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THE
NewsLetter

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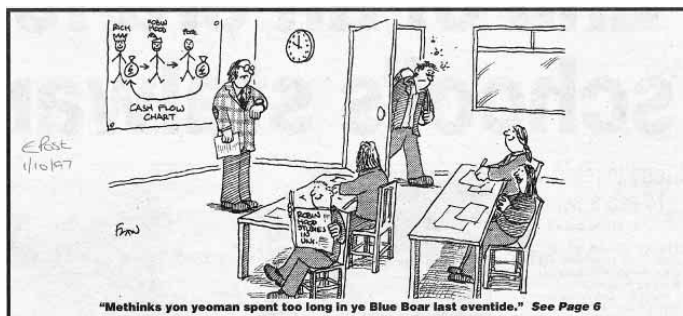
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International stage for Robin



(... continued from page one)

"Part of what I am doing is to suggest solutions to some hitherto unidentified or uncertain local references, including some in Rutland and Cumbria, in ballads from the 15th- to 17th-centuries. But the paper is not concerned with the sort of literal hunt to track down a real historical Robin Hood — we can't know if there was a real person behind the legend.

"The legend and its almost infinite capacity for transformation is the subject of the conference. My particular research is concerned more with the role of names and places in the ballads."

She added that, on one hand, geography is essential to the Robin Hood legend: a terrain of three elements — the forest, the highway and the (dangerous) town — is central to it, yet this terrain of the plot is not essentially localised. Not even to Nottingham and Sherwood.

Other regions appropriate the Robin Hood myth. She highlighted two in particular: Staffordshire — Needwood Forest and Tutbury; and Cumbria — Inglewood Forest, a location also for King Arthur in some medieval romances. There was even a Scottish Robin Hood.

"My paper asks why, when the adventures can happen anywhere that has the elements of the essential geography, placenames turn out to be so important in the Robin Hood ballads and what significance they have," she said.

There are already plans for a second international conference at the University in two years' time. The Department of English Studies has already a strong research interest in regionality in literary, linguistic and drama studies. It also contains the English Place Name Survey. There is increasing interest in cultural studies in the department, especially in relation to language studies, and Robin Hood ballads already figure in the undergraduate English studies course.

Other Nottingham speakers who attended the international conference at the University of Rochester in New York were Frank Abbott of Nottingham Trent University, who talked about the transference of the legend to a new medium in the city centre-based *Tales of Robin Hood*, and Michael Eaton, who talked about his award-winning film *Fellow Traveller* and his short film *Moving Pictures* on the history of Robin Hood on film.

Some of the ballads set Robin in Yorkshire — he goes fishing at Scarborough in one — and sometimes the claims of other regions have seemed to threaten Nottingham's own pre-eminence as Robin Hood country.

There have been two pieces in the Nottingham Evening Post (see cartoon, left) about the conference and the research on the legend and the point was made that there is perennial interest from tourists and visitors in the Robin Hood legend here in Nottingham.

I am glad to say that my paper points out that some of the apparently Yorkshire references may not be to Yorkshire but bring him back nearer home to the Rutland countryside. There are also other references that tend to reinforce the specific East Midlands and Nottingham settings of some of the ballads, which may be a comfort to anyone who fears that academics will spoil the traditional links with Nottingham.

Sometimes the ballad detail shows specific knowledge of Nottingham geography — and the sheriff, his castle and prison are clearly Nottingham.

This conference showed just how big the myth is and has been through the centuries. There is no fixed, original Robin Hood tale which is the 'real' story. Robin Hood can be everywhere and nowhere, but he is also often located somewhere in particular and, over the centuries, Nottingham and Sherwood have been the most important places.

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