**Robin Hood**

[Robin Hood](http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/knowledge/Robin_Hood.html) was the legendary bandit of England who stole from the rich to help the poor. The stories about Robin appealed to common folk because he stood up against—and frequently outwitted—people in power. Furthermore, his life in the forest—hunting and feasting with his fellow outlaws, coming to the assistance of those in need—seemed like a great and noble adventure.

***Early Sources.***The earliest known mention of Robin Hood is in William Langland's 1377 work called *Piers Plowman,*in which a character mentions that he knows "rimes of Robin Hood." This and other references from the late 1300s suggest that Robin Hood was well established as a popular [legend](http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/knowledge/Legend.html) by that time.

One source of that legend may lie in the old French custom of celebrating May Day. A character called Robin des Bois, or Robin of the Woods, was associated with this spring festival and may have been transplanted to England—with a slight name change. May Day celebrations in England in the 1400s featured a festival "king" called Robin Hood. A collection of **ballads**about the outlaw Robin Hood, *A Lytell Geste of Robin Hode,*was published in England around 1489. From it and other **medieval**sources, scholars know that Robin Hood, the legendary thief of England, stole from the rich and gave the wealth to the poor.

***Later Versions.***By the 1500s, more elaborate versions of the legend had begun to appear. Robin also acquired a girlfriend named [Maid Marian](http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/knowledge/Maid_Marian.html) and a new companion, a [monk](http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/knowledge/Monk.html) called [Friar](http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/knowledge/Friar.html) Tuck. His adventures were then definitely linked to Sherwood Forest. Beginning in the 1700s, various scholars attempted to link Robin Hood with a real-life figure—either a nobleman or an outlaw. But none of their theories have stood up to close examination. Robin was most likely an imaginary creation, although some of the tales may have been associated with a real outlaw.Also at about this time, Robin began to be linked with the reigns of King Richard I, "The Lionhearted," who died in 1189, and of King John, who died in 1216. The original medieval ballads, however, contain no references to these kings or to a particular time in which Robin was supposed to have lived.

**The Death of Robin Hood**

Legend says that Robin Hood was wounded in a fight and fled to a convent. The head of the nuns there was his cousin, and he begged her for help. She made a cut so that blood could flow from his vein, a common medical practice of the time. Unknown to Robin, however, she was his enemy. She left him without tying up the vein, and he lay bleeding in a locked room. Severely weakened, he sounded three faint blasts on his horn. His friends in the forest heard his cry for help and came to the convent, but they were too late to save Robin. He shot one last arrow, and they buried him where it landed.