

No.16. Summer 1991.

THE MUSEUM, SALTER ROW, PONTEFRACT WF8 1BA. ☎ 702995 (home)

PONTARCH

Pontefract & District Archaeological Society.

Editor: Eric Houlder, Past-President.



Robyn Hode, Barnsdale, and Wentbridge. A definitive account by The Editor.

Robin Hood is undoubtedly the most famous outlaw in the world. His adventures have been translated into most languages, and both film and television scriptwriters have adapted the surviving legends and in many cases added to them.

This process is not a new one, however. Even during the later Middle Ages, the original ballads were being altered as the minstrels who carried them between manor houses and castles used their artistic licence to 'improve' them. Later, with the invention of printing, and later still with the popularity of theatres and drama, the stories became even more distorted.

As the legend became increasingly the property of a national rather than a local audience, some aspects of the original setting became played down, whilst others achieved more prominence. Thus, the city of Nottingham gradually assumed the role of the major place in the stories, in spite of the fact that in all

the earliest versions speak of *Robyn of Barnsdale*.

Barnsdale, originally *Beornsdale*, is a small area of land to the south of Wentbridge and somewhat north of Doncaster. The Great

evidence that by the fourteenth century, or perhaps slightly earlier, the name Barnsdale had been applied to the valley of the Went itself, the area now known as Brocodale.

¶ Here begynneth a gest
of Robyn Hode



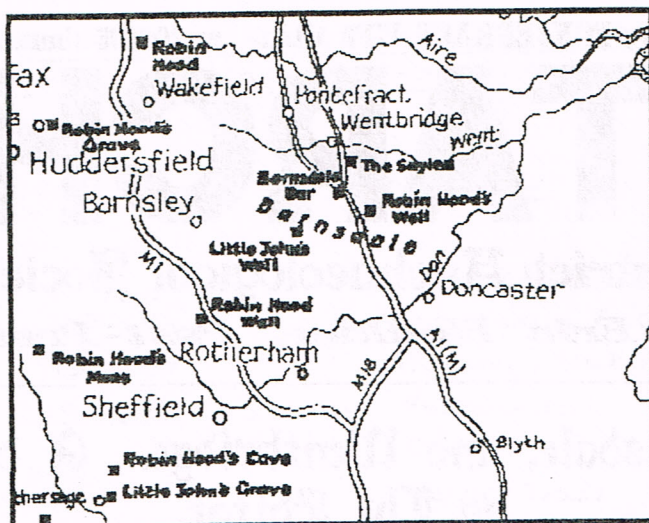
Woodcut illustrating 'THE GEST OF ROBIN HOOD,' (Nat.Lib.Scotland), previously used by Chaucer to represent a yeoman in *THE CANTERBURY TALES*.

North Road, the modern A1, passes through the middle of it, though the newer line of the highway actually by-passes Wentbridge on the massive viaduct. There is some

Even today, Brocodale is heavily wooded, and the masses of bluebells show that the woodland is primary. For many years, since the stage-coach era, in fact, the steep slopes of the Went valley have made the village of Wentbridge something of a traffic bottleneck. The modern viaduct was opened in the mid 1960s to alleviate this problem, with the result that the old village suddenly became a backwater. The ancient stone bridge no longer reverberated to heavy lorries, and the inhabitants could once again sleep at night.

Immediately past the bridge going north is the cutting, an artificial channel in the rock made to ease the slope in the last days of the stage coaches. Few people realise that the old road still exists parallel to the cutting

through the trees, and overlooking it. Narrow, steep, and rocky, the upper portion of the old road looks much as it would have done to the outlaws of Robin Hood. The lower part joining the present road would look equally authentic, except for the fact that it has recently become the access road for some new houses which show through the trees.



Distribution map of Robyn Hode associations.

The route out of the valley to the south is less steep, and less heavily wooded. It meanders more, eventually bringing the traveller up onto an area which today is intensely farmed, but which in medieval times would have been covered in scrub. As the road winds out of the valley, views of the village and the bridge below still open up, as they would have done to the medieval traveller. These vistas bring to mind verses from *The Geste of Robyn Hode*, the earliest of the ballads:-

And walke up to
the Saylis,
And so to Watlinge
Strete,
And Wayte after
some unketh gest,
Up chaunce ye may
them mete. (18)

They wente up to
the Saylis,
These yeman all
thre;
They loked est,
they loked weest,
They myght no man
see. (20)

But as they loked in
to Bernysdale,
Bi a derne strete,
Then came a
knyght ridinghe,
Full sone they gan
hym mete. (21)

But as they loked in
Bernysdale,

By the hye waye,
Than were they
wade of two blacke monkes,
Eche on a good
palferay. (213)

Barnsdale is also
mentioned in another of the
ancient ballads, *Robin Hood and
Guy of Gisborne*:-

But often words
they breeden ball,
That parted Robin
and John,
John is gone to
Barnsdale,
The gates he knowes
eche one. (11)

'My dwelling is in
the wood' sayes Robin,
'By thee I set right
nought;
My name is Robin
Hood of Barnsdale,
A ffellow thou hast
long sought.' (35)

The numbers in brackets
refer to the verses. The place-
name *Sayles* refers to a local
name which still survives on
older maps as Sales Quarry, at
nearby Hampole, and Sales
plantation between Wentbridge
and Smeaton. The latter spot
would, foliage permitting, give
anyone an excellent viewpoint
to observe travellers crossing
the bridge in the village below
and to the west.

The *Geste* also mentions

Wentbridge in a somewhat
roundabout manner:-

But as he went at a
brydge ther was a wastel-
ling,
And there taryed
was he,
And there was all
the best yemen,
Of all the west
countree. (135)

Of the other surviving
tales of the outlaw, *Robin
Hood and the Potter*, has a
direct mention of
Wentbridge:-

'Y met hem bot
Went breg,' seyde Lytyll John,
And therefore
yeffell mot he the!
Seche thre strokes
he me gafe,
Yet yey cleffe by
my seydis. (6)

One of the chief
characteristics of Robin in the
older stories is his respect for
women in general, and his piety
towards The Virgin and St.
Mary Magdalene:-

I made a chapell in
Bernysdale,
That semely is to se,
It is of Mary
Magdaleyne,
And thereto wold
be. (440)(*The Geste*.)

It may be coincidence,
but at Skelbrooke, the church
is dedicated to St. Mary
Magdalene!

The case for Robin Hood
having originally been based
somewhere near Wentbridge is
pretty much unassailable if
only the documentary
sources are
relied upon, as
above. However,
there is an
unusual
concentration of
actual place-
names connected
with the outlaw
in the same



area. Just south of Wentbridge alongside the Great North road is Robin Hood's Well. Though there are other wells attributed to the outlaw, this one is the earliest to be documented as such. Near Hampole is a Little John's Well, also of early provenance, whilst the exquisite Norman church of Campsall was said in local legend to be the site of the wedding of Robin and Maid Marion!

The location of Wentbridge in the Medieval Honour of Pontefract tends to add verification to its identification as the original haunt of Robin Hood. The nearby great castle of Pontefract could provide both the minstrels and the audience to begin the process of publicity which was eventually to make the local boy into the most famous outlaw in the world. Subsequent fictional additions, including the new location of Nottingham, have gradually hidden the truth behind the legend. Luckily modern scholarship is beginning to rehabilitate Robin Hood back into his original haunts.

oOo

WE ARE SURVIVORS!

*Only for those born before 1945.
Adapted from Family Tree.*

We are survivors! Consider the changes we have witnessed:

We were before television, before penicillin, before polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, frisbees and the pill.

We were before credit cards, split atoms, lazer beams and ballpoint pens; before pantyhose, dishwashers clothes dryers, electric blankets, drip-dry clothes and before man walked on the moon.

We got married first and *then* lived together. How quaint can you be?

In our time, Bunnies were small rabbits. Designer jeans were scheming girls named Jean, and having a meaningful relationship meant getting

along well with our cousins.

We thought fast food was a sandwich on the coach, and Outer Space was the back of the Crescent.

We were before house-husbands, gay rights, computer-dating, dual careers, and commuter marriages. We were before day care centres, group therapy, and nursing homes. We had never heard of FM radio, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word processors, yogurt, and 'men' wearing earrings. For us, time-sharing meant togetherness not computers or cons; a chip was something you ate; hardware came from *Englands* (if you had a few hours in hand!) and software wasn't even a word!

In 1940, 'Made in Japan' meant junk, and the term 'making out' referred to how you did in an exam. Pizzas, Macdonalds, and instant coffee were unheard of.

In our day, cigarette smoking was fashionable, grass was mowed, Coke was burned in stoves, and pot was something you cooked in. Rock music was a grandmas lullaby, and Aids were helpers.

We were certainly not before the difference between the sexes was discovered, but we were surely before the sex-change operation; we made do with what we had and we were the last generation that was daft enough to think that you needed a husband to have a baby.

No wonder we are so confused and that there is such a generation-gap today!

But we survived! What better reason to celebrate, and celebrate we will, for despite it all, most of us who married are still together, because we tried to surmount obstacles, not run away from them. We know that difficult times are a part of life, and that it isn't always rosy.

Many who remember the effects the depression had on their parents assumed adult responsibilities before they were even teenagers. Our generation now sees its

grandchildren doing the same thing, due to the high divorce rate. They are used as pawns in the ugly games being played between their parents. With so much in society being disposable, the trashing of partners is the 'in thing' to do.

What about fidelity, honesty, loyalty, morality and consideration for others? In this age, with drugs so prevalent, what base is given to children for stability? Materialism will never substitute for it.

Our generation made their own fun this generation expects others to do it for them, and for a high price.

Countless organisations were formed after the war to keep us in touch with our childrens' needs. We participated because it seemed right, but instead we produced the 'me first' generation. We have cared, shared, and despaired.

Let them now try to understand us for a change: we need our space away from them so that we can enjoy the principles that will always be in style, no matter how long man roams this planet. They were good enough to bring the children into this world, and raise them to adulthood, so now lets drink a toast to the Golden Rule, and live our lives to the fullest we deserve it.

Anon.

EDITORIAL.

Another short Editorial! At the AGM, concern was expressed that there were insufficient copies of the balance sheet, and it was agreed that this latter be published in the next issue of *PontArch*. You will find this overleaf. Please keep your articles, etc. coming in, and note that we can now reproduce drawings, cartoons, etc.

E.H.

PONTEFRAC T AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 1991

	£	£		£	£
<u>RECEIPTS</u>			<u>PAYMENTS</u>		
Balance b/wd 1.4.90			<u>Administration:-</u>		
Cash	3634		Secretarys Expens	1468	
Current A/c	100407		Printing & Stationery	5992	
Deposit A/c	<u>198653</u>	302744	Postcards	6198	
			Books	340 -	
<u>Sales :-</u>			Town Trail	312 -	
Cards & Badges Books			Keyrings & Badges	215 -	
& Prints	121384		Photographs	10 -	
Raffle	5497		Pontefract Cakes	<u>6475</u>	15783
Refreshments	<u>(01)</u>	126820			
			<u>Lecture Fees</u>		20428
<u>Subscriptions</u>		182 -	<u>Hermitage Visits</u>		2106
<u>Donations :-</u>			<u>Subscriptions</u>		2150
Hermitage Visits	14888		<u>Donations</u>		
Women Institute	<u>10 -</u>	15888	St Martin Church		
			Womensky	5 -	
<u>Bank Interest</u>		14623	P&I Delivery Suite	50 -	
<u>Wychs Bank Grant Swalesyard</u>		100 -	YA Trust	<u>50 -</u>	105 -
<u>Entrance Fee P Adelyman Lecture</u>		3 -	<u>Swalesyard Project</u>		98
<u>Excursions 1990/1991</u>			<u>Xmas Social</u>		5458
Income	9061 -		<u>Excursion 1991/92</u>		
Expenditure	<u>(8726)</u>	335 -	Bournemouth		50 -
			<u>Womersley Gala Stall</u>		10 -
			<u>Balance c/wd 31.3.91</u>		
			Cash in Hand	1184	
			Current Account	83309	
			Deposit Account	<u>223276</u>	307769
		£ <u>522135</u>			£ <u>522135</u>

Honorary Treasurer A. L. Hawkins Date 13th April 1991
 Honorary Auditor: R. P. Jockett Date 13th April 1991