
Robin Hood

Memories of the Coterel Gang

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1. Introduction

*Lythe and listin, gentilmen,
That be of frebore blode;
I shall you tel of a gode yeman,
His name was Robyn Hode.*

—Anonymous, ca.1350, *A Gest of Robyn Hode 1-4*

It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to find a member of the large Cotterell family who had never heard of Robin Hood, but how many Cotterells are aware that the activities of the Cotterell Gang in Sherwood Forest in the early fourteenth century may well have been the original from which the Robin Hood legend derived.

I think we all must have absorbed in childhood the links between Robin Hood, the Sheriff of Nottingham and Sherwood Forest, but attempts to identify Robin with a known historical character have never been generally accepted. The traditional picture comes from the work of Anthony Munday, a contemporary of William Shakespeare, in the period 1598-1601. The titles of his work contain almost all the elements of the Robin Hood we know today: “The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington, Afterward called Robin Hood of merrie Sherwodde: with his love to chaste Matilda, the Lord Fitzwaters Daughter, afterwarde his faire Maide Marian” and “The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington. Otherwise called Robin Hood of merrie Sherwodde: with the lamentable Tragedie of chaste Matilda, his faire maid Marian, poysoned at Dunmowe by King John”. Munday's work placed Robin firmly in the time of King Richard I who, in 1190, was away fighting in the Crusades, while his brother, Prince John was left behind to rule England. This early date appears to be a fictional creation of Munday, with no external evidence to support it.

Munday was by no means the first to tell the story of the outlaws of Sherwood Forest; several manuscripts survive from the end of the fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries. As early as 1350, the ballad of Robyn and Gandelyn (<http://www.lib.rchester.edu/camelot/teams/gandelyn.htm>) has the “godde Robyn” and “Gandeleyn his knawe” out hunting deer in the “grene wode” where they come across “Half an hunderid of fat falyf der” and Robyn shows his skill with the long bow.

*“Be dere God,” seyde gode
Robyn,
“Here of we shul have on.”
Robyn bent his joly bowe,
Ther in he set a flo;
The fattest der of alle
The herte he clef a to*

—Anonymous, ca.1350, *Robyn and Gameleyn*

It is a matter of speculation whether this is a tale of Robin Hood, but the parallel is very close. The first unambiguous references are Lettersnijder printed in Antwerp around 1510 and now in the

national Library of Scotland, and versions of the “Geste of Robyn Hode” in the Douce Collection at the Bodleian Library, Oxford and the “Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode” Cambridge University Library, printed by Wynkyn de Worde about 1506-10. A “Mery geste of Robyn Hoode” from about 1560 in the British Library. General opinion is that these copies of the *Geste* were all most probably composed or copied from material, perhaps three separate ballads, dating from the middle or second half of the fourteenth century, with the action set earlier in that century. Certainly the tales of Robyn Hood were well known before 1377 when William Langland [LANGLAND] (Passus V, line 396) has Sleuthe say “*But I kan rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre*”. Earlier dates in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been suggested on slim textual grounds, but the first half of the fourteenth century is accepted as the most probable date for the emergence of the tales of Robin Hood. In the *Gest* Robin has been described as a follower of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, whose rebellion against Edward II was defeated at the Battle of Boroughbridge in Yorkshire on the 15th. of March, 1322. Robin was amongst the survivors of the battle who were outlawed and who fled south into Sherwood Forest. Henry de Facombery, who had betrayed the plans of Thomas plans to the was rewarded with the title of Sheriff of Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire (a strange combination!). These outlaws of Sherwood were granted a brief respite when they were pardoned by the king in 1323 in return for help in suppressing another rebellion, but the amnesty was withdrawn two years later, and the exploits of *Robyn Hode* must have continued in Sherwood Forest for many years after 1325.

Originally Robin Hood was clearly of yeoman stock, it was only in later accounts that he became a displaced nobleman. There have been at several attempts at identifying a historical person as the real Robin Hood. Outlaws living in the forest were often described as Robin of the Wood, Adam Bell, another outlaw ballad is another possibility. John Bellamy [BELLAMY73] has treated the general problem of lawlessness in the later Middle Ages, and followed this up with a study of the historicity of Robin Hood [BELLAMY85], whilst Stephen Knight [KNIGHT94] produced a “A Complete Study of the English Outlaw” in 1994. In 1995 Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman [PHILLIPS95] in “Robin Hood, the Man behind the Myth” (Michael O’ Mara Books, London) proposed that Robert Hode, identified by Joseph Hunter in the mid nineteenth century as the leader of the escaped rebels from Boroughbridge, was the original Robin Hood. Robert Hode was a knight who lived on the edge of Barnsdale Forest, a few miles south of Wakefield, a forest at that time almost adjoining Sherwood Forest. In 1321 he had married Matilda who later joined him when he was outlawed and together they resided in Barnsdale Forest. The identification is attractive, but the evidence is of course purely circumstantial: the *Gest* only names Robyn Hode. Nevertheless, Wakefield has taken the suggestion to heart, and in 2004, David Hinchcliffe, MP for Wakefield demanded that Nottingham relinquish its claim to be the heart of Robin Hood Country. Perhaps other, generally neglected, criteria are the role of Robin Hood as the leader of a notorious band of outlaws, his ability to evade the hand of the law, and to win the general support and respect of the populace.

The geography of the *Geste* is often somewhat confused. Barnsdale is clearly associated with the nearby towns of Blyth and Doncaster (and possibly Kirkstall Abbey), but a lot of the action takes place in Nottingham and the nearby Sherwood Forest, and Little John can ride easily in a day from Nottingham to meet with Robin: although it is at least two days very hard ride from Nottingham to Wakefield. A similar confusion occurs when the king visits Nottingham to capture Robin. Suddenly we are translated to the Bowland Forest area in north east Lancashire with references to the “Passe of Lancashire” (surely either the pass over Fiensdale Head or possibly the later Trough of Bowland road, both linking the area around Whalley Abbey with Lancaster), to that *gentyll knyght*, Sir

Richard of the Lee, identified as Lee in Wyresdale (why not Leagram Hall in the same area, a major vaccary where deer were raised to be set loose in the forest), and Plumpton Park. If distant Bowland Forest can be conflated with Nottingham, then Barnesdale and Sherwood Forest are almost the same place. Perhaps this geographical confusion arises from the merging of separate stories. And to anticipate a little, the family of James Coterel had long been closely associated with the Bowland Forest area, including Wyresdale and Plumpton.

A somewhat wilder identification was proposed in 2006 in the novel “Hood” by Stephen Lawhead [LAWHEAD06]. The historical character Bran ap Brychan living in the eleventh century on the borders of Wales, who spent his time fighting the Norman invaders, is proposed as the original Robin Hood: forget all about Maid Marion, Sherwood Forest and the Sheriff of Nottingham. The identification is not even marginally convincing.

At least we can infer that the tales related in the *Geste* and other Robin Hood source material do reflect to some extent memories of historical happenings early in the fourteenth century, and in the neighbourhood of Sherwood Forest and Barnsdale. That being so, the historical records should be searched to find historical events suggestive of those in the tales. It is certainly historical fact that the early fourteenth century saw a wave on gang activity in the midlands area generally, usually driven by local gentry rather than vagabonds. In Leicestershire to the south the Folville gang were notorious, in Staffordshire to the west, Sir William Chetulton and his gang roamed that county and north into Cheshire and southern Lancashire in 1321-2. To the north, the Bradburns of Bradbourne in Derbyshire, together with John “the Little” took part in a burglary at Harrington in Yorkshire in 1318. In the centre of this region, the Sherwood Forest area north of Nottingham and north into southern Derbyshire and Barnsdale there was the notorious Coterel Gang.

As far as I know there has been no attempt to suggest that the *Geste* was based on the exploits of the Coterel Gang which were first recorded in 1328 at Bakewell in southern Derbyshire within Sherwood Forest. The Coterel Gang is one of the very few instances of outlawry in the early fourteenth century that has critically investigated by a competent historian. In 1964 J. G. Bellamy [BELLAMY64] of the University of Nottingham published his findings in a paper entitled “The Coterel Gang: an Anatomy of a Band of Fourteenth-century Criminals” in the October issue of the *English Historical Review*, Volume 79, pages 698-717 (1964). Although Bellamy notes that this is the same period as the material of the *Geste*, he does not attempt to identify Robin Hood with James Coterel, the leader of the gang, and there is no direct evidence to support such an identification.

However, James Coterel was the leader of a notorious and large band of outlaws in the Sherwood Forest area, he did have the ability to evade the hand of the law, and he and his gang did have the general support and respect of the populace.

There followed the high period of the gang's criminal activity from March 1331 to September 1332 during which it roved mainly through the Peak District and northern Nottinghamshire, which of course was Robin Hood country par excellence

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.702

In this article I propose that the exploits of the notorious and very successful Coterel Gang in Sherwood Forest which were both very topical and well-known, and inspired a great deal of popular support, could well have been a source of inspiration for the authors of some original ballads from which the “Geste of Robyn Hode” was compiled a few years later, and that these exploits became the origin of all the later stories of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. One might even speculate that

the Robert Hode of Barnsdale was himself a member of, or associated with, the Coterel Gang. In what follows I quote extensively from Bellamy's 1964 article since this is perhaps not generally available. You can purchase a copy of Bellamy's article from the British Library at: <https://www.bl.uk/services/document/lexformn.html>

2. The Coterel Gang

The first real reference to the Coterel Gang comes on 2 August 1328

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.699

Because they failed to appear in court on 20 March 1331 the Coterels were outlawed

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.702

Undoubtedly James was the leader of the gang, for all the juries which later accused him referred to his organisation as the society of James Coterel.

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, pp. 699-700

As he wandered through the Peak District and through Sherwood Forest James Coterel apparently became an attractive figure: the names of twenty recruits to his band are given by the jurors of the High Peak hundred alone.

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.705

At least four members of the Coterel family were involved in what were officially criminal activities in the Sherwood Forest area in the period 1328 to 1333, but James, John and Nicholas Coterel were never brought to book. Indeed, in November 1336 James was commissioned to arrest a Leicestershire parson accused of illegal activity, and Nicholas became Queen Philippa's bailiff for the High Peak and lead an army of archers into Scotland. Laurence Coterel was less fortunate, he was killed by Roger de Wennesley in March 1330.

Thomas Ifel of Stafford struck Laurence Coterel on the head with his sword. Roger Wennesley then struck Coterel with a knife, per medium gutteris, from which he died: Assize Roll 166 m.21

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.702, and footnote 2

Despite this, Wennesley apparently joined the Coterel Gang.

It was hoped to bring to trial Roger de Wennesley, lord of Mappleton, who had been commanded to arrest the Coterels in December 1330 but who instead had joined the outlaws

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.710

There is nothing fictional in the history the Coterel Gang, references to the original records of the day are given throughout Bellamy's article. Nor were the Coterels poor peasants, they held significant amounts of land and even, on one at least occasion, continued to receive their rents whilst outlawed and living in the forest. Bellamy quotes from the Middleton MS.

It was Walter Aune, brother of Sir William, who brought them the Stainsby rents and victuals: Assize Roll 1411b m.6

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.702, footnote 6

In summary then, James, the leader of the gang, and his brother John were younger sons of Ralph Coterel who died shortly before the 16th. of August, 1315. Nicholas Coterel was probably also a brother of James. Laurence Coterel was obviously one of the same family, possibly a brother of Ralph. Ralph held lands in Tadington, Priestcliffe, Chelmorton, Flagh, Toustedes, Cromford and Matlock. This was not a poor family.

The Coterel brothers were probably younger brothers, but they were not penniless: on 28 July 1329 Nicholas was able to purchase the marriage of John Basset for a fine of 56 pounds 13s. 4d. His brother James was given the wardship of the lands of Elizabeth, widow of Thomas Meverel, by Queen Philippa; this occurred, most remarkably, on 23 May 1332 when Coterel [was] still an outlaw

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.715

Despite the family possessions, it appears that James Coterel had discovered a way to make outlawry a very profitable business. The tales of Robin Hood stress repeatedly that Robin and his gang of Merrie Men persistently robbed the rich but generally refrained from murder. The records of the Coterel Gang robbing the rich are many, and “from the autumn of that year [1331] it seems to have been accepted policy to eschew violence” (Bellamy, p.705). To quote only a few of the many examples, a jury in Derby recorded that James Coterel took 100s. from Ralph Murimouth at Bakewell; £20 was demanded of William Amyas, mayor of Nottingham; £40 was the “fine” demanded from Sir Geoffrey Luttrell to be paid to *la compagnie sauvage*; William de Birchover was assessed at £20; and John de Staniclyf was imprisoned by the gang and only released on a bond of £20. To get some idea of the value of these amounts at that time, in 1315 Ralph Coterel owned a messuage and two bovates held in chief in Tadington and Priestcliffe by service of 10s. yearly, little more than one percent of the fine imposed on Luttrell. Again, James Coterel was granted one third of the manor of Tideswell by Queen Philippa at 20s. yearly on 23 May 1332 (a time when he was still an outlaw!) Another interesting example is given by Bellamy.

On 14 January 1332 Sir Richard de Wylughby, a puisne justice of the king's bench and son of Sir Richard de Wylughby the elder, chief justice of the common pleas in Ireland, was captured by outlaws the Coterels. the ransom money was shared out among the criminals in Markeaton Park (Derbys.) on 2 February 1332

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.707

It seems perfectly clear that the Coterels, like Robin Hood, stole primarily from the rich—not surprisingly perhaps, there would be little to be gained from robbing the poor. What does point to the importance and power of the gang was that they were more than happy to prey upon the very rich and powerful. We find no evidence of them giving to the poor as Robin Hood is reputed to have done, but if they did, it would have been very unlikely to have left any entries in the county records. Of the 1300 marks ransom for Sir Richard de Wylughby, only 340 are recorded as shared by the gang. Bellamy speculates that some of the remaining 960 might have gone to the gang's backers like Sir Robert Tuchet, lord of Markeaton and Ashwell. Just conceivably some might also have gone to the poor.

Friar Tuck was an important member of Robin Hood's merry men, and the Coterel Gang also included members of the clergy; two were found guilty by a civil jury at Bakewell and only escaped

sentence by pleading their clergy. At that time members of the clergy could only be tried by an ecclesiastical court. At York they pleaded innocence under oath and were free again.

Master Robert Bernard and another clerical member of Coterel's band pleaded their clergy [they were] committed to the keeping of the officers of the archbishop of York. They later purged themselves by oath

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.710

Bernard had a varied and somewhat dubious reputation. He appears as the instigator of the Coterel's attack upon Walter Can, vicar of Bakewell on 2 August 1328. Bernard had been vicar of Bakewell himself in 1327, but had been removed on papal mandate by the bishop of Lichfield on 1 June 1328 after he was found to have stolen from church funds. He had also been a clerk of Chancery, a teacher at Oxford University, vicar of Edith Weston in Rutland and Registrar of Lichfield cathedral, where he failed four times to pay relief to the poor, and had only been released from Oxford gaol in 1326.

The Coterel Gang appears to have been very mobile, their activities are recorded as far north as Yorkshire and as far south as Leicestershire and Rutland. It would seem that Coterel never stayed more than a month in any one place though he periodically revisited the places where he was most assured of a friendly welcome: these were Bakewell, Derbyshire (the canons of Lichfield), Gringley, Nottinghamshire (Sir William Aune), Mackworth and Markeaton (Sir Robert and Edmund Tuchet.)

The gang certainly had strong support from both the church and from wealthy local knights. Seven canons of Lichfield cathedral dean and chapter were accused of supporting the gang, Sir William Aune protected them in Nottinghamshire, and they had support from Sir William de Chetulton and Sir John de Legh, and “no fewer than four bailiffs of the High Peak were of continuous assistance to Coterel and his followers” (Bellamy, p.709). There is no record of the gang poaching deer in the royal forest of Sherwood as Robin Hood is reputed to have done, but the gang was large and had to live. To some extent they relied upon local support providing food, implying considerable local approval of their activities, but living in the forest it is unlikely they would refuse the chance of excellent game.

Nicholas Taddington brought victuals for James Coterel to Bakewell and took them to Great Shardlow wood, Sheldon parish and elsewhere when desired

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.702, footnote 6

The large number of those who were said by the juries to have received and maintained them (fifty seven at Bakewell and Mackworth alone) need occasion little surprise

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.703

In the spring of 1332, the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Rutland were visited by the Chief Justice of Common Pleas, William de Herle, the Chief Justice of the King's bench, Geoffrey le Scrope and other important men of law. It seems likely that it was the activities of the Coterel Gang which inspired this enquiry. However,

The Coterels and their adherents had little trouble in avoiding arrest, for the prior of Lenton informed James Coterel of the arrival of Richard Grey, the leading keeper, while Sir Robert Ingram gave similar warning to John Coterel by means of a letter

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.709

All the best Robin Hood films have scenes of the Merry Men armed and galloping to the rescue or attack of someone or somewhere, and there is a similar report of the Coterel Gang from Bakewell.

Bakewell jurors who summed up what other juries told of less aptly: the Coterels and their confederates, they stated, rode armed publicly and secretly in manner of war by day and night

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.702

How big was the Coterel Gang?

On 26 November 1332 the sheriff of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was ordered to exact from county court to county court no fewer than two hundred men including the canons of Lichfield, the hard core and the hangers on of the Coterel and the Folville gangs

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.710

So far I have made no mention of the Folville gang. They operated primarily further south in Leicestershire, but were known to associate with the Coterel Gang. Rather than one large monolithic gang, the evidence points to a number of lesser gangs under the overall control of James Coterel

The Derbyshire juries saw him as the leader of such a notorious criminal as Eustace Folville when the latter associated himself with the Coterels during his enforced absences from his native shire [Leicestershire]

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.700

It is quite clear that the Coterel Gang was operating on a major scale in the Sherwood Forest area over the period 1328-1333, and that there was little rivalry with other gangs, the Coterels dominated the scene. This was about 20 years prior to the production of the first version of the *Gest of Robyn Hode*. It is also clear that although the Coterels were outlawed, they enjoyed very considerable support from the church (Lichfield), and the locals, both peasants and gentry. They provided a focus for the unrest of the peasantry which was to erupt later in the century in the peasants rebellion of 1381, and they were powerful enough to avoid arrest or conviction.

It does not appear that James, John and Nicholas Coterel or their able lieutenant Roger le Sauvage were ever brought to book, nor indeed was the Lichfield chapter

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.711

Rather than operating as thieves, the Coterel Gang found other ways to raise money, they provided a service to church and gentry

The Coterels were probably hired by the clergy and by the local gentry because they were more proficient than were other men

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.717

The gang was successful and they enjoyed support from the highest in the land.

Coterel attracted new adherents because he found a way to make outlawry a most profitable business

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p705

The impression is given that in many quarters the gang was not only respected but reluctantly admired

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.717

The number of men who sat at some time in parliament either for shire or for borough and who had close connections with the Coterels is quite notable. James Coterel received assistance from no fewer than seven such men

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.716

Convictions of members of the Coterel Gang seem to have been extremely difficult it not absolutely impossible, but when they themselves were victims of criminal acts, convictions came easily.

significantly a Derbyshire conviction is that of Robert del Ile de Wight, who was accused of burgling the house of William de Bucstones, a close henchman of the Coterels

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.717

Much of the success of the Coterel Gang must be attributed to James Coterel himself. He was obviously a born leader who could command allegiance, he was able to gain support from the major gentry, he commanded respect from all, he was popular enough (and careful) to avoid the penalties of the law, he had great organisational abilities and he was a competent businessman who quickly saw that it paid to avoid actual violence. And finally, as his fame reached its zenith, he turned around and made his peace with society and the Crown.

The overall impression is that the energies of the gang members were turned [after 1333] to deeds which were not only less offensive but also of considerable value to the Crown

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.712

Even if the crown failed to convict the leaders of the gang none of its members gives evidence of what might be called a criminal career after 1333

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.717

James Coterel was a dominant figure in the first half of the fourteenth century. Bellamy sums up his influence.

Had there been no James Coterel there might never have been a spate of crime in the northern midlands

—J. G. Bellamy, *The Coterel Gang*, p.716-7

3. And in Conclusion

The historicity of Robin Hood has long been contentious (see for example, M. H. Keen, “The Outlaws of Medieval Legend”). The ballads and stories of the exploits of Robin Hood first appeared about the middle of the fourteenth century (*The Gest of Robyn Hode*) and were surely based, even if very loosely, upon some real historical events and people. They were certainly set in real geographical places, Nottingham, Sherwood Forest and Barnsdale. Robert Hode of Barnsdale, a rebel and refugee from the battle of Boroughbridge has been suggested as a model for the fictional Robin Hood, and the case is certainly well worth consideration. Unfortunately this identification removes all stress from the Sherwood Forest and Nottingham areas where most of the action of

the Merry Men occurred. What is also seriously lacking in the Barnsdale story is solid evidence of the activity of the hero, Robert Hode, as an outlaw with a prolonged and successful career of taking from the rich, gathering a band of adherents, and winning the support of the locals, both peasants and gentry.

The evidence we have assembled about the activities of the Coterel Gang, although quoted from Bellamy, comes almost entirely from presentments in the courts, and as such is likely to be of high probity and unlikely to be seriously in error. The Coterel Gang did exist and did have major support from the poor, the gentry, and the church. The Sheriff of Nottingham was very seriously handicapped in his attempts to control their activities, and was only rarely able to effect any arrests.

On one occasion the sheriff had to ask for three postponements of a hearing because he was unable to arrest James Coterel and three others (Bellamy, p.701).

I suggest that the career of James Coterel and his gang, operating with very considerable success at that time (1328-1333) in Sherwood Forest provides a much better model for the ballads and legends that followed. I propose that the entire collection of stories, legends and ballads about the exploits of Robin Hood and his Merry men is based upon the exploits of James Coterel and his gang in Sherwood Forest in the period 1328-1333.

Nowhere in the records of the Coterel Gang do I find any mention of Maid Marion. In 1321 Robert Hode of Wragby, a few miles south of Wakefield, married a Matilda from nearby Wooley. Munday (see Section 1, "*Introduction*") claims that Maid Marion's name was originally Matilda, the daughter of Lord Fitzwater. I suggested earlier that Robert Hode might well have been a member of the Coterel Gang, and it is known that his wife Matilda joined him in the forest during his period of outlawry. If Robert Hode of Wakefield was a member or associate of the Coterel Gang of Sherwood Forest, perhaps Nottingham is justified in erecting the signs about entering Robin Hood country on the M1. Also possible is that a Robert Hode gang of outlaws in Barnsdale came under the protection of the Coterel Gang, just as the Folvilles retreated to Sherwood Forest and the Coterel Gang when things got too hot for them in Leicestershire. Whatever the details of the association between James Coterel and Robert Hode, the *Gest* clearly links the activities of Robin Hood's gang to both Barnsdale and Nottingham. Perhaps by 1350 the name of James Coterel had become too respectable to be linked with outlawry, and the author of the *Gest* adopted the name of Robin Hood from one of James's captains, Robert Hode of Wakefield.

James Coterel's close companion in most of his escapades was his brother John. Whether John was big enough to be "Little John" I have no idea.

With the retirement of the leaders of the Coterel Gang into private and often public life after 1333, the spate of criminal activity in the midlands was notably arrested. The memory of the earlier lawless period was enshrined in the stories of Robin Hood.

You can read the original *Gest of Robyn Hode* at:

<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gest.htm>

*'Who is thy maister?' sayde the knyght;
Johnn sayde, 'Robyn Hode.'*

'He is gode yoman,' sayde the knyght,
'Of hym I have herde moche gode.'

—Anonymous, ca.1350, *Gest of Robyn Hode*, 101-4

Unfortunately “James Coterele” would not rhyme with “moche gode”. So how about

'Who is thy maister?' sayde the knyght;
John sayde, 'James Coterele.'
'He is gode yoman,' sayde the knyght,
'Of hym I have herde mon telle.'

—Anonymous, ca.1350, *Gest of Robyn Hode*, 101-4 amended 2007

Some of the other early ballads about Robin Hood can be read in original form on the web

Robin Hood and Sir Guy of Gisborne.

<http://www.ldyoutlw.com/gests/gisborne.html>

Robin Hood and the Monk.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/child/ch119.htm>

Robin Hood and the Potter.

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