of the abbey.<sup>53</sup> Robin is killed there. ‘*Donne*’ sounds sufficiently similar to *Donkesley*, as a place name of Robin’s assassin, to suppose there was some confusion or parallel storytelling at some stage. The existence of the mysterious ballad in c.1450 also demonstrates a degree of divergence of themes into different traditions, as it existed at about the same time as *Robin Hood and the Monk*, which is very different indeed. Alternately, and vice-versa it may also show that people incorporated themes from outlaw tales into other less-related stories. This is important because it is the contention of this work that the ballads contain certain elements which derive from an earlier period but that these were mixed with other elements from later periods.

### ***Robin Hood and the Monk, c.1450***

A tale in which several ideas found in Latin monastic stories may be seen is the ballad *Robin Hood and the Monk*. This exists in manuscript form from c.1450. Along with *Robyn and Gandelyn*, it is perhaps the earliest of the so-called early ballads. It is the only ballad which tells of Robin being imprisoned. The tale begins with a nice day in the ‘Greenwood’ in late spring, ‘*erly in a May mornynge*’.<sup>54</sup> Robin tells Little John that despite the pleasant weather, he is grieved by the fact he has not attended mass in Nottingham town for a fortnight. He then resolves to go to Nottingham with the protection of the Virgin Mary.<sup>55</sup> ‘Much’, the miller’s son, then suggests Robin take twelve strong and ‘*well weppynd*’ yeomen with him, so that none would dare attack him. Robin refuses this, deciding to take only Little John, to ‘*beyre my bow*’. They then have an impromptu archery contest and John wins. Robin calls him a liar and a cheat and John decides to leave his master’s service. With the interlude over, the tale becomes more serious. Robin has foolishly mistreated his otherwise loyal servant. Alone, Robin reaches Nottingham and enters ‘*Seynt Mary chirch*’, and kneels before the cross. Robin is then

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Robin Hood and the Monk* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

spotted by a ‘*gret-hedid munke*’, who runs out onto the street, calling for the gates of Nottingham to be shut, and raising a general hue and cry.

*‘Rise up,’ he seid, ‘thou prowde shereff...  
 ...I have spyed the kynggis felon,  
 for sothe he is in this town.  
 ‘I have spyed the false felon,  
 As he stondis at his masse...’*<sup>56</sup>

This ballad contains the first mention of the Sheriff of Nottingham, and of Nottingham itself, in the Robin Hood tradition. The monk has little respect for the ancient tradition of sanctuary, within a church, for he tells the sheriff that Robin is praying inside, ‘at his masse’. We then find out why, as the great-headed monk then asserts:

*This traytur name is Robyn Hode,  
 Under the grene wode lynde; (linden)  
 He robberyt me onys (once) of a hundred pound,  
 Hit shalle never be out of my mynde.*<sup>57</sup>

The monk’s recollection teaches the audience of Robin’s previous activities, and perhaps explains why Robin had been reluctant to visit Nottingham for the past fortnight. This story regarding the one hundred pounds is not found elsewhere. The sheriff then invades the church. Robin fights bravely and strikes the sheriff upon the head, but the sword breaks in two and the sheriff survives. It is significant to note the author makes it seem that Nottingham is rather vulnerable to attack, as the sheriff needs to gather ‘mother’s sons’, to fight Robin and suffers great casualties in taking one man, as Robin slays twelve of them.<sup>58</sup> Another ballad, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, parallels the episode of Robin invading Nottingham. In that ballad, the reason for invasion was to rescue Robin’s friend, Sir Richard. For Holt, the ballads are partly based upon memories of Nottingham’s vulnerability in the 1260s, when the town’s viability was threatened owing to the great robberies around it. At the time, Henry III had authorised its townspeople to reinforce

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

barricades in its defence.<sup>59</sup> This was about two centuries prior to the appearance of the ballads. There may have been more traditions regarding outlaws and Nottingham, which have been lost through the ravages of time. Without really knowing of them, we can hardly guess if the extant ballads contain hints or traces of these possible lost ideas.

The next stanza, number 30, is damaged by damp, but what is legible seems to imply that Robin desperately runs around inside the Nottingham church, to evade capture.<sup>60</sup> Another explanation is that he runs out of the church.<sup>61</sup> It has been reckoned that there is then a considerable missing section, which was lost in transcription.<sup>62</sup> For what follows is the outlaws' lamentation for their captured leader in the forest. It is revealed that faithful John is the only one in his right mind, not 'swooning and collapsing, as if dead', nor 'laying as still as stone', as did the other outlaws, presumably upon hearing of Robin's capture. John admonishes their weakness, and tells them that Robin '*...has servyd Oure Lady many a day... no wyckud deth shal he dye*'.<sup>63</sup> This reference to Robin's piety is reminiscent to that in the first extant Robin Hood story, written by Walter Bower, and covered in the last chapter, in which Robin's hide-out at Barnsdale (in Yorkshire) is invaded by the sheriff's men. Robin defeats them, though outnumbered, because he has heard mass regularly.<sup>64</sup>

Many of the plot sequences seem to be missing in the possible transcription error, which explains the suddenness of John's plan to rescue Robin. He knows that the *Grete-headed* monk will be sent to the king to inform him of Robin's capture. It is his plan to encounter the monk, in order to offer his service as his 'guide'. With Much, he finds the monk, who is travelling with a '*litull page*'. After John asks him of Robin, the monk brags that it was he who laid first hand on Robin—'*Ye may thonke me therefore.*' After putting the monk at ease, John throws him off the horse, and cuts off his head, with Much dispatching the page. The ballad then explains that John and Much would '*bare letturs to oure king*', which had been carried by the monk, and presumably tell of Robin's capture.<sup>65</sup> In the next stanza, John is kneeling to the king, pretending to be the appropriate messenger. The king seems pleased with the capture of Robin, giving Much

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<sup>59</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 97.

<sup>60</sup> Francis James Child (ed.), *English and Scottish Ballads*, 8 vols, Boston 1857-9, vol. 3, pp. 98-101.

<sup>61</sup> Dobson & Taylor, p. 117.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> *Robin Hood and the Monk* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. trans. D. Watt, 9 vols, St Andrews 1977-1997, vol. 5, p.354.

<sup>65</sup> *Robin Hood and the Monk* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 43.

and John twenty pounds, and making them ‘*yemen of the crown*’—servants to the king. He then gives John a document bearing a seal to secure Robin’s release, allowing safe conduct for Robin to the king—‘*and no man do hym dere*’.<sup>66</sup> It seems the king has been beguiled by John’s disguise, but this is not really made clear by the text. John returns to Nottingham bearing the king’s seal to the sheriff, who accepts the directives, upon seeing the ‘*kingus seell*’.<sup>67</sup> The porter of the gate reveals to John that their men had died on the walls, thanks to assaults every day, from ‘*John and Moch and Wyll Scathlock*’.<sup>68</sup>

After a celebration, in which the sheriff gets drunk, John goes down into the prison, and after dispatching the porter, frees Robin. They leave the castle by leaping away, where the wall is lowest. The following morning, the sheriff is in a panic at seeing the porter dead and Robin’s cell empty. He issues a proclamation of rewards and searches the streets, before lamenting that if he should ever come before the king, he will be hanged.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, Robin and John are safe in the forest. The ballad then changes scene to the king’s chamber. The king is angry that he and the sheriff have been beguiled. The king laments that Little John must be one of the best of England’s *yeman*, and notes his preferential loyalty to Robin in spite of him having been made a *yeman of the crowne*, and given ‘*girth*’ (pardon), as well as ‘*fee*’, an income of some sort, by himself.<sup>70</sup> It seems there was some confusion in the writer’s mind regarding the exact plot. The story may be based upon several earlier hypothetical tales—one in which the outlaw is taken and then given safe passage to see the king, another in which the outlaw is broken out of jail, and another in which the outlaw is given pardon, as happens in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. Combining them might create problems in the plot. There was absolutely no need for the breakout to have occurred since Robin may have been escorted out of the castle by John, thanks to his possession of the king’s documents, and to his title of ‘king’s yeoman’. Robin would then have been in John’s power, and have been able to make a break for it. If not, he would have instead been brought to a king who thought highly of Little John and Robin as well, so it seems no punishment was meted out for this reason.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

The plot seemed to have been leading to that eventuality, when it was interrupted by the breakout.

Another seeming anomaly is the fact that Little John is on speaking terms with the king. This would not have happened if he were a mere peasant, yet the ballad gives little clue as to social status. Perhaps the information which might have allowed us to make sense of the story was modified, before being written down. The fact the king's messenger has been murdered does not seem to matter. The king is perfectly happy to speak with Little John instead of the slain monk, after John tells a partial truth, that the monk 'died on the journey.'<sup>72</sup> John is then made the royal messenger and yeoman of the crown, despite being a 'nobody' in the story. The fact Robin is granted escort to appear before the king himself is another anomaly, suggesting both Robin and John are quite highly placed in the king's estimation. It would seem that the storyteller is reluctant to place Robin in the king's court, despite the story leading in that direction. The storyteller prefers Robin to remain in the forest, away from the establishment. Robin will not have gentility thrust upon him.<sup>73</sup>

What of the usage of 'yeoman'? In this ballad, the king addresses two merry men, Little John and Much the miller's son. He grants them the title of 'yeoman of the crown', which would imply a form of personal service to the royal household:

*The kyng gaf Moch and Litul Jon,  
Twenti pound in sertan,  
And made thim yemen of the crown.*<sup>74</sup>

This is important because it is the earlier, medieval usage for 'yeoman' which is perhaps being expressed here. Robin is also made a personal servant or yeoman of the king in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*.<sup>75</sup> It is this which may be the origin of Robin's yeomanry. Nevertheless, *Monk* is the first time in which Robin and his men are described as yeomen.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> A. J. Pollard, 'Political Ideology in the Early Stories of Robin Hood', *Outlaws in Medieval and Early Modern England: Crime, Government and Society, c.1066-c.1600*, eds. J. C. Appleby, P. Dalton, Farnham 2009, p. 124.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

## *A Gest of Robyn Hode*

*A Gest of Robyn Hode* is the most popular of the extant ballads. It was published and republished in England between c.1492 and c.1610.<sup>76</sup> It has been described as: ‘a conflation of four older ballads: Robin Hood, the Knight and the Monk; Robin Hood, Little John and the Sheriff; Robin Hood and the King; and Robin Hood’s death.’<sup>77</sup> This is hypothetical, as these ballads are not extant, but the argument is reasonable enough as the ‘ballad’ is as long as a minor epic, and there are some paradoxical elements which do not seem to fit in with each other.

The *Gest of Robyn Hode* seems to take the form of a biography of Robin. The ballad begins in the *greenwoode*, with Robin and his men assembled for the hearing of a little outlaw’s manifesto, delivered by Robin. Robin tells Little John that he must ‘bete and bynde’ bishops and archbishops, not harass any squires or gentry, and keep a mind’s eye out for the sheriff.<sup>78</sup> However, before we see any of this beating and binding, the plot is effectively hijacked by the entrance of a knight, later known as ‘Sir Richard at the Lee’.<sup>79</sup> He becomes Robin’s greatest ally in the story, even though he is not mentioned in any other ballad. Holt considered this character to have been inspired by a historical archetype. There was a ‘Richard Foliot’, who was a good friend of the Nottingham outlaw Roger Godberd, who led a Sherwood-Forest rebellion during the war-torn 1260s.<sup>80</sup> Robin’s order to John implied that the ballad should have been about beating and binding clerics. Instead Robin’s men waylay the knight and plan to rob him, but then find he has no money, save for six shillings. This is in spite of the fact Robin had hitherto ordered John that no harm come to any knight or squire.<sup>81</sup> This seems to suggest that the *Gest of Robyn Hode* is made up of different plots which have been stitched together. One is about an outlaw who attacks bishops and archbishops, and another is about an outlaw who might rob a knight.

After Robin’s men find they have a poor knight, rather than a rich one on their hands, he is made to tell his tale of woe. They find that the knight must travel to the abbey of St

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas H. Ohlgren, Lister M. Matheson. *Robin Hood: The Early Poems, 1465-1560: Texts, Context, and Ideology*, Delaware 2007, p. 133.

<sup>77</sup> P. Valentine Harris, ‘Who was Robin Hood?’ *Folklore*, 67 (Jun. 1956), 103-5, p. 103.

<sup>78</sup> *A Gest of Robyn Hode* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 92.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>80</sup> Holt, ‘Robin Hood’, *ODNB*; B. Harrison, H. C. G. Matthew (eds.), Oxford 2004, accessed 7/2/13.

<sup>81</sup> *A Gest of Robyn Hode* in Knight & Ohlgren, pp. 91-2.

Mary's, in Yorkshire, in order to beg the abbot there to extend his loan—or else he must soon forfeit his lands into the hands of that abbot, for the knight has no money. In order to prevent this, Robin dips into his treasury and lends the knight four hundred pounds in order to pay the debt with the proviso that it be paid back to him, interest free, a year later.

Just to illustrate the avariciousness of the abbot, the collateral for the loan, the knight's lands, are revealed to be worth more than the loan amount: four hundred pounds 'a year' by income alone.<sup>82</sup> This compares to four hundred pounds of loan upon which the whole land is apparently staked. The knight has seemingly been cheated as his land itself is valued at only four hundred pounds in the loan agreement. It is little wonder then that the abbot is subsequently shown to be so disappointed by Richard's payment. To create a spectacle, Richard arrives at the abbot's court in rags and begs for more time. He is rebuffed and then angrily throws the money on the table in front of the abbot. The ballad describes the abbot as staring into space, almost in disbelief.<sup>83</sup> This story may be allegorical. It exemplifies the misfortune of an English knight, whose land is forfeit into the hands of a cleric, over an unjust loan. Parallels for the avarice of the Yorkshire clerics have been found in history, but if we are to seek a parallel in literature, we could turn to the 1230s, where within the writings of the St Albans chroniclers, churchmen of Yorkshire were seen to be highly avaricious, and to have sold their souls to the devil.<sup>84</sup>

A paradox of the entire tale of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* is that although Robin has no obvious social status, his best friend becomes a knight, Sir Richard, and he himself enters the king's personal service later in the tale, after being pardoned.<sup>85</sup> One gets the impression there is something not being told regarding Robin's origins. The king himself determines to find Robin, but the only way he can find the outlaw is to look for him in the forest, disguised as a monk. In this manner, the king and his men are intercepted, and subjected to Robin's 'hospitality'. After a game of buffets, Robin finally recognises the king, by looking him in the face:

*Robyn behelde our comly kyng*

*Wystly (intently) in the face*

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>84</sup> Wendover (trans. Giles), 2: 598-600.

<sup>85</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 142.

*So dyde Syr Richarde at the Le,  
And kneled downe in that place.*<sup>86</sup>

What would an early audience have made of this literary formula? A medieval coin does not have the facial detail necessary to merit recognition by resemblance. Sir Richard is presented as recognising the king, because he was a member of the gentry, but why would a humbler forest outlaw know him by his face? The only way, presumably, was that Robin was formerly in his service. More pertinently, why is a forest outlaw being spoken to by a king in the first place, and secondly, why does he pardon Robin of his crimes? John Bellamy suggested that, for the story to make sense, Robin would have seen the king close at hand on an earlier occasion. Meeting the king twice, however, was not an opportunity readily available to the lesser folk in the medieval period.<sup>87</sup> The ballad is thus alluding to the fact that Robin has had access to the king before, and the pleasant encounter makes it seem that Robin is really meeting an old friend. Robin is presented as either very famous already, in his own time, or as a member of the king's entourage. Perhaps this relates to why, as early as 1540, the antiquary John Leland, wrote that Robin had been a famous 'nobleman outlaw'.<sup>88</sup> This kind of idea was an opinion which would be almost universal between the sixteenth century and the modern era.

There is a further mystery at hand. That is that after the ballad, the *Gest of Robyn Hode* is complete, we see this statement tacked onto the end:

*For he was a good outlawe, And dyde pore men moch god.*<sup>89</sup>

What can this mean? The *Gest of Robyn Hode* doesn't say how Robin did the poor any good at all, unless we are talking about the knight whom Robin helps out for four hundred pounds. As far as historical parallels are concerned however, James Holt, like Maurice Keen, regarded the tale as based upon the historical context of Richard Foliot, (leaf/'lee'), and his compatriot, Roger Godberd, who was perhaps remembered later as 'Robin Hood'.<sup>90</sup> It is to be recalled that outlaws seem to have begun to be called

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>87</sup> John Bellamy, *Robin Hood: An Historical Enquiry*, London 1985, p. 40.

<sup>88</sup> John Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, eds. Tho. Hernius, A. M. Oxoniensis, 1715, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 148.

<sup>90</sup> Holt, 'Hood, Robin', *ODNB*.

something similar to *Robin Hood* in the 1260s, and onwards.<sup>91</sup> Since, as pointed out in chapter four, those rebels may have been perceived to have fought for the cause of the poor as a cornerstone of constitutional reform, a 1260s context of ‘helping the poor’ might have been an inspiration in later legends.

As mentioned earlier, in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, we read that Robin goes to work in the personal service of the king after receiving a request to do so:

King: ‘*And come home, syr,*

*To my courte,*

*And there dwell with me.’*

Robin: ‘*I wyll come to your courte, Your servyse for to see.’*<sup>92</sup>

Again we see that the older definition of yeoman, implying service to the household of a lord, seems to have been still in use. There may be another thirteenth-century survival. In this tale, the king of England is not named, so may be based upon several archetypes. He is however referred to as the ‘comely Kinge Edward.’ This could refer to Edward II, but it could also suggest a parallel to a 1260s tradition, particularly considering rebels and their defeated armies did indeed hide in the forests, in fear of the retributions of Prince Edward, in that time of civil war. Part of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* seems to be a retelling of the tale of ‘Adam Gordun’, as if the adventure had happened to ‘Robin Hood’. Allegedly, Gordun was a ‘knight’ and was met by ‘Prince Edward’ in the forest, and taken onboard as a servant. This story predates the *Gest of Robyn Hode* by two centuries. In the writings of the anonymous chronicler who succeeded Matthew Paris at St Albans, we read something regarding this outlaw under the year 1267. It may have been retrospectively inserted after the legend developed:

About the same time, too, a knight named Adam Gordun, living near Winchester, who had been deprived of his inheritance with the other adherents of Earl Simon, refused to accept of the terms of peace offered by the king, and retreated with his followers to a part of the road leading from Wilton to the castle of Farnham, which, lying in a valley and rendered

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<sup>91</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 188.

<sup>92</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 142.

tortuous by eminences covered with woods, was a good place of retreat for robbers, and employed himself in pillaging the neighbouring country, especially the lands of those who adhered to the king's cause. Edward being desirous of trying the strength and courage of this man, whose fame had reached his ears, marched against him with a strong body of troops; and as he was preparing for battle, Edward gave orders to his followers not to interfere to prevent a single combat between them. The two therefore met, and continued to exchange repeated blows at one another with equal effect. For a long while they fought without either party giving way to the other, when Edward, delighted at the valour of the knight and his courage in battle, advised him to surrender himself, and promised him his life and a good fortune. To this the knight assented, and throwing away his arms surrendered to Edward, who sent him off that night to Guildford, with a good recommendation, to be presented to the queen his mother. His inheritance was afterwards restored to him by Edward, who became his friend, and always found in him a faithful servant.<sup>93</sup>

In both the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, and in the chronicle, we have the outlaw doing combat with the king, the king taking the outlaw into service, and the king (or future king) being Edward. The information regarding Adam Gordun is important because it supplies a late thirteenth-century context to a ballad which was perhaps not compiled until the end of the fifteenth century. This demonstrates that early information can inspire later tradition, albeit in a highly modified form which has lost much of its original flavour, and contextual relevance.

Knight has made an interesting observation: ‘A recurrent feature of the early Robin Hood texts is the way in which Robin or one of his band will pose as a member of the legal apparatus—Little John as the king’s yeoman in the “Monk”, Robin himself as an

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<sup>93</sup> *Matthew Paris's English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, ed. trans. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1854, vol. 3, p. 364.

informant in the “potter”, Robin as Guy the bounty hunter in “Guy”.<sup>94</sup> I would argue that although these elements may have served stories well as clever outlaw disguises designed for the entertainment of the audience, they may also have been memories of a tradition in which Robin was thought to have been associated with part of the kingdom’s hierarchy. A simple forest outlaw, as Robin is considered to have been in a more original legend does not simply don a disguise and hobnob with the well-to-do. No peasant can simply seamlessly blend into the culture of the elite. Perhaps there was a reason why early audiences could understand why Robin could serve the king.

### The evolution of ‘yeoman’

So far we have seen various definitions of ‘yeoman’ as they are extant in the ballads. They are applied both to Robin, as well as to his men. As mentioned earlier, the term has at least two different definitions. There is a high-medieval understanding of the term as referring to a ‘servant or attendant in a royal or noble household, usually of a superior grade, ranking between a sergent... and a groom... or between a squire and a page.’<sup>95</sup> There is also a different fifteenth-century definition which refers to a new social class of the time, ranking between husbandman and gentleman.<sup>96</sup> The use of the term yeoman, in all its contexts however, seems to preclude inclusion in the highest classes—the nobility. It is really difficult to be more specific, but the use of the term seems to indicate that Robin was seen as a person of some social standing, when he was outlawed. We summarise some of the uses below. It may well be that there are so many outlaw tales which have ‘lent’ their adventures to the mythical Robin Hood corpus, that various definitions of ‘yeoman’ have been incorporated. This might explain the array of opinions regarding what type of yeoman Robin was, among scholars.

Gamelyn’s outlaw men were called *wight yonge men* (strong young men) rather than ‘yeoman’, as Robin’s men are referred to in the early ballads of the fifteenth century. ‘Young man’ is one accepted very early definition for the word.<sup>97</sup> By the fifteenth century, the term was rather fluid in application. In fact, *Robin Hood and Guy of*

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<sup>94</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 64.

<sup>95</sup> ‘yeoman, n.’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989, online version, June 2010, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/view/Entry/231598>, accessed 7/2/13.

<sup>96</sup> R. Almond, A. J. Pollard, pp. 52-3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

*Gisborne*, a short ballad version of a medieval original, though not recorded in surviving form until the mid-sixteenth century, makes occasional use of the term ‘wight yeoman.’<sup>98</sup> This seems to relate to the earlier usage found in the *Tale of Gamelyn*, meaning something like ‘strong young man’ or ‘strong attendant’. There is an inherent ambiguity relating to the usage of the term *yeoman* in the ballads, because they were composed in the medieval period but not published until the end of the Middle Ages, by which time the definition had shifted. In fifteenth-century usage, for instance, a yeoman middling-class audience might have thought that Robin was one of them.

The claims for yeomanry as a social class of freemen are not really compatible with a statement, mentioned earlier, from John Leland, *c.*1540 in which Robin is described as *nobilis exlex*, or noble outlaw. The term *nobilis* may (generally but not necessarily) be equated with holding a pedigree to a noble title, which ranks higher than gentry. Almond and Pollard however, consider that ‘yeoman’ in the ballads means ‘yeoman of the forest’, which seems to be a title for ‘forester.’<sup>99</sup> Most curiously for an apparent peasant, ‘Robin Hood, the yeoman of the forest, is fully cognizant of the rituals and practices of gentlemanly hunting.’<sup>100</sup> If an archetype of Robin Hood was a peasant, then ‘yeoman’ in the medieval usage, might have just referred to a ‘young man’, for peasants were not awarded high titles. On the other hand, this argument is not in keeping with the specific nature of Robin’s yeomanry. Usually only noblemen and members of the gentry are awarded titles.

The outlaw tradition began with the earlier outlaw legends of noblemen earls like Fouke Fitz Warin, Eustache the Monk and even Hereward the Wake, who lived as far back as the Norman Conquest. Although the names of these earlier outlaws were usually forgotten, their adventures proved so interesting that they were incorporated into later legend. It is known that many of the adventures of Fouke Fitz Warin have found their way into Robin ballads, and were retold as if Robin himself had accomplished them.<sup>101</sup> It is not the place of this chapter to list all the instances of that occurrence, as that work has already been largely done.<sup>102</sup> The inclusion of the adventures of earlier earls into the Robin Hood corpus does however add to the confusion of what sort of yeoman Robin

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<sup>98</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 174.

<sup>99</sup> R. Almond, A. J. Pollard, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>101</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 690.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 672-3.

Hood was perceived to have been. Or, more startlingly, the presence of an older yeoman definition allowed a variety of figures loosely qualifying as different sorts of yeoman, to become integrated into the legends. Adam Gordun, as a strong and virtuous knight exhibits many of the qualities of the yeoman Robin Hood of the fifteenth century. By becoming a household knight, or servant, Gordun seemingly fulfilled the criteria for the earlier yeoman definition. Although it has not been suggested, the simple inclusion of this legend into the Robin Hood ballads may have contributed towards making ‘Robin’ into a yeoman.

Peter Coss considers that had the characters of Robin Hood really been foresters, they may have been called as such. Instead, they seem to be portrayed as yeomen of another sort who are merely situated in a forest.<sup>103</sup> This assertion might be qualified by saying that Robin Hood is ultimately based upon many different outlaws and therefore different types of yeoman. Behind them all however, is an original medieval valet, as seen in the ballads, who seems to have been servant to the king. Perhaps simply, the balladeer was aware that this was the fate of the outlaw, so he had no problem calling him a yeoman at the start of the ballads (ideas of Robin becoming a yeoman late in the tale may not have been news to an audience anyway, as they had perhaps heard vestiges of the story before). The idea of a yeoman in the king’s employ seems a likely original meaning behind the word, and it may not have even applied to any original ‘Robin Hood’ but to other outlaw figures which relate to the legend, such as William Cloudesley, or Adam Gordun, both of whom were compelled to work in this way after their pardon.

### **‘Yeoman’ as a later textual addition**

Despite the definition of yeoman, in a medieval sense, being present in the ballads, we also see evidence of yeoman as a term increasingly used to describe Robin Hood, and in this sense it can relate to the later definition. There is no mention of ‘yeoman’ in the three medieval chronicles which mention Robin. These are the works of Walter Bower, Andrew of Wyntoun, and a marginal commentator for the *Polychronicon*. These are all early to mid fifteenth century. The first mention of Robin as a yeoman is in the early ballads, which are mid to late fifteenth century. By then ‘yeoman’ perhaps meant small landowner rather than direct servant of the king, or lord.

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<sup>103</sup> Coss, p. 74.

In *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, R. M. Wilson noted the similarity between Bower's story and *Robin Hood and the Monk*.<sup>104</sup> He was referring to Robin's veneration for the Virgin, which, in both stories, could not be interrupted despite the approach of a sheriff and his men. Bower wrote his story of Robin Hood in c.1440. The MS for *Robin Hood and the Monk* is dated to c.1450. The story begins:

*In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,  
And leves be large and long,  
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste  
To here the foulys song.*<sup>105</sup>

There is no address made to a yeoman audience, but it is very similar to how *Robin Hood and the Potter*, a slightly later representative of the early ballads goes. In this, the well-bred are addressed:

*In schomer, when the leves spryng,  
The bloschoms on every bowe,  
So merey doyt the berdys syng  
Yn wodys merey now.*

*Herkens, god yemen,  
Comley, corteys, and god,  
On of the best that yever bare bowe,  
Hes name was Roben Hode.*<sup>106</sup>

The ballad appears to contain two sequential introductions, when either one or the other would do. For some reason, both are included. This suggests some modification of original material has occurred. There may have been an earlier introduction, so good it could not be done away with, and then a second introduction designed to take advantage of a newer audience of the yeoman class.

One thing which is to be noticed is that Robin is immediately, at the start of various early ballads, described as a yeoman. The references to yeomanry then appear to drop off

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<sup>104</sup> R. M. Wilson, *Lost Literature of Medieval England*, Frome and London 1970, p. 139.

<sup>105</sup> *Robin Hood and the Monk* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 37.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

as we venture deeper into the ballads. It was almost as if the word ‘yeoman’ was used to introduce Robin to an audience of late fifteenth century yeomen, to pique their attention, so they, as fifteenth-century yeomen, or members of a sort of middling class, could feel that Robin was associated with them.

The *Gest of Robyn Hode*, published just before 1500, is addressed to a slightly different audience to that of the *Monk*. It begins:

*Lythe and listin, gentilmen,  
That be of frebore blode;  
I shall you tel of a gode yeman,  
His name was Robyn Hode.*<sup>107</sup>

It seems the ‘lythe and listin’ introduction is an ancient one. This can be deduced because the mid fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn* begins: ‘Lithes and listneth and harkeneth aright.’<sup>108</sup> Yet there is no address to gentlemen, or even ‘yeomen’ in that tale, written down several decades prior to the Peasants’ Revolt. Gamelyn becomes ‘cheef justice’ of the ‘free forest’ rather than yeoman forester. ‘Gentilmen’ is an even more recent addition than ‘yemen’. It suggests that a higher-class audience was by then required to pay attention to stories of this outlaw. In the second paragraph of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, we read:

*Robyn was a prude outlaw,  
Whyles he walked on grounde;  
So curteyse an outlawe as he was one  
Was nevere non founde.*<sup>109</sup>

This serves as an introduction to the fact the play is about Robin Hood. It is not until the third paragraph that we perhaps have a semblance of what may have been an early peasant introduction. This could well date, in form, from *c.*1377 and might be a relic of the ‘Rymes of Robin Hood’ which has found its way into a much later ‘early ballad’:

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

*Robyn stode in Bernesdale,  
And lenyd hym to a tre,  
And bi hym stode Litell Johnn,  
A gode yeman was he.*<sup>110</sup>

This is yet another ‘introduction’ which follows after the last. The evidence for this as an older introduction is that it relates to a surviving scrap of a ballad relating to Robin Hood, which dates from the early fifteenth century. This was perhaps only about thirty years after the revolt in which time ‘Ryms of Robyn Hode’ were apparently known:

*Robyn Hod in Barnsdale stode.*<sup>111</sup>

The similarity of this with later tradition demonstrates that a part of the ballad was derived from an earlier, perhaps different version. ‘Rymes’ from Langland’s lifetime may well have found their way into written ballads. We know the ‘ryme’ was still alive in c.1432, for a clerk of the parliamentary rolls inserted the following into a margin under that year:

*...Robyn,  
hode,  
Inne,  
Greenwode,  
Stode,  
Godeman,  
was,  
hee...*

Robin Hood, in Greenwood stood. He was a good man.<sup>112</sup>

Significantly, this is the first time we see evidence of a person of literate ability seeming to praise Robin. The reason for writing the text is unclear. It consists of a list of outlaws, of which the quoted fragment is a segment. Knight considers the clerk was simply trying

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>111</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 264.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

to amuse himself.<sup>113</sup> It is evident that this is the introduction to what may have been some surviving rhyme of Robin Hood. This text is amazing for its similarity to the phrase in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. It is to be noted that rather than saying ‘*A gode yeman was he*’, as in the post-1492 *Gest*, Robin here in 1432 is merely a *Godeman*. ‘Yeoman’ is simply not used in this earlier time. This may be because the rhymes in this earlier time were not directed at the middling-class yeoman, but the ‘foolish common people’, as noted by Bower in 1440. This is important because it demonstrates that earlier myths of Robin were perhaps made to fit in with the aspirations and ideals of the yeoman of the late fifteenth century.

### ***Robin Hood and the Potter***

In the *Gest of Robyn Hood* we see the phrase: ‘*For he was a good outlawe, and dide pore men moch god*’ tucked in right at the end of the story.<sup>114</sup> Holt’s main explanation for this, that Robin did the poor knight much good, is somewhat unsatisfying.<sup>115</sup> Holt himself explains that, relative to other classes, knights were not that badly off in the medieval scheme of things, even if they might have become impoverished. If we are speaking of a noble or gentrified audience, they might have had sympathy, but it is hard to see why poorer peasants might have had sympathy for the ‘poverty’ of a knight. Although Holt maintains that this is the closest Robin comes to giving to the poor, in the stories, I would suggest that there is a closer parallel to robbing in order to give to the poor, found in another ballad.<sup>116</sup>

*Robin Hood and the Potter* is an almost unique tale found in a MS which dates to around 1500.<sup>117</sup> This ballad is rather important because it actually seems to be the only ‘early’ ballad which relates to Robin assisting ‘pore men’ in general, rather than the isolated instance of helping the knight as seen in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. In this ballad, Robin steals from a potter and sells wares cheaply to the commons...

*Foll effen agenest the sceffeys gate,  
Showed he hes chaffare,*

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<sup>113</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, New York 2003, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 38.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 57.

*Weyffes and wedowes abowt hem drow,  
And chepyd fast of hes ware,  
Yet 'Pottys, gret chepe!' creyed Robyn,  
Y loffe yeffell thes to stonde.*

Right against the Sheriff's gate  
He showed his wares,  
Wives and widows drew around,  
And quickly bought his wares,  
'Pots, great bargain!' cried Robin  
I hate to leave these standing.<sup>118</sup>

There is an immediate response to the discounted pots, though the result is a farce:

*The pottys that were pens feyffe,  
He solde tham for pens thre;  
Preveley seyde man and weyffe,  
'Ywnder potter schall never the'.*

The pots that were five pennies,  
He sold them for three,  
Man and wife privately stated:  
'Yonder potter shall never prosper'.<sup>119</sup>

What are we to make of this? Evidently Robin is doing a service for the public, but this has not been mentioned by commentators, presumably because Robin is selling rather than giving. Pollard considers that a mockery is being made of commerce.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps however, there is more to the story. In this ballad, Robin does not have to assist the public in order to complete his mission. His 'mission' is to disguise himself and play the informer as to Robin Hood's location in Sherwood. He does so and convinces the sheriff to make the journey with him. Once safely inside Sherwood with the sheriff, he reveals himself as Robin, thus proving to the sheriff that Robin is no liar, as he did indeed take

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<sup>118</sup> *Robin Hood and the Potter* in *Ibid.*, p. 66., my translation.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66., my translation.

<sup>120</sup> Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, p. 9.

him to see Robin Hood. The entire ‘pots’ episode is superfluous to this, and may originally have been a separate ballad. Two stories regarding Robin and Nottingham may simply have been tied together to show how versatile Robin Hood could be. Here, the ‘pots’ episode serves ‘merely’ as comic relief without any explanation as to why Robin decides to act so foolishly. As a plot tool it is used to introduce Robin to the sheriff, because the sheriff’s wife just happens to be interested in one of his pots. The story doesn’t really explain the significance of setting up shop, ‘right against the sheriff’s gate’ since Robin’s pot-selling does not seem to have been noticed by the authorities as an illegal act.

The problem is that Robin is going over and beyond what might have been required to bring himself into the sheriff’s clutches. He not only sells pots cheaply, creating a sensation, but makes a fool of himself in front of the populace. In the ballad, he could have been presented as going straight to the sheriff, offering the location of Robin Hood, with cheap wares as a present, but he instead prefers a more roundabout means of meeting the sheriff. This may have been necessary in the plot in order to incorporate what could have been an earlier ballad or tradition. There may have been a story in which Robin or another outlaw opened up market in town to help the poor, selling goods to everyone cheaply, and another, in which he travelled to Nottingham in order to dupe the sheriff and lure him into Sherwood.

This story echoes archetypal stories told in thirteenth-century chronicles in which an outlaw assisted the poor through the sale of cheap produce. As mentioned in chapter three, hooded men were reputed to have stolen food from clerical stores in Yorkshire in the 1230s, and to have subsequently set up shop in town in order to sell these cheaply to the commons. Documents were presented by the perpetrators to sheriffs who sought to arrest them. These papers bore the royal seal and stated that the perpetrators were not to be obstructed in their acts. Thus they could have acted with impunity, untouchable to sheriffs.<sup>121</sup> This also sounds a little like the tale of *Robin Hood and the Monk*, where the sheriff is prevented from dealing with Robin by John’s presentation of the king’s seal.<sup>122</sup> It somehow had to be added to the story as it may have been dealt with in an earlier outlaw legend.

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<sup>121</sup> *Roger of Wendover’s Flowers of History*, ed. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1849., vol. 2, p. 546.

<sup>122</sup> *Robin Hood and the Monk* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 45.

*Robin Hood and the Potter* is a myth which could have been intelligible to a thirteenth-century audience, aware of some legendary character who sold food on the cheap. By a later period, however, the political circumstances had changed, and more direct memories of the time were replaced by dim oral traditions. What is taken for ‘pots’ in this story may have been something entirely different. There is, for instance, a parallel story to *Potter*, called *Robin Hood and the Butcher*, circulated in the seventeenth century. This story is essentially the same as *Potter*, except instead of pots, Robin robs a butcher, and then sells cheap meat to an eager public.<sup>123</sup> The town butchers then get angry with Robin and take him to the sheriff. Ideas of Robin selling cheap goods may well explain why the writer of the *Gest of Robyn Hode* added a final line that Robin ‘dyde pore men moch god.’<sup>124</sup>

It is not simply through thirteenth-century chronicles that we can see how stories behind *Robin Hood and the Potter* are older than its estimated date of about c.1500. In the earlier *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450, we have the following rhyming introduction:

*In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,  
And leves be large and long,  
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste  
To here the foulys song.*<sup>125</sup>

In the MS of *Robin Hood and the Potter*, c.1500, whose author may have wished to preserve some vestige of the rustic accent of the balladeer, we have a rhyming introduction of a very similar sort to that of the *Monk*:

*In schomer, when the leves spryng,  
The bloschoms on every bowe,  
So merey doyt the berdys syng  
Yn wodys merey now.*<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 56.

<sup>124</sup> *A Gest of Robyn Hode* in Knight & Ohlgren, p. 148.

<sup>125</sup> *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

This chapter has argued that *Robin Hood and the Monk* and *Robin Hood and the Potter* may preserve some elements which were told as stories in a much earlier period. The similarity of the introduction of *Potter* to that of the *Monk*, as shown here, but not in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, suggests that *Potter* and *Monk* may derive from a similar ballad strain. These were stories told about Robin Hood in the fifteenth century that embellished stories going back to an earlier generation.

### ***Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough and William of Cloudesley***

There is something fascinating going on in the ballad *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough and William of Cloudesley* which dates from the mid sixteenth century, though tales of the outlaws were known in the early fifteenth.<sup>127</sup> Just as stories about Robert of Thwing echo some told about Robin Hood, so might stories about William Wither relate to another legendary figure, namely William of Cloudesley. This particular ballad even relates to William Tell. The mechanism allowing this was the flexibility of the oral tradition, and the age of the ballads, which has allowed corruption of original themes.

The flexibility of oral tradition is exemplified by the fact that William of Cloudesley has parallels to Wyntoun's 'Robin Hood'. Firstly, Cloudesley is described as a 'wight man'.<sup>128</sup> He actually lives in the forest of Inglyswode (Ingolwode of Wyntoun, a purported home of Robin Hood).<sup>129</sup> Robin Hood of the surviving early ballads does not, though none survive from Wyntoun's day.

The story seems to echo general themes about William Wither. In order to rescue William of Cloudesley from a hanging in Carlisle, his outlaw friends decide on a stratagem. They present a 'letter wryten wele' though with a pretended king's seal, to a porter, echoing *Robin and the Monk*, as well as the actions of Wither's men.<sup>130</sup> Ultimately Cloudesley and his men go to London to beg pardon. The king is initially adamant that they must be hanged for their famous crimes, but pardons them after the queen begs a boon. After this, stories reach the king about how Cloudesley and his men are responsible for slaying about 300 men including a mayor and sheriff and justice, and

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>128</sup> *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley* in Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

the king then regrets his decision to pardon them and make them yeomen.<sup>131</sup> An archery contest is held and Cloudesley must shoot an apple from his son's head or be hanged. (Perhaps this competition is seen by the audience as an explanation why he is not hanged for such a major disturbance?) After he successfully does so, he curiously states that he will go to Rome to be absolved by the pope:

The yemen thanked them full courtesly,  
And sayd, 'To Rome streyght wyll we wende,  
Of all the synnes that we have done  
To be assoyled of his hand.'<sup>132</sup>

Not having touched any religious figure, the ballad concludes with Cloudesley presumably going off on an overseas adventure. In this way we have the themes of the letters bearing the king's seal, Cloudesley going to London with his accomplices to be questioned by the king, and immediately going to Rome to be absolved, related also in the *Chronica Majora*.

## Conclusions

The stories told about various outlaw figures celebrated in English literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, demonstrate many relations with those known from the chronicles recorded in the thirteenth century, concerned with Yorkshire in particular. *Robin Hood and the Monk* and *Robin Hood and the Potter* show parallels to these earlier tales, but rather than being set in Yorkshire, they now take place around Nottingham. *Monk* and *Potter* offer exceptional insights into the form of an earlier legend, compared to the more manufactured *Gest of Robyn Hode*, as they were not cobbled together for printed consumption. Rather, these were stories which were passed down as best they could be remembered.

The *Gest of Robyn Hode*, seems to retain elements of earlier stories, being Yorkshire- as well as a Nottingham-oriented. It lacks some of the early thirteenth-century literary parallels found in *Potter*, and yet retains some loose but perhaps perceptible vestiges of traditions based around the Barons' War of the 1260s. The main part of the plot, relating

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

to the waylaying and befriending of a knight, may well have been inspired by events of the later thirteenth century, and a Nottingham tradition. The section it also contains, about Robin in Barnsdale who refuses to attack knights, but encourages his men to attack bishops and archbishops, is part of a different Yorkshire-inspired tradition, directed against the corrupt abbey of St Mary's.

We have seen that *Robin Hood and the Potter* may be a composite of two or more traditions. It is ultimately concerned with capturing the Sheriff of Nottingham, for humiliation and ransom within the woods. In the first half of *Potter*, the location is irrelevant. Robin travels into town to sell pots. This is an unnecessary interlude to his overall mission of luring the sheriff into Nottingham. It is based around the idea of the outlaw as a salesman of cheap stolen goods for the masses, an archetype which might partly originate in the 1230s. Likewise, *Robin Hood and the Monk* is also something of a compilation. Like other ballads, it seems to be based loosely around a parallel to some strife around Nottingham, a town attacked by outlaw rebels in the 1260s. The composite nature of the work is highlighted by the fact Little John does not really need to 'break' Robin out of prison. He is in possession of documents which can seemingly free Robin into his own custody, yet he breaks Robin out of prison regardless because it makes for a good tale. The storyline is thus confused and seems based on more than one possible plot alternative which the balladeer may have chosen. As in the case of *Potter*, the story seems to parallel ideas recorded in the St Albans chronicles from the 1230s—namely the plot event of a sheriff being befuddled by papers bearing the king's seal. A similar scenario is presented in *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*, in which the outlaws use documents with a pretended seal to escape a tricky situation.

The issue of 'yeoman' is an important one. I have suggested that more than one form of yeoman may be involved in the ballads. The early definition of yeoman as servant in a noble or royal household is supported by both the *Monk* and the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. Robin is dealt with personally by the king and even recognises him by his face. The meeting between Robin and king in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* is something of a reunion and Robin is asked to reside in the king's court and do him service. One might imagine that if Robin had been a mere peasant, he may have been considered ill-suited by an audience for such high-level work in the king's proximity.

There is certainly more to the ballads than has been passed down. There are many paradoxes in the ballads about Robin Hood. They are similar to stories about outlaws like

Cloudesley, raising the possibility of the existence of earlier traditions which have partly but not fully come down to us. Certainly the figure of the outlaw in the late fifteenth century was no longer the same as two centuries earlier. Yet he builds on an earlier tradition. This will be discussed further in the next chapter, as we investigate some of the literary and antiquarian material which appeared soon after the early ballads were recorded in writing.

## Chapter 7      Gentrification and the earlier tradition

In the sixteenth century the Robin Hood tradition exhibits considerable divergence from earlier forms. Ballads continue to be written in the old style, but antiquaries and chroniclers begin to imagine Robin Hood as an earl, celebrated for robbing the rich and giving to the poor—a phrase never previously used about him. The famous phrase appears to have its origin in a late sixteenth-century work of William Warner (1558-1609). A section of *Albion's England*, written as a long poem, contains the text:

*Braue Archers and deliuer men, since nor before so good:*

*Those tooke from the rich to giue the poore, and manned Robin Hood.*<sup>1</sup>

The attribute of robbing the rich to give to the poor, featured in later tradition, is not clearly evident in the early ballads, yet later commentators were almost certain of it, and it does not seem to have been altogether an invention of their day. In the previous chapter an example was provided of how Robin might have accomplished this task. In one early ballad, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, Robin sold deeply discounted stolen pots, in Nottingham. In a similar but later ballad, *Robin Hood and the Butcher*, which may have been a relic of an earlier tradition, Robin sold cheap meat. If this is the way in which Robin originally ‘*tooke from the rich to giue to the poore*’, it is clear that this has been obscured in these early ballads, for the tone of this scenario which survives, is one of comedy. It seems to make a ‘mockery of commerce’.<sup>2</sup> Robin’s help for the poor might have possibly become obscured behind a program of fifteenth-century comedy. As hitherto discussed, outlaw myths develop themes much older than the ballad form in which they are presented. The name of Robin Hood was already legendary in 1262.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, Oxford 1994, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late Medieval Stories in Historical Context*, New York 2004, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Holt, ‘Hood, Robin (*supp. fl.* late 12th–13th cent.)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13676>, accessed 7/2/13.

The apparent lack of compatibility between the early and later tradition opens up a paradox that is the subject of this chapter. It is argued that the almost outrageous sentiments and seeming incompatibilities regarding Robin Hood in the later tradition are best explained not as simply pure invention of that day, but as some reference to an earlier tradition, however vague, which has not fully come down to us, leaving us unable to explain some of what we, from a twenty-first-century perspective, consider as the dissimilarities. It is also argued that there was still a certain awareness in the sixteenth century of Robin Hood as a Yorkshire rather than a Nottingham figure. This seems to be an opinion of the playwrights Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle. Perhaps in a related way, this is a conclusion which modern scholarship has also reached, based upon close scrutiny of the early ballads. Reading them, one at once envisages a Robin at home in Yorkshire as well as the location of Sherwood, near Nottingham. Playwrights of the sixteenth century may simply have selected tales from thirteenth-century chronicles, a historic time of several famous heroic rebels, which began to be printed in the sixteenth century. They perhaps encountered tales which they thought congruent with the character of Robin Hood they were creating afresh. They may have encountered histories of earls and high figures of politics, some famous in heroic myth in medieval times, and sought to associate Robin with ideas they found there. Along with popular pressure for gentrified stories, such traditions may have also assisted in gentrifying or even regentrifying Robin Hood, as his story was, in the earlier ballad tradition, already fused with the adventures of earl-like figures of popular tradition.

The Tudor period brought about changes in historical method. Historical writing centred more on the personality of a strong king, and had less to do with the sermonising of chronicling monks.<sup>4</sup> Earlier information about Robin Hood became unsuitable for the antiquarian mind, and Robin was placed in an earlier time, in King Richard and John's day. There were other changes, and the early ballads seem to not have been highly regarded as historical sources. In the early ballad tradition the entire story of Robin's origins and reason for outlawry is ignored, or unknown, despite the fact he has a clear agenda against the sheriff and clergy in particular. This made the ballads unsuitable as complete sources for formulating plays in the high style of those who were

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<sup>4</sup> F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, Toronto 2004, p. ix.

contemporaries of Shakespeare. Such plays needed to include various characters around leading historical figures: information which was best found in chronicles.

It was seen in the last chapter that when Robin resides with the king at court and John becomes a 'yeoman of the crown', the balladeer decides to take these characters back to the forest where they can resume their unassuming identities. In the tradition which came after, Robin is an earl or someone of high birth, and more explanations are sought. He is someone who falls foul of high churchmen, and becomes 'Robin Hood'. Intrigue and conspiracy fall upon him and he dies a premature death. Where does this come from?

There were motives for gentrifying Robin, and imagination played its part. The early ballads survive from a time when there may have been a desire for centralised good government. In the sixteenth century, the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I exemplify administrations which were based around a powerful figurehead. Henry VIII had chosen to dictate his own terms to Rome. Things were quite different from the early thirteenth century, when Rome was technically master of England, and Henry III was a servant of the pope, who assisted him, occasionally, in siphoning resources out of the kingdom. In the various ballads, Robin maintains a loyalty and love towards his king despite some kind of rebellion. The tradition thus reflects one of an allegiance to the monarchy, quite relevant to the end of the Middle Ages, and quite different to the world of King John or the 1260s, in which outlawed rebels furiously fought against their sovereign. It is indeed paradoxical then, that Robin in the sixteenth century should be placed amidst the court of wicked John. Is this gentrification to support the aspirations of a sixteenth-century audience, or an attempt at reconstructing an earlier tradition? The gentrification hypothesis reflects an assumption that Robin Hood was originally a popular figure, subsequently ennobled. Yet one could also argue that there may have been a desire to re-establish attributes that some considered he had lost in other presentations. While both points have their merits, this chapter argues that the latter possibility has been neglected. For instance, it was seen in earlier chapters that Matthew Paris of the thirteenth century, as a part of the educated Latin-speaking audience, had himself supported heroic rebels of the gentry class. In Montfort's war, the gentry and commons fought for similar ideals. It is not impossible that the lost early Robin Hood ideas had supporters among all classes, implying that different stories would have circulated among these classes, in different languages, creating divergences in the early tradition. We even saw that Robin's men are de-facto servants of the king as early as in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, c.1450, the earliest

surviving ballad, when Much and Little John are made yeomen of the crown. This is a courtly scenario at an early stage, but with an emphasis on matters of the forest rather than matters of court. This would be reversed.

In the Elizabethan play: '*The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*', c.1598, the king of Robin Hood is identified as King Richard, with Prince John lurking in the background. Rather than residing in a forest, Robin is active in a courtly environment and takes part in high politics. This is quite different to the ballads, where he was merely a 'yeoman', but it is also a different form of literature. It is antiquarian and historically oriented to match the sentiments of chroniclers and historians of the sixteenth century. The plays of Robin Hood, written by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle at the end of that century, seem a world away from the early ballads of just a hundred years earlier. Nevertheless, there remain parallels with ideas found in the ballads. There is a certain compatibility, despite wild differences. As in the scenario in the *Monk*, and in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, Robin does indeed go to reside with the king in his court for a little over a year. Robin gets bored with this and flees back to the forest.<sup>5</sup> This compatibility with later tradition is not suitably acknowledged in the later scholarship and various objections towards the value of the later tradition shall be outlined in the historiography. Few details were provided of what Robin gets up to in the royal court in the early ballads, even though his presence there is mentioned. It was part of the story, yet that audience may not have been interested in the exploits of the high and mighty.

On the whole, the late chroniclers, antiquaries and balladeers whose work is introduced in this chapter, seem to have combined an innovative presentation, particularly idealising the poor, with older elements, which, it should be argued, may reflect older ideas about the heroic outlaw. James Holt and Stephen Knight allow the possibility that the curious elements of the sixteenth-century tradition have some earlier origin. I would like to further this framework by introducing new evidence into the mixture. It seems that the works of several of the playwrights and antiquaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contain some hitherto unnoticed elements, which parallel elements in the very early legends regarding the mythology of outlaws and victims of the outlaws of the 1230s—although there are also evident differences as well. These stories are originally to be found in the St Albans chronicles of Roger of

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, Michigan 2000, p. 145.

Wendover and Matthew Paris, of the early thirteenth century. Reasons for why the different sources seem to be converging will be discussed. They survived and became part of the framework of the Robin Hood tradition. The brief discussion of historiography deals with antiquarian attempts at placing Robin, as well as some modern commentary on their attempts, which tends to minimise the importance of early efforts.

## Historiography

The seeds of modern scholarship regarding the origins of the outlaw legend of Robin Hood were sown by antiquaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Books, education and literacy were no longer the exclusive trappings of the clergy and the exceptionally wealthy. Education was becoming increasingly available to enterprising men who might later develop the means and desire to locate manuscripts and assorted information, a section of which is perhaps today no longer extant. Antiquaries utilised their own materials in their study of the past. They helped to further develop the legend of the outlaw in their own style. In c.1540, the antiquary John Leland seems to have broken with earlier tradition when he wrote of Robin as a ‘noble outlaw’.<sup>6</sup> This break with tradition renders the idea suspect, at least for many readers.<sup>7</sup> In the following decades, the chronicler Richard Grafton wrote of Robin being an earl, in his *Chronicle*. In c.1598 a play was released, entitled *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, which clarified Robin’s earldom. The sixteenth century is the age in which Robin becomes significantly more elevated in terms of social position than he had hitherto been. The main element surrounding sixteenth-century attempts at history is that the early ballads tend to be disregarded. They may have been regarded as the ‘popular’ tradition, rather than the ‘historical’ tradition which was glorified and aggrandised.

The conventional view is that Robin Hood’s gentrification was considerably developed after the medieval period.<sup>8</sup> It was developed at the hands of chroniclers and commentators who acknowledged and respected centralised power and valued an urbanised ‘elevated culture’.<sup>9</sup> Changes may have been made as a result of a changing

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<sup>6</sup> John Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. Thomas Hearne, vol. 1, London 1774, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, London 1987, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

audience. We know from the mid fifteenth-century chronicler Walter Bower, that Robin was celebrated by the *stolidum vulgus*.<sup>10</sup> These are ‘foolish commons’. Gentrification of outlaw legends occurred very early. As seen earlier, Gamelyn of c.1350 is partly gentrified. Any early mention of Robin’s gentrified ‘origins’ (if any such ideas existed at the time), would perhaps have been seen as less than satisfactory, to the peasants of 1381 who wished to engage in revolt against noblemen.

Several ballads, as they survive from the fifteenth century, seem rather artistic, perhaps different to the form of Robin Hood stories known to Bower, who seems to have generally disliked them. The *Gest of Robyn Hode*, printed fifty years after Bower’s comments, is addressed to ‘*gentylmen*’, and the ballad known as *Robin Hood and the Potter*, written decades earlier, is addressed to ‘*yemen*.’ This implies that the audience in this final period of the Middle Ages was not just the common people (*vulgus*) as earlier suggested by Bower, but, as Holt considers, the employers of minstrels.<sup>11</sup> Holt looks even beyond a yeoman audience, considering that minstrels would have sought the highest patronage available, namely the nobles.<sup>12</sup> The ballads, for Holt, are designed for the nobleman’s household. Nevertheless, Holt considers that Robin of this early period is not gentrified. He is simply a ‘yeoman’.<sup>13</sup> This would not be sufficiently acceptable in the sixteenth century as that audience perhaps wished Robin to be figure of higher prestige.

Munday and Chettle’s *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, from the end of the sixteenth century, are extremely unusual, as they are very different to what has come before, in terms of the early ballads. But that may be mere illusion, as we do not possess all the original writings or oral tales. The early modern scholar Joseph Ritson, reached a startling conclusion regarding these plays in his edition of the Robin Hood corpus of texts. ‘They seem partly founded on traditions long since forgotten’ and ‘contain some curious and authentic particulars not elsewhere to be met with.’<sup>14</sup> One reasonable counter-argument to this is that Munday was not historicising, but simply drawing upon the materials of other, more traditional noble

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Bower. *Scotichronicon*. ed. trans. D. Watt, 9 vols, St Andrews 1977-1997, vol. 5, p. 354.

<sup>11</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, London 1989, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Ritson, (ed.), *Robin Hood: A collection of all the ancient poems, songs, and ballads, now extant, relative to that celebrated English outlaw*, ed. Joseph Frank, London 1832, vol. 1, p. L.

outlaws, from the time of King John. Holt writes that the main components regarding King John were borrowed from an anonymous play: *The Troublesome Reign of King John*.<sup>15</sup> He adds: 'Munday not only traduced the yeoman hero but also translated his story into a tale of court intrigue.'<sup>16</sup> He further adds, however: 'It cannot be proved that Robin's ennoblement originated in the theatre; the first hints of it in Leland antedate the first surviving plays to include it by sixty years; but dramatists' views of the tastes of the theatrical audience, especially at court, certainly encouraged and shaped it.'<sup>17</sup> Folklorist Barbara Lowe had this to say on Munday's *The Downfall and death of Robert Earl of Huntington*. It is: 'a late Elizabethan romantic drama, without the slightest historical value as evidence of anything to do with Robin Hood except notions current about him in 1590-1600. And even then it is just that sort of evidence abhorred by folklorists—coloured by literary embellishment and the exigencies of plot.'<sup>18</sup> Rodney Hilton, who considered Robin something of a popular literary creation, considered that Munday and Chettle attempted: 'to make the popular hero acceptable to the snobbish and pedigree-conscious upper class of Tudor and Stuart England.'<sup>19</sup> The answer to the origin of the audaciously-written plays seems to be that we don't actually know which sections were outright inventions, and which were based on something earlier. Scholars seem to agree that it's best not to dismiss Munday and Chettle's extravagant writings completely as invention.

Nobody has examined the later, post-medieval tradition in greater detail than Stephen Knight. His 1994 work, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, contains an in-depth analysis of the later Robin Hood tradition, which had been hitherto greatly neglected in favour of the earlier tradition. Like Holt, Knight considers that Robin was gentrified in later times. A gentrification process had taken place and the mythical figure of Robin Hood was elevated to the 'nobility,' a position he had never hitherto attained, by perhaps the early to mid sixteenth century. Significantly Knight allows that there may be an older aristocratic tradition related to Robin Hood, than is extant. Nevertheless, he points out the fact that even in the *Piers Plowman* reference regarding rymes of Robin Hood and Ranulf Earl of Chester, as well as in the early ballads, an absence of an

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<sup>15</sup> Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Lowe, 'The Final Truth about Robin Hood?', *Folklore*, 67, 2 (Jun. 1956), 106-9, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> Rodney Hilton, *The Origins of Robin Hood, Past and Present*, 14 (Nov. 1958), 30-44, p. 32.

aristocratic title seems to be implied.<sup>20</sup> Knight considers that the plays represent a re-direction of the Robin Hood tradition, and notes that the play-companies themselves were owned by lords and high officials.<sup>21</sup> He considers they satisfied mass tastes, and pandered to the refined tastes of the ‘powerful few’, who wished to see an elevated Robin, in the London theatres of the 1590s.<sup>22</sup> In a paper from 2003, Meredith Skura expounds this traditional suggestion that the ballads were altered in the sixteenth century, into new stories where Robin became gentrified. She argues that social and cultural changes occurred in London which facilitated the gentrification.<sup>23</sup> London merchants may have dreamed of joining the nobility.<sup>24</sup>

There may be room to allow that certain obscure stories about Robin Hood as well as romantic ideas permeated and mingled with later ones. Thus far, the only Robin Hood authority to suggest that later tradition is *more* ‘accurate’ than that presented in the early ballads was the antiquary and ballad editor Joseph Ritson. He thought that these later stories were more useful for discerning information about the earliest tradition.<sup>25</sup> That is certainly going too far, but as mentioned, Stephen Knight and James Holt both consider that some elements of the later stories might be based upon some earlier narrative. In this chapter, I would like to reflect on this idea, and offer some potential evidence that the antiquaries and storytellers of the post-medieval world, such as Anthony Munday, did not outright invent their material, but at least derived inspiration from, developed and incorporated certain earlier ideas relating to chronicled or otherwise romantic figures, into their works, to a greater extent than is perhaps appreciated, in their attempt to create a new myth.

## **John Mair, c.1521**

What later information was based upon imagination and what was carried over from an earlier tradition? Our first stop in charting the development of the overall movement of ‘gentrification’ of Robin Hood that occurred is an analysis of the chronicle of John Mair

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<sup>20</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> Meredith Skura, ‘Anthony Munday’s “Gentrification” of Robin Hood’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 33, issue 2 (May. 2003), 155-80, p. 156.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Ritson, vol. 1, p. lix.

(1467-1550). Known in his Latin texts as ‘Major’, he was a philosopher, antiquary and chronicler. He was the first to record a tradition which is not found in the ballads. As a chronicler, he did not necessarily consider that he was writing literature. Largely sourcing Caxton (*The Chronicles of England*, 1480), he wrote things down as if they were history. This is important to note because it seems to demonstrate that a seemingly definitive version of Robin Hood differed from the ballad version as early as c.1521. This was what Mair considered to be the authoritative tradition:

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 that were wealthy. They took the life of no man, unless he either attacked them or offered resistance in defence of his property. Robert supported by his plundering one 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 the abbots. The robberies of this man I condemn, but of all robbers he was the humanest and the chief.<sup>26</sup>

This is a far grander view of Robin than anything recorded in the earlier ballads and fragments. For starters, it is made clear that Robin robs the rich to give to the poor, although this phrase is not yet invented. This attribute is not found in other outlaw traditions and therefore seems particular to Robin Hood, even if it is not really covered by the early ballads. The part regarding Robin being outnumbered sounds suspiciously like Walter Bower’s story of Robin being outnumbered in the forest, and yet vanquishing all enemies. This shows some of the information may be derived from a purportedly popular source which has not survived other than in the condensed form in Walter Bower. Yet, there are some apparent breaks with the previous Robin Hood tradition,

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<sup>26</sup> John Major, *A History of Greater Britain As Well England and Scotland*. ed. trans. Archibald Constable, Vol. 10., Edinburgh 1892, pp. 156-57. ‘Circa haec tempora ut auguror, Robertus Hudus Anglus et Parvus Joannes, latrones famatissimi in nemoribus latuerunt, solum opulentorum virorum bona deripientes. Nullum nisi eos invadentem vel resistentem pro suarum rerum tuitione occiderunt. Centum sagittarios ad pugnam aptissimos Robertus latrociniis aluit, quos 400 viri fortissimi invadere non audebant, rebus hujus Roberti gestis tota Britannia in cantibus utitur. Faeminam nullam opprimi permisit nec pauperum bona surripuit, verum eos ex abbatum bones sublatis opipare pavit. Viri rapinam improbo, sed latronum omnium humanissimus et princeps erat’. John Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae, tam Angliae quam Scotiae, per Joannem Majorem*, Edinburgh, 1740, pp. 128-9.

which placed Robin in the later thirteenth century. Mair's Robin, who has different attributes, is placed in a different time: that of King Richard, at the end of the twelfth century. This is a Robin Hood idea which had never been recorded before, implying it is part of a legend which diverged from other Robin Hood ideas, some of which made up the surviving early ballads, receptive to peasant (if they are based on earlier rhymes), and later yeoman audiences. There is simply no information in any ballad about the size of Robin Hood's little army or its capacity to fight off much larger forces. Mair is hazarding a guess or indicating that he had perhaps heard a story along these lines. He added that stories of Robert Hood were told in song across England, implying firstly that these were a source for his information, and secondly, that they were unlikely to have been standardised across the kingdom. The ballads: *Robin Hood and the Potter*, along with *Robin Hood and the Monk*, for example, survive in a single manuscript. The London editors never thought to include them in the comprehensive *Gest of Robyn Hode*, which is itself a ballad composite. Perhaps they never knew of the existence of these other ballads.

Mair's information may also have been second hand. He may have quoted directly from an annotation in a book. There is no mention at all of the Sheriff of Nottingham in Mair's statement, despite his appearance in most of the early ballads. Robin's role here is to attack the abbots. This at least sounds very similar to the Robin of the beginning of the composite *Gest of Robyn Hode*, who advises John to beat and bind the bishops and archbishops, and leave the knights alone, despite trying to rob a knight later on.<sup>27</sup> There are at least two traditions at work, because by this time Robin Hood ballads are already based loosely on the memories of various outlaws. Holt considers that Mair's statement reflects the original Yorkshire Robin Hood tradition as his dates precede the mention of 1262 in which Robin Hood was already known as a famous legendary outlaw.<sup>28</sup> At any rate, Mair does not really refer to the 'Robin' of the Baronial Revolt of the 1260s, favoured by Bower. He does seem to call Robin a waithman of sorts, but not of Inglewood and Barnsdale, as favoured by Wyntoun. It seems we are dealing with ideas about different outlaw-type figures that became associated with Robin Hood in later times. With the advent of Mair's tradition of placing Robin as far back as the age of Richard, the gentrification of 'Robin Hood' could begin, and the supposed chronicle or

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<sup>27</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> J. C. Holt, 'Hood, Robin (*supp. fl.* late 12th–13th cent.)', *ODNB*.

‘historical’ information available on Robin would thence begin to differ from the ballad material, which tends to lack a gentrified element.

## John Leland

John Leland c.1503-1552 was a poet and antiquary. He was a proficient traveller and assiduous compiler of information regarding ancient memorials and books. He had received a commission from Henry VIII to examine and record the content of the libraries, monasteries and colleges of England.<sup>29</sup> Leland had a fascination with the Middle Ages, and aimed to revive a lost literary heritage.<sup>30</sup> He was able to read and catalogue many monastic writings before the dissolution of the monasteries. When he had exhausted the available catalogues of the monastic libraries, he began traversing England, recording its topography and landmarks. Leland claimed that reading the ‘honest and profytable studyes’ of the medieval historians inspired his travels.<sup>31</sup> Amongst the Yorkshire entries we read of Robin Hood. Considering Robin’s reputation as a ‘yeoman’ in the popular ballads, it is surprising that Leland should provide the following statement regarding Robin Hood. The *Collectanea*, c.1540 contains the note:

*Ebor. Kirkley monasterium Monialium, ubi Ro: Hood nobilis ille exlex Sepultus.*

Yorkshire. The monastery of the nuns of Kirklees, where Robin Hood, the nobleman outlaw lies buried.<sup>32</sup>

Leland describes Robin as a nobleman. This seems to be a new development. The idea is clearly suspect because hitherto Robin is never in the realm of those above the knightly class, yet we cannot also dismiss the statement as lacking some traditional basis, as Leland was seemingly not interested in developing a glorified image of Robin Hood, beyond this remark. Rather, a contamination may have occurred, which justified Leland’s belief. The memory of more than one outlaw may have contributed to Leland’s notions. The ballads do not detail Robin’s background. That is more the realm of the medieval romance which really did tell of noblemen such as Fouke Fitz Warin and Eustache the

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<sup>29</sup> James P. Carley, ‘John Leland’, *ODNB*, accessed: 7/2/13.

<sup>30</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature 1485-1603*, eds. M Pincombe, C. Shrank, Oxford 2009, p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> Leland, p. 54., my translation.

Monk. In fact, we know that some of Fouke Fitz Warin's purported adventures, in particular, were retold in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, as if they had been performed by Robin Hood. Since this occurred, there is a possibility that some additional ideas of Fouke as nobleman may at one time have infused tales of Robin Hood, but these have not really found their way into the two manuscript Robin Hood ballads, or that printed in London and elsewhere, as the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. Perhaps some new outlaw stories of Leland's day may simply have been more gentrified than others, for Richard Grafton takes Leland's notion one step further.

## **Richard Grafton**

By the mid-seventeenth century, the existence of two traditions regarding Robin's origins becomes evident in surviving works. Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) was an avid collector of curiosities and books. His vast collection ultimately helped to found the British Museum. Sloane MS 780 dates from the eighteenth century, though it may be based upon earlier writings.<sup>33</sup> It contains a remarkable summary of the life of Robin Hood, with the idea that he was of noble origin. An early version of the Sloane MS may have been consulted by Richard Grafton (1511-1572) in the writing of his *Chronicle*. Knight considers Grafton to have been a reliable chronicler. On this basis, he suggests that an early aristocratising narrative might have once existed.<sup>34</sup> This makes Grafton's work rather important, if indeed he can be relied upon to have based his work upon earlier sources, rather than having invented it. In 1569, he wrote that he received his information about Robin Hood from an 'olde and auncient pamphlet', which parallels the story found in the later Sloane manuscript, which may be an independent source. Grafton considered the following to be the authoritative story regarding Robin Hood:

*But in an olde and auncient Pamphlet I finde this written of the sayd Robert Hood. This man (sayth he) discended of a nobel parentage: or rather beyng of a base stocke and linage, was for his manhooe and chivalry advaunced to the noble dignité of an Erle. Excelling principally in Archery, or shootyng, his manly courage agreeyng therunto: But afterwardes he so prodigally exceeded in*

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<sup>33</sup> Edward. J. L. Scott, *Index to the Sloane Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1904, p. 261.

<sup>34</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 41.

*charges and expences, that he fell into great debt, by reason wherof, so many actions and sutes were commenced against him, wherunto he aunswered not, that by order of lawe he was outlawed, and then for a lewde shift, as his last refuge, gathered together a companye of Roysters and Cutters, and practised robberyes and spoylyng of the kynges subjects, and occupied and frequentede the Forestes or wilde Countries. The which beyng certefyed to the King, and he beyng greatly offended therewith, caused his proclamation to be made that whosoever would bryng him quicke or dead, the king would geve him a great summe of money, as by the recordes in the Exchequer is to be seene: But of this promise, no man enjoyed any benefite. For the sayd Robert Hood, beyng afterwarde troubled with sicknesse, came to a certein Nonry in Yorkshire called Bircklies, where desiryng to be let blood, he was betrayed and bled to deth. After whose death the Prioresse of the same place caused him to be buried by the high way side, where he had used to rob and spoyle those that passed that way. And upon his grave the sayde Prioresse did lay a very fayre stone, wherin the names of Robert Hood, William of Goldesborough and others were graven. And the cause why she buried him there was for that the common passengers and travailers knowyng and seeyng him there buried, might more safely and without feare take their jorneyes that way, which they durst not do in the life of the sayd outlawes. And at eyther end of the sayde Tombe was erected a crosse of stone, which is to be seene there at this present.*<sup>35</sup>

At the start of this piece, we see a note regarding two different Robin Hood traditions. One is similar to that which was evidently first mentioned by John Leland—namely that Robin was a ‘noble outlaw’. Yet Grafton also says that Robin may also have been of ‘base stock’. He himself is unsure. It is to be observed that Grafton is not specific on the issue of dates either. Grafton’s uncertainty does not prevent him from making claims about ‘records in the exchequer’, regarding the reward offered for Robin’s capture. No details are provided, so it might be presumed this was a liberty taken by Grafton or the publisher or writer of the ‘ancient pamphlet’, assuming it existed. Bluntly, Grafton is suggesting that one tradition of which he is aware might be more gentrified than another,

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<sup>35</sup> Grafton, *Grafton’s Chronicle; or History of England*, 2 vols., 1569, ed. J. Johnson, London 1809, pp. 84-5.

and he is unsure which the original is. Since there were ideas relating to Robin Hood emerging in the sixteenth century, these may have been inspired by earlier narrative. Grafton's uncertainty seems to point to at least different versions of early oral narratives, as might be expected. If we consider this and the ideas of other antiquaries, it seems that the later Elizabethan playwrights had some firm basis for believing in a lost earlier tradition.

### ***Albion's England—1589***

The poet William Warner (1558-1609) composed a universal chronicle called *Albion's England* in 1586, in which he wrote of Robin Hood:

*Those daies begot some mal-contents, the Principall of whome  
A County was, that with a troope of Yeomandry did rome,  
Braue Archers and deliuer men, since nor before so good:  
Those tooke from rich to giue the poore, and manned Robin Hood.  
He fed them well, and lodg'd them safe in pleasant caues and bowers  
Oft saying to his merry men, 'What iuster life than ours?'*<sup>36</sup>

This is the very first time the popular idea of taking from the rich and giving to the poor is seen. In John Mair's work, the concept was vaguely alluded to, minus the catch phrase. Mair simply stated that the poor are themselves not harmed. Earlier, in the medieval *Gest*, the concept of Robin helping the poor was tacked onto the end of the ballad: '*he dyde pore men moch god.*'<sup>37</sup> Once again, this is minus the modern rendition of the phrase.

The 'justness' of Robin Hood is emphasised. This may be an elaboration of the justice achieved in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. Warner also introduces a new way of thinking about forest outlaws in terms of a primordial and pristine setting, for the pleasantness of bowers and caves is emphasised.<sup>38</sup> It is quite a different way of expanding the tradition than that achieved by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle, who tended to ignore the forest in their placement of Robin amidst a courtly environment.

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<sup>36</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 135.

<sup>37</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 136.

## The plays of Anthony Munday

Playwright Anthony Munday, c.1560-1633, was one of Shakespeare's rivals in the London theatre business of the 1590s. With the assistance of Henry Chettle, he wrote a historical tragedy on Robin Hood: *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, c.1598. A follow-up play by Munday was: *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington*. It has been remarked that: 'no English writer has ever handled the Robin Hood legend in a more high-handed and cavalier fashion than Anthony Munday.'<sup>39</sup> Knight and Ohlgren considered that the plays 'fulfilled the trend towards gentrification.'<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, they contain reflections of a pre-existing earlier tradition, probably partly sourced from chronicles, as shall be shown. Rather than being entirely a mirror of Elizabethan romantic and social attitudes of the day, there also seems to have been some historicising effort put into the plays, and to a greater extent than is appreciated. For instance, they speak of 'excommunication', and we hear that Robin has been condemned in Rome.<sup>41</sup> This is a very unusual idea. It is not explained very well in the play. Nor is it integral to the plot, which makes one wonder why the idea was included. Excommunications were certainly less serious after the reign of Henry VIII, and would not have been as relevant to the daily lives of the elite of the Elizabethan period, notwithstanding religious animosity of the day and threats from Catholic Spain. Munday may have got the idea from reading the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris. As mentioned in chapter three, various masked figures were excommunicated after the fact, for assaulting various Roman dignitaries. On the other hand he may also have got the idea of excommunication from a later ballad source, from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The outlaw William Cloudesley must travel to Rome for absolution based on unspecified crimes.<sup>42</sup>

Neither the early ballads nor Munday's works attempt to tell the full story of Robin Hood. They never explain the story behind Robin's animosity to clerics. An attack on 'bishops and archbishops', as Robin demands of his men in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, would certainly have brought down a sentence of excommunication upon the perpetrators. Those were figures of great authority in England, and attacks on their persons or property would have drawn attention from across the kingdom. Yet the ballads

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<sup>39</sup> R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, London 1976, new ed. Bridgend 1997, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 296.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 262.

neglect the issue of whether Robin's orders were followed, and Robin curiously never raises the point again. His men merely hound the Abbot and monks of St Mary's Abbey in York. If early ideas of excommunication existed in an outlaw tradition, they were not relevant to the daily lives of the listeners of ballads. That such an idea pops up in Elizabethan plays seems to reflect the perfection of the historicising attempts of the antiquaries of the sixteenth century. They may have begun to consult older medieval chronicles relating to the periods in which they considered Robin Hood may have lived.

There certainly seems to be too much information provided, in an attempt to make the plays seem credible. In the *Downfall*, Robin has some trouble with the 'prior' of York, over a debt. The prior is his uncle, Gilbert de Hood, and determines upon Robin's downfall. This seems to be an explanation for Robin's ballad animosity to clerics and churchmen. Eventually, in *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington*, Gilbert de Hood is complicit in poisoning Robin, although he subsequently regrets this action, and the king is even present to hear his lamentations, and the guilt of a wicked individual called Sir Doncaster.<sup>43</sup>

This is largely unheard of material. These playwrights are the first to describe in detail a highly gentrified tradition which they seem to have basically invented, but also one which developed out of already gentrified ideas: Knight considers that the *Gest of Robyn Hode* represents a partly gentrified tradition; because Robin has a friend called Sir Richard, and is known at court.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned, in the previous chapter it was shown that even in the earliest ballad, *Robin and the Monk*, c.1450, Robin is known at court and is praised highly by the king, despite no formal address being made to any particular class of audience. Robin was thus already 'gentrified' for the benefit of a common or yeoman ballad audience, in what is the earliest literary tradition. This suggests there may already have been aspects of a gentry tradition mixed in with ideas of Robin Hood: perhaps even from the earliest times. As discussed in chapter five, de-gentrification of the heroic or outlaw tradition appears to emerge around the time of the Peasants' Revolt. This was when the popularity of the noble outlaw was declining and the rise of Robin Hood as a figure with a mysterious background was facilitated. By placing him in the time of King John, Munday and Chettle considered they were returning Robin to a romantic past, the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 421.

<sup>44</sup> Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 89.

era of the heroic nobleman rebel. They created a gentrified tragedy, based on an aristocratic Robin Hood, for the theatre.

The most outrageous of their excesses in creating a late twelfth and early thirteenth-century setting for Robin Hood, was to make the spurious claim of a connection between the earldom of Huntingdon and Robin Hood. In *The Downfall*, Little John states:

*First, no man must presume to call our master,  
By name of Earle, Baron, Knight, Lord or Squire,  
But simply by the name of Robin Hoode.*<sup>45</sup>

With the stroke of a pen, a lord thus becomes a mysterious commoner, with the name 'Robin Hoode'. Robert could be both aristocrat, and Robin, an obscure personage. Earlier confusions regarding mixing of outlaw traditions with romantic aspects could thus be explained away. This may have satiated the curiosity of members of the audience who still possessed an old printed copy of the earlier '*Gest of Robyn Hode*'. In that tale, the earldom, an elaboration of the idea picked up by John Leland, as well as the tradition of Robin being an earl, as seen in Grafton's *Chronicle*, was not mentioned.

We find an interesting passage purporting to explain why Robin was hated. In the *Downfall*, according to 'Roger of Doncaster' (here an enemy of Robin, as well as in the earlier ballads), Robin is:

*...still the Churchmens foe,  
An ill end will betide him, that I knowe.  
Twas hee that urg'd the king to sesse the clergie,  
When to the holy land he tooke his journey.*<sup>46</sup>

The play seems to be suggesting that Robin Hood advised the king to assess (tax), the clergy when Robin, the king, or both, were on crusade. The statement implies that the king may have listened to Robin's advice, and may have taxed the clergy. Perhaps it is implied that this is the reason why Roger and company are embittered against Robin, and so plot his demise. Robin is shown to be an advisor to the king, and dislikes the churchmen, as he wishes them to be taxed. This fitted in well with a post-reformation

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<sup>45</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 341.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

environment. The *Gest of Robyn Hode* does not go into nearly as much detail regarding motives for killing Robin. It merely states that a certain ‘Syr Roger of Donkesly’, a knight, used the affections of a prioress to have Robin killed when he sought treatment at Kirklees priory.<sup>47</sup> The ballad provides names but not details.

There does not seem to be a definitive ‘Roger of Doncaster’ in any mythical tradition earlier than the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. The *Gest* never explains why Roger of Doncaster was aggrieved by Robin. It is perhaps itself an incomplete and corrupted version of an earlier tradition in which things are better explained, although we cannot be sure that this is the case. The essence of the motivation of Roger in the Munday and Chettle play is that Robin has made trouble for the clergy in terms of clerical revenues, and so they conspire to do away with him. In the *Death*, Robin is elaborately poisoned by churchmen, and the king thereafter punishes the wrongdoers.<sup>48</sup> In the playwright tradition, as an earl, Robin is an advisor and rebel. He is a factional figure against a clique dominated by the likes of Sir Doncaster, and Robin’s uncle, the ‘Prior’ of York. Even Hubert de Burgh shows up, playing the role of the chorus.<sup>49</sup>

Unnoticed by scholars are passages in the *Downfall* which recall episodes relating to an outlaw tradition dating back to the 1230s. This tradition was initially recorded by the St Albans chroniclers, Roger of Wendover, and Matthew Paris, in the early thirteenth century. There are curious differences, but it seems that a similar story is being told. The later playwright version is sufficiently different to suggest it was modified by the fluidity of a colloquial oral tradition, or some other more recent series of events, before finding its way into Munday and Chettle’s *Downfall*. Alternately the playwrights were inspired by reading the story in Matthew Paris’, as there was an edition of his *Chronica Majora* available in print after 1570, before supplying their own details and modifications.

A declining Roger of Wendover, or his successor Matthew Paris, wrote down tales concerning a great c.1234 famine in Yorkshire, which they held to have occurred there. They wrote two stories regarding wicked clerics who stored up money and grain, out of avarice, when times were bad. They stated that men died from want of food. In their second tale regarding the Yorkshire famine, they hold that one store, which had been kept for many years, in spite of hunger, was inspected, and found to have been rotting

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 402.

and full of starving vermin, such as snakes and other ‘creatures of Satan’. The decision was made to destroy the rotting corn with fire, and a huge bonfire was lit to destroy the store, from which various vermin emerged. The story records that the people much lamented this sight and cursed the avarice of the archbishop responsible. He had allowed people to starve while food rotted.<sup>50</sup>

Let us now examine a tale found in Munday and Chettle’s work, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, which may have been loosely inspired by this story. In this play fire falls from heaven, ‘in the manner of a fier drake’, and sets a large store of corn ablaze. The common people are quite angry about it. They curse the ‘Prior of York’ for hoarding up the grain, only to have had it destroyed by fire anyway. Evidently the tale contains elements of the story found in the St Albans texts. The plot is similar, and has a similar effect, but the elements have been scrambled. A servant addresses the wicked Prior:

*Even heavie news, my Lord; for the light fire  
Falling, in the manner of a fier drake,  
Upon a barne of yours, hath burnt six barnes,  
And not a single strike of corne reserv’d from dust.  
No hand could save it, yet ten thousand hands,  
Labourd their best, though none for love of you.  
For every tongue with bitter cursing band,  
Your Lordshippe as the viper of the land.*<sup>51</sup>

In the ‘original’ story the grain is burned to remove a pestilential stench and then snakes emerge from the burning morass. In that, a voice is heard telling people not to lay hands on the grain. The voice claims that the grain and the archbishop are the property of the devil. In the grain-burning story found in the *Downfall*, all the ideas of vermin crawling out of the putrid rotting pile are removed. If the c.1598 famine story relates to the c.1234 famine story, then we might ask how this has happened. There is a strong similarity in both tales: the public is in uproar at the loss of food during a time in which the poor are starving in Yorkshire, and curse a churchman in a position of authority, who also

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<sup>50</sup> Roger of Wendover’s *Flowers of History*, ed. J. A. Giles, 3 vols, London 1849, vol. 2, pp. 598-9.

<sup>51</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 353.

happened to have been an enemy of an outlaw. (Matthew Paris knew that the Archbishop of York, who features in the earlier story, was an enemy of Robert of Thwing, which relates to the Prior of York as an enemy of Robin Hoode.) In the *Downfall*, the starving masses labour to put out the fire. The people curse the Prior as an enemy of Robin Hood:

*Thus and thus they cride:*

*Upon this churle, this hoorder up of corne,*

*This spoyler of the Earle of Huntington,*

*This lust-defiled, mercilesse false Prior,*

*Heaven raigneth vengeance downe in shape of fier.*<sup>52</sup>

We have seen that although this ‘Earl of Huntington’, or ‘Robin Hoode’, is associated with notions of King John’s period, there appears to be some relic of a legend from c.1234 in the *Downfall* as well.

Matthew Paris wrote that that Walter de Gray, the Archbishop of York had been an investigator into the corn robberies of 1231-2.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to reflect that Munday called the Prior of York (the Archbishop of York in the similar chronicled story), the ‘spoyler’ of Robin Hood. In the playwright version, the grain-hoarding archbishop is the ‘Prior of York’, Robin Hood’s enemy and uncle, Gilbert de Hood. These characters fall out over a debt, resulting in Robert Earl of Huntingdon becoming the outlaw ‘Robin Hoode’, and being excommunicated. The similarity of the outlaw’s persecutor as perpetrator in both stories is intriguing and seems to demonstrate that the *Downfall* was not altogether made-up in the later sixteenth century. Possibly, Munday and Chettle read or heard about the story told in Matthew Paris’ *Chronica Majora*. Munday and Chettle may have thought that the stories of Thwing, as found in the *Chronica Majora*, were Robin-Hood like. There is another possibility. An alternate version of the story is found in: ‘*The doome warning all men to the iudgemente: Wherein are contayned... all the straunge prodigies happt in the worlde*’, 1581, by Konrad Lykosthenes.<sup>54</sup> One of the stories speaks of a gentleman of Yorkshire who refused to give help to a pauper. His barn with corn was subsequently destroyed in a storm. This may have inspired Munday, as

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>53</sup> Wendover, (trans. Giles.), 2: 551.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Wright, ‘The World’s Worst Worm: Conscience and Conformity during the English Reformation’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring, 1999), p. 116.

well as the information contained in Matthew Paris, which does feel more specific to Munday's rendition. Whatever the cause of inspiration of Munday and Chettle in telling this story about a gentrified Robin Hood, those in the audience familiar with the chronicle of Matthew Paris could have recognised parallels with the stories told about the villainy of the archbishop of York in the thirteenth century. Although we can clearly say there is no direct evidence of a continuity of a folk tradition, the plays of Shakespeare, for instance, are testimony to a deep interest in Munday's time in investigating and rationalising for entertainment's sake stories that went back to the medieval period.

## The Earl of Chester re-appears

Munday and Chettle decided to give the Earl of Chester a minor role in their play. Perhaps they read about the earliest literary mention of Robin, in *Piers Plowman* of c.1377, which associates him with *Randolf, Erl of Chestre*. In the tale a priest called 'Sloth' asserts:

*But I kan rymes of Robin Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre.*<sup>55</sup>

It is interesting that Robin is in 1377 immediately associated with the tales of a nobleman, who is conspicuously absent in early Robin Hood ballads. Although no early ballads survive of the Earl of Chester, he pops up in both the *Downfall* and the *Death*. In other words, Ranulf is placed in the same time period as Robin Hood. In the *Death* he gives testimony against Sir Doncaster while Robin is dying from poison. He says that Doncaster had been made a knight by King Richard's father, and had once raped a nun in the woods.<sup>56</sup> It reminds one obliquely, of the wicked liaison between the Prioress of Kirklees and Sir Roger of Doncaster in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. In the *Downfall*, 'Chester' plays something of the role of a peacemaker. He is ambivalent, and largely neutral. He exhibits some sympathy for Robin and stands in the cause of justice.

A long poem exists, in a cumbersome tetrameter which has been described by an editor as having been written more by an 'annalist or genealogist than a poet'.<sup>57</sup> This

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<sup>55</sup> William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-text Based on the Trinity College Cambridge MS B. 15. 17*, ed. A. V. C Schmidt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London 1995, p. 82.

<sup>56</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 418.

<sup>57</sup> John W. Hales, and Frederick J. Furnivall (eds.), *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript, Ballads and Romances*, London 1867, vol. 1, p. 258.

does not seem to be a medieval survival. The poem is entitled *Earles off Chester*, and we have a date of c.1650 for its composition. It tells us nothing regarding the earl which cannot be found in chronicles of the same period. This, unlike the tradition of Munday and Chettle, truly does seem to be based directly on information in the chronicles, for it gives a very superficial political history of the twelfth to early thirteenth centuries, and it feels more like an attempt to re-invent the lost Chester ballads from ‘authoritative’ information rather than popular fable.

In Chapter Five, it was mentioned that several adventures regarding the Earl of Chester are to be found within a romance called *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. This tale achieved some popularity in the early fourteenth century. These adventures dealt with an Earl of Chester working for King John, but with an even-handed approach to John’s enemies. The appearance of the Earl of Chester in Munday’s works, in the time period of King John, suggests the playwright was attempting to relate the works to earlier tales of the outlaw, within which framework, invented details could be provided.

### **Martin Parker—*A True Tale of Robin Hood***

The process of gentrification of the outlaw continued into the seventeenth century, although it did not reach the heights seen in the works of the playwrights. Martin Parker (1600-1656) is described as ‘the best known professional ballad writer of the early seventeenth century.’<sup>58</sup> He sought to make his own mark upon the Robin Hood legend. He released a history of Robin Hood which appears on a register, dated ‘20 February’, 1631.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps another edition was recorded on the *Stationers’ Register* of 29 Feb 1632.<sup>60</sup> His unusual work was entitled ‘*A True Tale of Robin Hood*’. There exists a surviving 1631 edition which was included in the Robin Hood textual corpus edited by Francis Child, as well as in the edition by Knight and Ohlgren, in modern times. A 1686 edition was included by Joseph Ritson in his eighteenth-century edition of Robin balladry.

Parker’s *True Tale* purported to be a definitive version of the Robin Hood story. Parker was perhaps doing what he thought others did because apparently, it was

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<sup>58</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 602.

<sup>59</sup> Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, 8 vols, Boston 1857-9, vol. 5, p. 353.

<sup>60</sup> Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, vol. 3, p. 227.

‘carefully collected out of the truest writers of the English chronicles, and published for those who desire to see truth purged from falsehood.’ Child lamented of Parker’s research: ‘Perhaps he regards broadside-ballads with historical names in them as chronicles: at any rate, though he reports some things which are found in Grafton, and in Mair as cited by Grafton, much the larger part of his *True Tale* is now to be found only in ballads. When he does not agree with ballads which have come down to us, he may have used earlier copies, or he may have invented.’<sup>61</sup> Knight and Ohlgren consider that Parker sees the ‘old Catholic churchmen as the major enemy.’<sup>62</sup> Of course, this fits in with the tradition found in Munday and Chettle’s work, as well as Robin’s declaration in the earlier *Gest of Robyn Hode*, that bishops and archbishops should be beaten and bound, something which doesn’t actually take place in the ballads.<sup>63</sup> Such ideas might have been too shocking for gentle or even popular ears.

Just as in Munday and Chettle’s earlier plays, Robin is undone by the ‘*crewell clergie*’. In Parker’s tale, Robin is the Earl of Huntingdon, who is in great favour with his ‘prince’. He maintains an army of three hundred bowmen out of love for archery. Robin has consumed his wealth by ‘*profuse expence*’, and is outlawed thanks to the machinations of the abbot of ‘Saint Maries’ to whom Robin owes money.<sup>64</sup> The tale makes some very bold claims. It states that the Bishop of Ely, with escort of one thousand horsemen, was taken prisoner by Robin’s men, and ransomed.<sup>65</sup> This tale is not found in other Robin Hood stories. Ely was certainly a haven for outlaws and rebels during various wars, so there may be something more to this.

Parker makes the unusual claim that the king is about to offer pardon for Robin and his men, when Robin’s men, despairing at some calamity, flee to Scotland. Robin calls them traitors, but the story maintains that forty men out of more than one hundred stick with Robin. Whilst in this state of distress after his men’s defections, Robin becomes feverish and is taken to a nunnery where he is bled by a ‘*faithless fryer*’ who kills him.<sup>66</sup> This is all most unusual. There is nothing in any other tradition which suggests that Robin’s men left him in such a way, yet it makes sense if Robin was indeed a northern

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., vol.3, p.227.

<sup>62</sup> Knight & Ohlgren, p. 603.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 605-6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 612.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 616.

outlaw. Parker is unequivocal regarding the merits of his research. If he has been honest, it seems he drew upon a tradition which does not seem to be extant elsewhere. He states at the end of his work that if someone should question his research and study it: ‘he’ll find it true I know.’<sup>67</sup> This is another bold claim. From our modern perspective, the tale seems to be pure invention and there is seemingly no source which can verify it. Parker’s ballad appears to be of a similar vein to that of *Randolf Earl off Chester*, composed around 1650. The aim of both seems to have been to construe a new myth based upon old ideas, and guesswork, into a more modern and all-encompassing biographical romance, whilst making an attempt at the old ballad form.

Parker’s ‘true tale’ may contain information regarding obsolete practices. There exists an interesting passage containing information on a practice not found elsewhere, in the primary Robin Hood texts, regarding Robin’s activities. Robin’s practice here seems so unusual, and brutal, that its presence seems like something which belongs in a ribald, as it is not fully suitable for a gentrified audience. It is unexplained information:

*No monkes nor fryers he would let goe,  
Without paying their fees;  
If they thought much to be usd so,  
Their stones he made them leese.  
For such as they the country filld  
With bastards in those dayes;  
Which to prevent, these sparks did geld (castrate)  
All that came in their wayes.*<sup>68</sup>

Parker is saying that Robin may have castrated clerics. Nothing of the sort is present in the early ballads, or any other Robin Hood tradition. The idea hardly endears the audience to view Robin in a positive light. Placing this detail in the story makes Robin seem like an over-vengeful and crazed character, acting in great fury, in some cause which Parker fails to fully describe. Parker says that Robin is outlawed by an abbot due to non-payment of debt, but Robin’s reaction seems extreme, and this is not a satisfactory explanation for the audience. Parker provides none. His story is strange, but it might have

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<sup>67</sup> Knight and Ohlgren, p. 620.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 607.

served his interest to explain why Robin hates priests. On the contrary, neither Parker, nor the compiler of the earlier *Gest of Robyn Hode* was able to explain this hatred of Robin's. The audience thus hears of the punishment but not really of the crimes.

Failing to explain things properly gives Parker some credibility; insofar as it appears he may well have been drawing upon an earlier tradition, though it must be said that casting such an illusion may have been his intention. Early outlaws such as Gamelyn could certainly be brutal. To be critical however, Parker's era was one of great religious upheaval and mistrust of the Catholic Church. It is fair to say that this is the more probable explanation for why Parker felt free to have his outlaw torture clerics, regardless of whether he was inspired by earlier outlaw ideas or not.

## Conclusions

There is strong dynamism in the evolution of the outlaw tradition, as exemplified in Robin Hood stories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Legends drew upon an array of sources and imagination and the tradition could change rapidly. Stories found in *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, are sufficiently different to those of the ballads, to lead to the conclusion that they are mainly a product of the sixteenth century, designed for an elite audience, though they contain stories inspired by information found in Latin chronicles to a greater extent than is realised. The *Downfall* was relevant to an Elizabethan audience, as it sought to create a glorious past and a glorious Robin Hood, who was amenable to their gentrified tastes. It not only looks back to a medieval past, but contains elements which are to be understood from a medieval perspective. The presence of a story with strong parallels to stories told in the pages of the thirteenth-century chronicles of Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, suggests that the stories told by Munday and Chettle may have been inspired by those of earlier centuries. They clearly thought the original legend did not include an invasion of Nottingham town, as in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, and were inspired to create a story based around other, more officious affairs. They preferred to be inspired by a Yorkshire tradition that had parallels in the Latin stories of Matthew Paris, certainly available to educated readers in the late sixteenth century, as well as in more recent stories.

Writers of the sixteenth century were obsessed with a gentrification of the popular outlaw, attempting to return him the mantle of the romantic heroic rebel of earlier times.

John Leland implied Robin had a noble background in about 1540, which was less than fifty years after the *Gest of Robyn Hode* was first published. Mair established a tradition which sought an original Robin Hood, who preceded the civil war of the 1260s and its memories. This laid the groundwork for an attempt to place Robin in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. There was a continuity of concern with unjust behaviour, firstly regarding Rome, in their own era of the sixteenth century, which compared favourably with their story. Secondly, there was an awareness of Yorkshire as the location of an outlaw tradition. They placed their outlaw in the time of John, a time of several heroic rebels. Rather than talk of the haunts of Fouke Fitz Warin, or others, however, they concentrated upon Yorkshire. They were inspired to write of an excommunicated outlaw-type figure. In their tale, he led some revolts against unjust and corrupt churchmen. They were continuing to celebrate figures first singled out in monastic chronicles of the thirteenth century.

## Thesis Conclusion

We have explored issues surrounding the remembrance of the outlaw in different periods. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the 'outlaw' was a rogue but brave nobleman who simply resisted his king, and was celebrated in romance. In the fourteenth century, we have ideas of a violent and vengeful outlawed figure, namely Gamelyn, whose ballad appears before the onset of the Peasants' Revolt. In later times Robin Hood definitively appears, and replaces the memory of older outlaws, but not their deeds. What emerges, and is argued, is that the memory of the outlaw and his adventures is more important than the memory of specific details about the real-life characters who might have inspired the later stories. At the end of the Middle Ages, Robin Hood becomes an all-encompassing heroic figure who dominates reflections of the past harsh world, by absorbing, and incorporating aspects of earlier tales, with the ease of the enterprising storyteller who selects the best parts of various tales for his audience's entertainment. The forest simplicity of Robin Hood had led some to suggest the tales were primarily about a figure who had little or nothing to do with politics. Yet if we look at the input of memories relating to characters like Robert of Thwing as well as outlaws of the time of the baronial revolt, into the ballads, it seems that difficult ideas based on an old political situation no longer understood were discarded. Stories were compiled and recorded as ballads, where sentimental or primordial notions of a bucolic past assisted in placing Robin in a greenwood in May, from where he strikes out at a medieval sheriff and the usurious St Mary's abbot, or within the king's court in other times.

It has been suggested that memories of events of the 1230s involving a prominent northern knight, Robert of Thwing, may have contributed to the development of stories of a heroic figure, providing an early framework around which ideas of Robin Hood later developed. Although this idea has been suggested several times before, the approach of looking at the chronicled stories relating to Thwing, as influences which relate to stories found in Robin Hood (in addition to more obvious ideas of wearing hoods and giving to the poor, mentioned by others) is a new one. The approach is not to exclude the possibility that there were other influences which helped shape the Robin Hood legends.

Rather it suggests that legendary traditions were created about figures like Robert of Thwing even within the thirteenth century, that may find an echo in later stories. It is the entertainment which the memory of the outlaw provides which is important, not specifics. A dominant approach has been to focus on the origins of the specific figure of Robin Hood. Stephen Knight and Anthony Pollard, look more at the literature and society, respectively, in analysing the development of the stories within their own context. Literary specialists should not ignore the contribution made by monastic chronicles towards creating stories about heroic figures.

The chronicle tradition differs strikingly from other literary sources. Ideas are expressed in the chronicles which seem to have contributed towards an early understanding of the outlaw in the thirteenth century, thereby influencing later ideas of Robin Hood, which developed out of an oral, as well as written tradition, including the intrusion of Nottingham tales some time after the 1260s. There are notable parallels between the monastic stories about Thwing, known as William Wither, and later tales about William Cloudesley as well as Robin Hood.

The legends of earlier and later outlaws may contribute to the later Robin Hood stories, because 'Robin Hood', however he may have been understood, in different ways through different stories in various parts of England and beyond, was the most popular way to envisage a rogue figure who fought for a heroic ideal.

William Wither, identified as Robert of Thwing in Wendover's chronicle in the 1230s, rapidly disappears from history, to be transformed during the 1240s into a handsome young man and energetic knight. The implication is that he became seen as a heroic figure, about a decade or more after the events that made him famous. Robin Hood is not Robert of Thwing, although scholars have pointed out similarities. Robin can only be a fictional character fully developed in much later times, who lives in Sherwood and attacks a Sheriff of Nottingham. The setting is bucolic and the time period does not matter, save that it is usually spring. The Robin Hood story is an invention inspired by the tales of many different historical outlaws. Thwing, by contrast is a character who defends his advowson by punishing Romans living in England, in a very specific and limited timeframe.

The figure of Thwing seems to undergo a degree of character development. Presented with caution by Wendover, Wither is described in a later marginal addition by Matthew Paris, as 'Robert of Thwing, a knight of good birth who was cloaked', taking emphasis

away from the idea of anonymous hooded men and a mysterious William Wither, whose name vanishes forever after the conclusion of the robberies. Notably, the chronicler wanted to bring out that Robert was wearing a disguise, though we cannot get into his thoughts and perhaps his mere intention was to identify Wither once again, in a final marginal note, in pursuit of accuracy. Nevertheless, it is the first time either Thwing or Wither is described as cloaked. In that final addition, Paris or someone else gives Thwing the credit as being the dashing and daring figure, the final image behind that chain of events. The description helped create the image of an outlaw figure, who committed aggression in the cause of countering perceived injustice. These images would be built on in subsequent stories about outlaws, prior to the composition of the surviving ballads about Robin Hood. The later Robin Hood stories are uninterested in the specifics of any political situation. Thwing may have been something of an inspiration, however, for the stories relating to him, found in monastic sources, are similar to aspects of stories written down at the end of the middle ages, in the Robin Hood ballads.

Chapter One introduces Robin Hood, an unknown and mysterious figure, as an archetypal ballad outlaw, describing different aspects of the surviving tradition. The argument supports the existing idea that Robin Hood as a myth is of an early thirteenth-century origin. This serves as a foundation for the rest of the analysis as it points out the time period most suitable for searching out the obscure beginnings of the legend. The other issue to be tackled was that of identifying a context for any early popularity of the legend. The chapter examined the fact that the surviving late medieval ballad, the *Gest of Robyn Hode* explicitly indicates that Robin's major enemies seem to be clerics and churchmen. The chapter also noted that in earlier times there were many popular outlaws, but by the fifteenth century, there was really only one great popular outlaw, Robin Hood. This set up an understanding, expanded chronologically with evidence that the adventure stories of early outlaws, including an early Robin Hood, seem to have coalesced centuries later into a newer, contaminated, universal outlaw adventure also known as 'Robin Hood'. This highlights an issue inherent in existing Robin Hood research; scholars interested in early Robin Hood refer to a contaminated tradition which is over two centuries out of date with its origins. Rather than comparing later myths with the thirteenth-century world, as some have done, it seems more prudent to investigate that period itself. We can look at some issues of the day which may have been a basis for the popularity of celebrated outlaws contemporary with that period.

We know that by 1262 the name Robin Hood was already known. A set of events before this had occurred, which gave the legend some popularity. Chapter Two sought to examine the nascent hostilities in this period in depth. There was a period of prolonged warfare and crisis at the start of the century. There was xenophobia towards foreign invaders and Romans who began to administer England. The goal of the chapter was to examine political grievance, conducive to the formation of stories about heroic figures. It was a decisive period for the formation of such stories, because it was the historical time of men like Fouke Fitz Warin, Eustache the Monk, and Ranulf III of Chester, who may have been an inspiration behind various lost tales. All three of these figures rallied at one time, for their rights, and participated in political situations, covered by the St Albans chroniclers.

Perhaps the most destabilizing action which led to the appearance of those who would later become outlaw heroes, was the surrendering by King John of his lands to the pope in return for protection against his many enemies in England, in 1213. The nobles had been assertive before this, but this event, highly unpopular, was followed with a call by the barons for their rights, and civil warfare. It was noted that the continued submission of England to Rome began to cause consternation among the barons, particularly by the 1220s, and that Earl Ranulf of Chester, somewhat associated with Robin Hood in the fourteenth century, openly opposed both Rome and her puppet ruler, Henry III. As well as making these observations in terms of their significance for outlaw research, the chapter concentrated on the careers of Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches. These two partially represented their competing power-bases (pro English vs. 'foreign') in what was effectively a struggle for supremacy regarding who would rule England. Although exceptions and deficiencies to this time-honoured view were pointed out, for instance des Roches' alliance with the pro-English Ranulf of Chester, these opposing figures represented different future directions for the kingdom. Their intense rivalry would also become the basis for the rise and persecution of Robert of Thwing, a knight and prominent outlaw. Under the name *William Wither*, he would attack Roman churchmen and clerics in the domestic sphere, with terrorist acts and robberies. As a representative of English barons opposing foreign domination, he would become active in the inter-regnal political arena, as a representative of the English barons, before the pope and the German emperor. This is a political theme which was not altogether divorced from the more common people, owing to the creation of parliaments such as the little-understood

‘Community of England’, by the mid thirteenth century, as related by Matthew Paris, which purported to represent all people. Thwing’s movement was perceived as a ‘universitas’ (association) or ‘communitas’. This was also an ideal partly held by rebels in the baronial conflict of the 1250s and 60s. Among these rebels was Roger Godberd of Nottinghamshire. He must have been a famous outlaw at one time for his tales mixed heavily with an earlier Robin Hood tradition along with those of Fouke Fitz Warin, Eustache the Monk, and as argued later, Robert of Thwing.

Chapter Three makes the case for the 1230s as a formative time for the origin of some major themes that would become incorporated into the later Robin Hood tradition, and that these early formative ideas are recorded in the Latin chronicle tradition, as a set of recurring themes regarding perceived enemies of the kingdom. The escapades of *William Wither* in the 1230s are known to several historians who have covered Robin Hood, but they have not been studied in any great detail, despite recurring scholarly suggestions over the years that they represent an archetypal Robin Hood-like scenario. A major piece of evidence relating ideas of the robberies of the 1230s to early Robin Hood was that images of the figure initially known as *William Wither* to the St Albans chroniclers, whose men threw money to the poor and disposed of stolen grain for reduced prices, may have transformed within the lifetime of the chronicler Matthew Paris. First, Wither was revealed to be Robert of Thwing, a knight from Yorkshire. As mentioned, later, Paris took steps to aggrandise the image of this character, describing him as young and good looking, and of good birth. Later still, a further marginal addition was made, perhaps unnecessarily, to clarify that Robert was Wither who was ‘cloaked’ (*palliatum*), and was of high origin. This may precede the celebrated early mention of ‘*Robehod*’ in 1262 by some years, perhaps a decade or so. It is hard to say whether this addition, which serves as a clarification, was inspired by an early memory of ‘Robin Hood’ but the fact that stories about Thwing’s actions relate to the later Robin Hood legends is striking. They happened in an appropriate time period and reflect themes found in later stories, such as wearing hoods during robberies, as well as enmity for churchmen and clerics. There is however, another major component to the stories which requires explanation—the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Robin has enmity for rich churchmen and clergy, and for the Sheriff of Nottingham. These outlaw elements seem to be historically incompatible. Nottingham information is thought by James Holt to have been added to an earlier tradition. Chapter Four

investigated how this may have occurred. It was observed that the 1240s-50s were decades in which sheriffs were seen as unusually and increasingly corrupt, and with just cause, due to some misguided reforms in the 1240s. This is not mentioned in the outlaw scholarship, and is coincident with a shifting of the Robin Hood tradition from Yorkshire, to Nottingham, where the outlaw could be positioned near a corrupt sheriff. The transition has hitherto been inexplicable. The social environment of the day would have made the sheriff a target of popular anger. This occurred when tales regarding his demise may have been invented and perpetuated. While scholars tend to emphasise that the war which followed was caused by a reaction of the barons against Henry's foreign favourites, both the revolution in 1258 and civil war seem to have had some popular involvement. It was certainly not just the private concern of barons as the rebel government of the time sought to bring legal protection from the exactions of corrupt sheriffs, to the poor. The barons and their sympathisers saw themselves as 'the English' who were being oppressed. An obvious precedent was the remembrance of the actions of Robert of Thwing, of thirty years earlier, who adopted the English name *William Wither*, and who took the corn of foreigners and gave it back to the English. The first noted mention of Robin Hood, 'Robehod' in 1262, occurs just before the war for the struggle for baronial rights and an English identity. Stories of this early 'Robin Hood' may have arisen in this time if they reminded people of a similar situation.

The civil-war environment facilitated the existence and success of various outlaws. Among them was Roger Godberd, a Sherwood outlaw whom scholars agree seems to have been the inspiration for the Nottingham element in Robin Hood. Not noted by Robin Hood scholars is an epitaph in William Rishanger's chronicle, stating that Simon de Montfort worked for the oppressed poor. The statement accords with some peasant sentiment in England at the time. As members of the disinherited, Godberd and other outlaws were the successors of the rebel reformists and may have inherited some of that reformist legacy. They may have been seen as the new 'Robin Hoods', particularly as that name may have already become a nickname for a certain class of criminal. The earlier legend was enlarged as it became contaminated with ideas of Nottingham and the civil war, and earlier details were gradually lost or altered.

Chapter Five analysed the changing representations of the outlaw, between the time of the many noble heroic figures of the early fourteenth century, and later Robin Hood. The disappearance of the nobleman outlaw is not the only thing which occurs. It is shown that

from his appearance, until about the middle of the fifteenth century, when the first stories appear, Robin Hood is spoken of poorly. Three medieval chronicles which mention Robin were closely analysed and it was seen that each considers that although tales of Robin Hood are popular, praiseworthy in limited respects, they are also seen as somewhat contemptible. Even William Langland's alliterative English story, *Piers Plowman* casts Robin Hood in a somewhat poor light. This indicates that Robin Hood may have been more a tale for peasants and commons in the fourteenth century, than for the more educated classes. Tales for one audience may have been more predominant over tales for another audience. Peasant preference is not however an indication as to Robin's status in those forgotten stories. In addition to his association with *Ranulf of Chester* in *Piers Plowman*, it was shown that Robin Hood is associated with disinherited earls in Walter Bower's chronicle of c.1440. Furthermore, multiple traditions are revealed. Bower's chronicle effectively contains two separate traditions, one written under the year 1265 in which Robin is praised somewhat, and a bleaker re-introduction of Robin from 1266 which makes him seem like a more powerful and dangerous figure. This is significant considering Robin Hood would have sprung from an outlaw tradition otherwise dominated by noble earls, in the thirteenth century, to whom Robin was the successor. Associating Robin with disinherited earls potentially pushes back the time of Robin's progressive 'gentrification' to an earlier stage, though the theme of an increasingly gentrified Robin is conventionally seen as a later introduction. Although a fourteenth-century Robin Hood may have been a story for peasants, the tradition had earlier roots. The *Tale of Gamelyn* of the same era was shown to have perhaps originated as a type of romance, though the form in which it survives is more suited to the consumption of a vengeful audience, hostile to authority. The fact that tales of noble outlaws begin to go out of fashion around the time of the tale of *Gamelyn* suggests that there was an incentive for the outlaw to change identity. It is suggested that a potential similarity of the violent fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn* to early tales of Robin Hood, may have been a reason for the distaste for the early Robin Hood stories in the minds of the medieval chroniclers. By the fifteenth century, the audience began to include the emerging middling and higher classes, so tastes for what was acceptable would have perhaps again changed. The disappearance of the noble outlaw stories changed Robin Hood again as notable aspects of their adventures were incorporated into the early ballads.

The overall function of Chapter Six is to show that the ballads of the late middle ages are representative of a wider set of earlier outlaw and heroic stories than is appreciated. It was a time when the audience of Robin Hood changed from the *stolidum vulgus* of the time of Bower, to *yemen* and *gentilmen* who read or listened to the ballads. It was pointed out that although Robin is referred to as a ‘yeman’ (yeoman) in the earliest surviving ballad of the mid-fifteenth century, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, there exists a fragment from earlier in the fifteenth century which sounds very much like an introduction to that ballad, with the exception that Robin is called a ‘goodman’ rather than yeoman. This is important because it shows that Robin was not necessarily a yeoman, in terms of the fifteenth-century understanding, in the earliest tradition. It also shows that the very early balladeer, or rhymer, was not necessarily trying to connect Robin with an audience of yeomen. That came later. Nevertheless, there are vestiges of an early usage for the word. For instance, although ‘yeoman’ was being used to associate the audience with the characters in the ballad, the word perhaps actually referred to the earlier medieval definition of yeomanry as service to the king’s household, which is exemplified in the *Gest of Robyn Hode* as well as in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, as pointed out in this work. This means the original popular outlaw does not have to have been a petty landowner, in the style of a yeoman of the latter fifteenth century. Stories about other outlaws could have combined to form later Robin Hood legends. This is not the only function of Chapter Six. It has never been investigated whether plot elements of tales regarding Robert of Thwing relate to elements found in the Robin Hood ballad tradition (although clear similarities have been pointed out). This chapter argues that there are parallels between them. The Robin Hood tradition seems to have incorporated several thirteenth-century images, in particular, in the case of Robin in *Robin Hood and the Potter c.1500*. This ballad incorporates a story about the outlaw selling cheap stolen pots to an eager public, for reduced prices. It is suggested that this is perhaps how Robin Hood originally ‘robbed from the rich and gave to the poor’, an idea associated with Robin that neither the early nor later ballads can otherwise adequately explain. It seems to draw upon the thirteenth-century idea of the hooded men doing good for the poor by selling cheap stolen corn in town. If so it indicates that memories of Robert of Thwing served as one possible archetype for the later stories of Robin Hood. The similarities between the traditions have never been assessed in literary terms so this link was not noticed. It is also pointed out that the idea of befuddling the Sheriff of Nottingham with ill-gotten

documents bearing the king's seal, as in *Robin Hood and the Monk*, in order to effect an escape, paralleled a feature of the Robert of Thwing tradition, as recorded in a story by Matthew Paris, in which different ill-gotten documents bearing the king's seal are used to avoid arrest. This idea is not found in other outlaw traditions.

Chapter Seven examines the Robin Hood tradition after the early ballads were written. It makes the case that there was, in antiquarian times, a different understanding of the stories of Robin Hood, and because of this they dug into old chronicles for information from older stories which they sought to relate to their own unique ideas about who Robin Hood was. The chapter shows that antiquarian commentators make explicit and indeed authoritative statements regarding Robin Hood which are not evidenced by a simple reading of the early ballads. Most striking is the text of the historical play *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle. This may well have been written to pander to the tastes of an upper-class Elizabethan audience, as is the conventional explanation for its dissimilarity to the ballads. The other explanation is that it also recalls a medieval context, for it seems to fit in with the antiquarian commentary of the age. The excessive gentrification of Robin into an earl is rightly considered as evidence for a late and invented origin, yet the play contains details of sixteenth-century sermons, which also parallel stories in the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris, under the year 1235. In this, there is a corrupt cleric of Yorkshire whose hoarded and diseased grain-supply must be burned in the midst of famine. The stories relate to one another: the clerical perpetrators of both corn-hoardings are enemies of an outlaw described in nearby pages. It shows that Munday and Chettle may have sought to relate their version of Robin Hood with another figure, found in the pages of Matthew Paris. The *Chronica Majora* itself enjoyed popularity in the sixteenth century. The gentility of heroic figures such as Fouke Fitz Warin and Thwing may have inspired Munday's own notions of a Robin Hood set in a similar period.

Our aim has been to investigate changing ideas and influences behind aspects of the memory of a heroic outlaw tradition, in various times. Unavoidably, Robin Hood became the premier figure, under which other outlaw traditions became associated. Little John and Friar Tuck may have originally been separate outlaws who became associated with Robin. The adventures of Fouke Fitz Warin were also associated with Robin Hood. A heroic figure found in the writings of Matthew Paris was Robert of Thwing, about whom new information was added for about two decades after the robberies of 1231/2 and even

after Thwing's death. Aspects of stories associated with Thwing have parallels to the ballad tradition. In the fourteenth century, there were many noble outlaw heroes and people told rhymes of Ranulf of Chester and Robin Hood. By the fifteenth century, Robin Hood was to emerge as the dominant outlaw hero, with the best of the adventures of various thirteenth-century and later outlaws incorporated into the ballads as if they had been Robin's accomplishments. This is perhaps one reason why later commentators had no clear consensus regarding any possible 'original' Robin Hood: the tradition they attempted to pinpoint in history is representative of a whole set of earlier traditions, mixed with much creativity. In c.1521, when John Mair attempted to write about the original Robin Hood, he thought he was writing about the best of outlaws: in reality it was a tradition which combined the best of outlaw-style adventures. He saw a heroic figure, whom he described as the *princeps* of thieves. Robin was the most humane among their profession, one who never harmed the poor, and who took the goods of wealthy abbots. Mair created an image that exerts fascination, even today, as we try to look back upon the famous outlaws of the medieval world.

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