

ROBIN HOOD



Picture and model: Sandy Andrew Carr

The merry folkloric characters of Robin Hood, Little John, Maid Marian and Friar Tuck are firmly embedded in our cultural imagination, with countless TV and film adaptations in recent years. But, overall, the roots of this engagement with Robin Hood stories have been forgotten – that is, the long held tradition of ‘Robin Hood Games’, which would take place every year in medieval burghs across Scotland and England during the sixteenth century. Whole communities engaged with these celebrations, which were centred around May Day but the festival period would often last for days. Short plays would be performed involving all the key Robin Hood characters. There was always a tradition of appointing a leader to the day’s festivities, who had a different title dependent on where the location – an ‘*Abbot of Narent*’ or ‘*Lord of Innobedience*’ in Edinburgh, an ‘*Abbot of Unrest*’ in Peebles, an ‘*Abbot of Unreason*’ in Inverness and Haddington and an ‘*Abbot and prior of Bonaccord*’ in Aberdeen. As may be apparent from these titles, the Robin Hood Games were by no means calm or peaceful affairs, but rather thrived on a lively and bawdy atmosphere. It’s perhaps inevitable, then, that in the turbulent period of civil unrest leading up to the Scottish Reformation, the reigning Scottish monarch Mary of Guise decided to ban any form of Robin Hood festivity or celebration in 1555, ordering ‘*that in all times coming no manner of person be chosen Robert Hood or Little John, Abbot of Unreason, Queens of May, nor otherwise, neither in borough nor to landward in any time to come.*’ In Edinburgh, this caused such an outrage that crowds rioted outside the old Netherbow Port in the heart of the Old Town to protest against this legislation!

Despite this upset, however, the tradition of performing folk plays continued in Scotland, largely in the form of the [Galoshins](#) play, more traditionally performed around houses at Hallowe'en. Original Robin Hood play scripts are hard to come by these days, but the following modern reworking, written by Donald Smith, was often performed in recent years at Edinburgh's Old Town Festival Gala Day. **Why not give it a go with family and friends this May, and make sure you dress up well too!**

Calling the play

**It's the month of May,
And time for our play.
It's all about Robin Hood
So you know we'll be good.**

Who says so, sonny?

I do, so gie us yer money!

Wee man, you're making a gaff,
Your wee play is bound to be nyaff!

Who are you calling wee, mister?
My daddy was Finn McCool,
When he peed he filled a swimming pool.
With one fart he shot out Berwick Law,
And Hercules was his Granpa.

Robin Hood, you say?
To the green without delay,
And you'll enjoy our play!

Play

ROBIN

I am Robin Hood the outlaw,
and I live in Sherwood forest.
I steal from the rich to give to the poor,
I'll never give up till King Richard comes home
and puts an end to that tyrant King John
and the evil Sheriff of Nottingham.

MARION

I am Maid Marion.
He's my fiancé, but we can't get married
till King Richard comes home.

But in the meantime I'm an outlaw too,
hunting deer in the greenwood,
and living in caves with Robin Hood.
But don't get the wrong idea
like Little John.

JOHN Marion, Marion, my love!
Robin can't give you what you need.

ROBIN Oh no, not again.
He'd find a pub in the Gobi desert.

JOHN I am your man, Marion,
Look at my staff.

MARION Watch it, Little John,
I'm made of sterner stuff.

JOHN Marion, Marion, give me quarter!

MARION Take that, and that, you booby!

ROBIN It's another slaughter!

MARION Defend yourself like a man!

JOHN Give up like a woman!

MARION Right, that's it.
Cracked head for you!
(John tries to defend himself, ineffectively)

JOHN Love me gentle, love me true.
(sinks to the ground)
A corner of this wood, forever England...

MARION Time to get hunting, Robin,
or we'll have nothing for the pot.

ROBIN Right away, Marion,
You go that way, I'll go this.

SHERIFF *(in hiding)*
So, they're going different ways,
and Little John's down and out.
Now's my chance to seize
the fair Maid Marion

to make her forever mine!

(all off in different directions)

- ROBIN** Not a track or trace.
Not even a sniff of deer.
I've been hunting all day,
and need a break.
What's this? A holy friar fast asleep.
Perhaps he will give me some food.
Holy Friar, kind sir, Father...
- TUCK** Who's there? Stand back,
or I'll buff you.
- ROBIN** No harm meant, good Friar.
- TUCK** An archer, eh? Do you want butted?
- ROBIN** No. I've been hunting all day,
I'm tired and hungry.
- TUCK** What do you want from me?
- ROBIN** Just a little something to take the edge off my hunger, if you have
anything to spare.
- TUCK** I'm a holy man, fasting and praying,
all I have is a slice of cold porridge and some water.
- ROBIN** The gift of a poor man, Friar,
is doubly welcome.
- TUCK** Blessed is he who expects nothing, my son,
for he will not be disappointed.
Here you are, stranger.
- ROBIN** Thank you kind sir.
What is your name?
- TUCK** Brother William. Brother William Tuck.
- ROBIN** Not Friar Tuck, the friend of Maid Marion!
- TUCK** The very same. In fact,
I'm looking for her now.

- ROBIN** She's supposed to be somewhere in the forest with Robin Hood the bandit.
- TUCK** He's not a bandit, he's a hero and I must find them.
- ROBIN** Good Friar, I am Robin Hood.
- TUCK** Why didn't you tell me, you silly little man? Come here and let me embrace you.
- ROBIN** Urgh!
- TUCK** Enough of this rubbish.
Have something decent to eat.
I've left a few things over from my lunch.
- (reveals hidden mound of food)*
- The open air life gives you an appetite.
I could get used to this!
- ROBIN** Enough, Friar Tuck,
I can't eat another scrap.
- TUCK** Nonsense, man, this is just a wee picnic.
Where are we going to find our dinner?
Wait, I almost forgot.
I must find Robin Hood – that's you – and Maid Marion.
- ROBIN** What's wrong?
- TUCK** It's that greasy Sheriff of Nottingham,
and spindly Guy of Gisborne.
They're skulking in the forest today
to kidnap Marion,
and lock her away until she agrees
to marry one of them – or both – I forget which.
- ROBIN** Hurry then, good Tuck.
We must rescue Maid Marion.
She's a damsel in distress.
- (rush off)*
- MARION** I love him, I love him not.
Do I love him? Do I love him not?

Are men really necessary?
I've shot three deer already,
and there's no sign of Robin.
Tell me something new.

(Sheriff and Guy creep towards her)

What was that? Did you hear something? Where?

(There. They shift sides)

No, nothing. You lot are a bit jumpy.
Just a minute I did hear something.
(There) Where?

(There) Where?
Come on, you're just imagining things.
What?

(They grab her)

SHERIFF	Now we have you.
MARION	Let go of me.
GUY	We've come to rescue you, Marion.
MARION	I don't need rescued.
SHERIFF	Yes you do, juicy tender little morsel.
MARION	Get your clammy wee hands off me.
GUY	Don't be distressed, sweet damsel.
SHERIFF	This rope will just increase the pleasure...
GUY	of your forthcoming marriage to...
MARION	I'll never marry you, Guy of Gisborne. I'd rather be dead!
SHERIFF	That can be arranged, in due course. <i>(pulling her away)</i>
BLACK KNIGHT	Stop. Unhand that maiden.

GUY Who are you?

BLACK KNIGHT I am the Black Knight.

SHERIFF Well, mind your own business.

BLACK KNIGHT My business is injustice and oppression.
Loose that defenceless woman!

SHERIFF Defenceless! Who are you kidding?
She's the best shot in the forest.

GUY And that includes Robin Hood.

BLACK KNIGHT Cut her free or I'll slice you pair in two.

GUY Well, when you put it that way.
Let me untie you, Marion.

MARION You two are for it.

BLACK KNIGHT Good madam, leave this to me.

MARION You must be joking.
Take that, you jerks!

(Robin and Tuck hurry up)

TUCK There she is. Quick, Robin.

ROBIN We meet again, Sheriff,
and this time there's no escape.

MARION Leave them to me, Robin.

TUCK and me!

(melee)

BLACK KNIGHT Stop, good Holy Friar, refrain from violence.

TUCK Are you with them, black one?

BLACK KNIGHT No! I am the Black Knight,
newly returned from the Holy Land,
where I fought in the cause...

TUCK Stop blethering then and
come and have dinner with us.

(meantime Marion has tied up Sheriff and Guy)

MARION Three guests for dinner, Robin,
but two of them won't be eating.

TUCK You're not suggesting! Mind you,
that's the one thing I've never tried.

MARION I've got three deer back at camp.

TUCK So you knew I was coming.
I'll roast them in lard.

GUY Please, no!

TUCK With chestnut stuffing and boiled gut sausages
wrapped round the guts, and topped with blood puddings
laced with eyeball sauce and, for desserts, we'll have cherry pie, apple
pie, currant slice...

BLACK KNIGHT Doesn't anyone want to know
who I really am?

ROBIN Will it not keep for later?
I'll need to go and wake up Little John.

BLACK KNIGHT I am your lost king, Richard,
returned at last to claim his own.

SHERIFF Oh no, it's that creep
come back to rule us.

GUY And we're nicked.
Please, Richard, believe me!
He forced me to do it!
Remember when we used to play
tiddly-winks together?

RICHARD And you, Robin, I pardon.
You are an outlaw no longer.

ROBIN Marion, now we can get married!

MARION Not so fast, Robin.

I'm not sure about all this petticoat business.

TUCK Wait till after dinner at least.
It's time for a feast.
The King has come home.
Let me embrace you once and all.

ROBIN Oh no!

(Tuck does damage)

BLACK KNIGHT Anyone got a tin opener?

MARION Here comes Little John.
He looks a bit dazed.

ROBIN Time for a dance everyone.

MARION Yes, I suppose we'd better
untie this pair.

GUY We promise to be good, don't we?

SHERIFF I suppose so.

ROBIN Bring on the leafy boughs
because it's May, the birds are singing.

LITTLE JOHN The forest glades are green again.

MARION Flowers are blooming on the branch.

ALL **It's time to feast and play,
The merry month of May!**

END

Stories, drama and song so often go hand in hand that it is not surprising that singing songs and ballads of Robin Hood is also common. The great storyteller and tradition bearer Stanley Robertson knew one of these songs, 'Robin Hood and the Pedlar', which is popular also in England, but Stanley sang a distinctly Scots version, transcribed here and available to listen to on [Tobar an Dualchais](#):

A pedlar brisk and a pedlar thrawn,
 And a pedlar came linkin ower yon lee.
 When who should he meet but twa troublesome men,
 Twa troublesome men he chanced for to see.

What's in your pack noo, me gay fellow?
 What's in your pack? Noo it's come tell tae me,
 I have seven shirts o the finest silk
 Beside my bow strings two or three.

Then up spoke bold Little John,
 "It's half of your pack it shall fall tae me!"
 But there's nae a man in a' Scotlan,
 Can tak my pack awa frae me.

And John, he took a broad broad brand,
 The pedlar he stood by his pack,
 And they both did fight and they both did swing
 Till Little John cries "Pedlar, hold your hand."

And then up spoke bold Robin Hood,
 Fa was sittin up ahint the tree,
 For ah ken a man nae sae big as ye,
 Fa can tak yer pack awa frae ye.

And Robin picked a broad broad sword,
 The pedlar he stood by his pack,
 And they both did fight, and they both drew blood,
 Till Robin cries "Pedlar, hold your hand."

"Since ye are a better man than us,
 Ye're surely a knight o some fame,
 And since ye've won his bet straight and fair,
 Come pedlar, tell tae us yer name."

“For I neednae tell my name to ye,
I neednae tell my name at a’,
For it lies within my ane breistbane
Gin I tell my name at aa”

“But my name it is Stoot Fellair,
I was banished fae the land beyond the sea,
For the killing o a man in my father’s land,
And tae the greenwood I wis forced tae flee.”

“Then if you be Stoot Fellair,
And surely my sister’s son ye’ll be!”
An they both shook hands, an they both shook swords,
An the greenwood rang wi mirth and glee.