

HERITAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY



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Culture, Heritage and Representation

Perspectives on Visuality and the Past

Edited by

EMMA WATERTON and STEVE WATSON

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Representation
Perspectives on Visuality and the Past

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Chapter 9

Authenticity, the Media and Heritage Tourism: Robin Hood and Brother Cadfael as Midlands Tourist Magnets

Roy Jones

Eco (1986) has pointed out that many tourists seek hyper-real destinations. One means by which such hyper-reality can be attained and/or heightened, particularly in visual terms, is through the link between mythical or fictional characters and their supposed actions in actual places, and especially in places with heritage significance. Two such places where this process can be observed are Shrewsbury Abbey in Shropshire and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, both in the English Midlands. Shrewsbury Abbey is the fictional home of Brother Cadfael, a twelfth-century monk-detective and the hero of numerous novels and television programs. Sherwood Forest was first associated with the mythical actions of Robin Hood in late medieval ballads, and the media, in many forms, has continuously built upon this legend over the intervening centuries. At both locations, these fictional/mythical characters have been used to develop local tourism industries and even to rehabilitate and visually transform areas suffering from economic and/or environmental problems. Using Selwyn's (1996) concepts of 'hot' and 'cool' authenticity in tourism, this chapter will summarize both the histories and the fictional/mythical overtones of these areas before considering how these have been blended in the construction of local tourist narratives and the visual culture that supports these.

As demonstrated by the popularity of 'battlefield tourism' (McGreevy 1991) at many locations from Gallipoli to Gettysburg, or of 'dark tourism' (Lennon and Foley 2000) more generally, tourism sites can benefit considerably from an association with violent (or romantic) events and heroic (or notorious) characters – sites, in short, where both the actual landscapes and the events associated with them conjure up vivid pictures in the eye and mind. Furthermore, it would seem that these tourism benefits can often accrue to places, even when the events and the characters with which they are associated are mythical and/or fictional. The presence of Mount Olympus is hardly a drawback for tourists to Greece, though very few now see it as the home of the Gods; likewise, Prince Edward Island's tourist industry depends very heavily on the Anne of Green Gables stories. Modern media events can also play a significant, though not necessarily deliberate, role in tourism as aficionados seek out the locations that they have seen in successful

films and television series (see Mordue 1999 on 'Heartbeat Country'). For example, although it is, in any case, a tourist 'historic gem' of a town (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000), Stamford benefited considerably from being the location for the BBC's 1994 televisionisation of *Middlemarch*, as did Lyme Hall, the stately home at which 'Mr Darcy' (Colin Firth) famously emerged from a lake in the BBC's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Selwyn, in his work on tourism and myths, considered the power of history and fiction, and distinguished between the representation of 'cool' and 'hot' authenticity, both visually and in more general terms, as follows:

The suggestion here is to work with two distinct senses of the term 'authentic'. A first type may be termed 'hot authenticity' and will apply to that aspect of the imagined world of tourist make-believe – that aspect of tourist myths – concerned with questions of self and society. The unashamedly modernist suggestion is that underneath the surface structures of the post-modern tourist myths ... are modern and even pre-modern concerns with the 'authentic self' and the 'authentic other' ... A second type 'cool authenticity' may be reserved for propositions which aim to be open to the kinds of procedures described by Popper ... and which would like to claim a different kind of legitimacy from those in the former category (1996, 20–1).

Cool authenticity, therefore, refers to that which can be empirically demonstrated to have occurred, to buildings and/or sites, still extant and visible, of proven antiquity and, ideally, to sites where people, who are generally considered to be significant contributors to national, or at least local, heritages, incontrovertibly performed notable feats. Hot authenticity, by contrast, produces responses from the emotions, rather than from the intellect, responses, perhaps, to issues of good and evil, or even just to a good story. For example, tours focusing on ghosts and murders are becoming increasingly common across the Western world. But tourism and, even more so, place marketing relate to authenticity in a more complex manner than that indicated by the simple dichotomy between the factual (cool) and the fabulous (hot). Even where actual and colourful characters were involved in real, spectacular and nationally significant events (such as Napoleon and Wellington at Waterloo), a whole range of media representations, from *Sharpe's Waterloo* through *Vanity Fair* to historical documentaries, will increase public awareness and interest, and thus stimulate tourist movements.

At a further level of complexity, fictional or mythical stories are often set in actual locations. The Colosseum in Rome (already, of course, a major tourist attraction) featured strongly in the highly successful film *Gladiator*, which was a classic piece of hot authenticity in terms of its dramatic depictions of good and evil. My frequent use of (real and fictional) examples from both the distant and the not so distant past is deliberate. Selwyn is not alone in pointing out that, insofar as people seek for their 'authentic' selves through tourism, they often focus on those earlier (or different) societies, which they perceive as offering them simpler

and, thus, more 'real' experiences than do their own modern, urban environments (see also Cohen 1994; MacCannell 1999, 91). It matters not that their Indigenous, farm stay, 'pioneer' or other historical tourist experiences are frequently restored and sanitized to the point of what Eco (1986) terms hyper-reality or that the more aesthetic aspects of the visual are privileged over the less pleasant aspects of the earlier aural and olfactory realities. Indeed, the very unreality of what is being perceived may assist the viewers/tourists in relating the contemporary visual experience with their own cultural or national heritages

English history and (again according to Eco) medieval history are, perhaps, particularly evocative both in terms of hot authenticity, through what we perceive as their heady mix of chivalry and violence and, in terms of cold authenticity, through the visual impressiveness of their physical remains (cathedrals, town walls, castles, abbeys etc.). In this chapter, I will, therefore, focus on two areas in the English Midlands, Shrewsbury in Shropshire and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, where fictional/mythical/media-generated medieval figures have been co-opted, not merely into becoming the bases of local heritage tourism attractions, but also into being catalysts for place marketing and even for local economic regeneration. In both cases, I will summarize firstly the cool authenticity of local historical record, and secondly the hot authenticity of the exploits of, the fictional monk-detective, Brother Cadfael of Shrewsbury Abbey, and the mythical outlaw, Robin Hood of Sherwood, respectively. I will then consider the more complex (tepid?) authenticity of the development of local tourist industries which have both used and co-opted a variety of essentially visual media to blend these cool/real (Shrewsbury Abbey and Sherwood Forest) and hot/unreal (Brother Cadfael and Robin Hood) components into heritage tourism attractions.

Cool Authenticity

Shrewsbury Abbey/Abbey Foregate

As a frontier fortress town close to the border with Wales, Shrewsbury, in cold historical fact, experienced a turbulent and frequently violent history throughout the Middle Ages, a fact that was first acknowledged in 'hot authenticity' terms when Shakespeare made the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403 the climax of *Henry IV, Part 1*.

At the beginning of this period, in 1083, The Abbey of St Peter and St Paul in Shrewsbury was founded by French, Benedictine monks and was probably built on the site of an earlier wooden church. Like most abbey communities at that time, the monks were the caretakers of holy relics, in this case the remains of St Winifred, which attracted pilgrims to the abbey and the town. At that time, Shrewsbury was a major fortress and county town guarding the borders of England from attacks by the Welsh. A meander of the River Severn offered Shrewsbury its protection, within which the town and its walls were built, with a castle guarding

the meander's narrow neck. The Abbey was constructed immediately East of the town next to the gated English Bridge. The major road from London (which roughly followed the route of the Roman road known as Watling Street) passed by the Abbey and entered the town over the bridge. Although much of the land near the Abbey was taken up by this community's own gardens, ponds and a mill on an adjacent stream, the suburb of Abbey Foregate began to develop around it in the early Middle Ages.

Given this location, the Abbey would have certainly been a focal point in the movements of many people in this frontier place in these uncertain times. The protection offered by the town and its walls was frequently required during the Middle Ages when Shrewsbury was besieged several times. A notable siege occurred during the mid-twelfth century, the period during which the first Brother Cadfael novels are set. England was then experiencing a civil war between King Stephen and the Empress Maud/Matilda who both claimed the crown.

Since the Middle Ages, both the abbey itself and the surrounding suburb of Abbey Foregate have experienced considerable change. During the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century, the monastic buildings at Shrewsbury were destroyed, though the Abbey Church itself remained. Charles II offered to make Shrewsbury a city and the Abbey Church a cathedral in thanks for the town's support during the English Civil War. However, his offer was rejected by the civic leaders of the time on the grounds that such an elevation had not been the reason for their support of the Royalists.

Thomas Telford, the pioneer civil engineer, constructed the London-Holyhead ('Irish Mail') turnpike road through the former monastic site in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Shrewsbury also became a major railway junction, and a railway station was subsequently built on the site of the monastic buildings. Abbey Foregate was crossed by railway lines and a large locomotive depot was constructed close by. Even the Abbey's former gardens (the Gaye) on the banks of the Severn became the Gay Meadow, the stadium of the local football club up to the 2006–7 season. By the late twentieth century, Abbey Foregate railway station had been closed, road congestion approaching the English Bridge was severe and the area surrounding the Abbey was suffering from urban blight.

Sherwood Forest/Edwinstowe

Edwinstowe allegedly (this word recurs constantly with reference to the village and its surrounds) developed around the burial site of Edwin, King of Northumbria, who was killed in battle against the Mercians in the early seventh century and buried in the forest at the battle site. Subsequently, he was sanctified and a chapel was constructed at the site of his tomb. By 1086, a small village was grouped around this religious building ('a church, a priest and four bordars' according to the Domesday Book) and the first stone church was built there in 1175.

Edwinstowe was formerly within, and is currently adjacent to, (a much reduced) Sherwood Forest. Sherwood Forest occupies a tract of land in the North

of Nottinghamshire, where the soil was too poor to merit its early clearance for agriculture. It was not necessarily thickly wooded, and parts of it would have been sandy heathland. In the early Middle Ages it was therefore classed as common land where local people could hunt, gather, collect fuel and graze their stock. When the Norman monarchs designated this area a royal forest, these public privileges were withdrawn – coinciding with restrictions placed upon public access to crown land throughout the country at that time – a move which caused popular resentment locally and nationally. However, the resentment was, perhaps, personalized to a greater extent in the area around Edwinstowe when one of the ‘coolly’ authentic characters of the Robin Hood legend, King John, built a hunting lodge there.

During and after the late Middle Ages, as the population grew and as farming techniques improved, the forested area was gradually reduced. However, it is perhaps a reflection of the relatively poor agricultural quality of the land that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the area North and East of the remaining forest became ‘The Dukeries’, a region of stately homes and extensive landscaped parks. The region then experienced extensive environmental and socioeconomic disruption in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the Nottinghamshire coalfield was developed. Pre-existing villages, including ‘Robin Hood’s village’ of Edwinstowe, were massively expanded to accommodate the miners and their families. By the turn of the millennium, however, most of the pits had closed and the area was experiencing high unemployment and levels of socioeconomic distress.

Hot Authenticity

Brother Cadfael

The fictional character Brother Cadfael was a Benedictine monk at Shrewsbury Abbey around 1140 and was the detective hero of 20 novels (termed ‘medieval whodunits’ by their publisher) and three short stories. These murder mysteries were published, roughly annually, from 1977 to 1995 – the year of the death of the author, Edith Pargeter, a local woman who used the pseudonym Ellis Peters when writing her detective stories. Between 1994 and 1998, four series of television dramas based on the novels were made, largely on location in Hungary. The profile of the series was enhanced by the presence of the noted Shakespearian actor, Sir Derek Jacobi in the role of Brother Cadfael. These programs were shown internationally and appeared on the Public Broadcasting Service in the USA and on a commercial channel in Australia.

While Shrewsbury and the Abbey were the prime foci of these works, their ‘action’ frequently extended across Shropshire and its adjacent counties. Characteristically, the books included maps to enable readers to follow their plots. Notwithstanding the antiquity of their settings, it is still possible for anyone visiting or with a knowledge of these areas to pinpoint, and to a certain extent, therefore, to visualize an impressively large proportion of the locations used in these stories.

Robin Hood

The Robin Hood stories are set in the final years of the twelfth century (Dobson and Taylor 1972). According to the Nottinghamshire County Council website, in 1261, an outlaw in Buckinghamshire was given the name of 'William Robinhood' by an official recording his case. Eight such cases of nicknaming had occurred by 1300. Schama (1995) has also noted that one Robert Hood of Wakefield, Yorkshire, was convicted of taking wood from the earl's forest in 1308 and was obliged to make a payment for it.

The earliest surviving poem about Robin Hood dates from 1400 and is preserved in Lincoln Cathedral. In the late fifteenth century, the 'Lytell Geste of Robin Hode' first appeared, which was a collection of songs about Robin Hood and his associates. Apparently, these had first been performed as court ballads, but, through the then dominant oral tradition, the range of songs became more extensive and the range of their performers and listeners gradually became more socially inclusive. Initially, the legend of these 'gestes' was pro-establishment. Robin Hood was portrayed as standing up for the king and for the people's ancient rights against the corrupt officials who sought to profit from Richard I's absence during the crusades. Certainly Henry VIII took part in Robin Hood festivities in 1515, complete with a venison breakfast out of doors and 200 Lincoln green-clad archers. Later that century, Shakespeare compared the situation of his characters in the Forest of Arden (also in the English Midlands) in *As You Like It* with that of Robin Hood and his band.

However, in 1795, Joseph Ritson, who was writing at the time of, and was in sympathy with, many of the ideals of the French Revolution, published the two volume *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Songs and Ballads*, in which a more radical dimension of 'robbing the rich to help the poor' was added to the Robin Hood legends. Since Sir Walter Scott consulted both Ritson the man and Ritson's works while writing his medieval novels, this political view of the Robin Hood legend became more widely popularized, and some twentieth-century treatments of the story took an almost communist approach to the adventures of Robin and his 'comrades'.

For much of the last century, a steady stream of film and television treatments of the legend has complemented the print and dramatic material, with Robin Hood being represented on screen by a wide range of international actors from the Australian Errol Flynn to the American Kevin Costner. In recent years, the legend has been made increasingly inclusive in other dimensions, with, for example, a black outlaw featuring in the film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and a Muslim, female outlaw in the recent BBC TV production, not to mention such comedic treatments as *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* and even *Maid Marian and her Merry Men*. Each of these representations draws on a conventional series of visual cues, such as the green costumes, the forest setting, and the primacy of the longbow as the weapon of choice. Although Yorkshire figures in several of the stories, including that of his death, and that county contains

a Robin Hood's Bay, most of the legends focus on Sherwood Forest and on Nottinghamshire. Notwithstanding the centrality of Sherwood/Nottinghamshire to the Robin Hood legends, it must also be acknowledged that they are now also a significant part of a broader English heritage in which the (virtuous, English) Saxons are opposed to the (corrupt, French) Normans. Even more broadly – and fortuitously in tourism terms – Robin Hood is also a classic example of the bandit hero (Hobsbawm 2001). Such figures (for example, Jesse James, Ned Kelly and Zorro) figure strongly in the cultural heritages of many nations and place Robin Hood in a near-universal genre in much the same way as Brother Cadfael fits into the popular category of detective fiction.

Tepid Authenticity

The Shrewsbury Quest and Cadfael Country

Shrewsbury has been a noted tourist destination virtually since it developed railway connections in the nineteenth century. The initial focus of this industry was on the historic town centre, with its exceptional collection of 'black and white' Tudor buildings and on the landscaped riverside parks and gardens, which are the site of one of England's most famous flower shows. By the 1980s, however, the 'Brother Cadfael' books were being sold at the Abbey's book and souvenir shop and, by 1990, a booklet of walks in Abbey Foregate and central Shrewsbury (printed by 'Brother Cadfael Products Limited') traced 'the footsteps of Brother Cadfael' on his various murder investigations. Soon after, a series of metal footprints were placed in the town's pavements to mark these 'footsteps'. Major tourism development in Abbey Foregate did not begin until the early 1990s, when land opposite the Abbey became available as part of the redevelopment of the former station yard. The Shrewsbury Quest (with its slogan 'Live the History ... Solve the Mystery'), which was constructed on this site, contained a recreation of an abbey scriptorium, guest hall and herb garden (complete with the hut where Brother Cadfael prepared his medicines). Visitors could learn about elements of monastic and medieval life and, at the same time, find clues to solve a murder. They could also stand in the reconstructed buildings and gardens of the Shrewsbury Quest and see the medieval tower and aisle of the Abbey Church (but not the road that lay between the two; the 'hot' visual had primacy over cold authenticity). The centre was opened in 1994 with the support and advice of Edith Pargeter, and included a recreation of her study. In 1997, a memorial window to Edith Pargeter was unveiled in the Abbey church, perhaps fittingly in view of the major contributions made to its upkeep by Brother Cadfael tourists in recent years.

The Shrewsbury Quest closed in 2001. This was, perhaps significantly, a few years after the supply of new Brother Cadfael books and television programmes ceased. However, a member of the local Chamber of Commerce informed me that visitor numbers were consistently high and that other financial problems brought

about its closure. In spite of the demise of the Shrewsbury Quest, the tourism impact of Brother Cadfael endures and extends well beyond Abbey Foregate. The Abbey still sells the Cadfael books and other memorabilia (which now include Cadfael herbals and recipe books and guides to the places mentioned in the novels). Interestingly, the Abbey is now addressing authenticity issues of its own. Signage clearly identifies the medieval/monastic (and thus Cadfael-related) parts of the building and distinguishes these from the (largely Victorian) repaired and reconstituted sections. Both the monk and his alter ego, Sir Derek Jacobi, have been used extensively to promote the tourist attractions of Shrewsbury, Shropshire and the entire region. In a tourism brochure for Shropshire, Jacobi (photographed tonsured and wearing a habit) is quoted as giving his 'blessing' to the Brother Cadfael Trail in Shrewsbury. Guide books and postcards now refer to Shropshire as 'Cadfael Country', in part displacing the county's other literary tourism magnet, A.E. Housman, the author of the popular 'Shropshire Lad' poems. The visual medium of television is now perhaps a more powerful attractant than the verbal medium of poetry.

Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood Country

In the late eighteenth century, while he was assessing Sherwood's timber resources for the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars, Major Heyman Rook noted an oak so large and so old that it could have been there in Robin Hood's day. His comments caused the tree, which, with a certain lack of modesty, he named the Major Oak, to become romantically associated with Robin Hood. It was a secondary point that this tree would have been too small to provide either shelter or a hiding place for outlaws in the twelfth century. Following the so-called rediscovery of the Middle Ages in the nineteenth century, and the medievalism promoted by Ruskin, Morris and the pre-Raphaelites, the Major Oak began to be visited by the curious. Edwinstowe, at that time, was a pretty, rural village unaffected by coal mining, and it became a stopping off point for these visits. There were clearly local benefits in this development and the village and its church became increasingly complicit in the legend. The parish church had been new in Robin Hood's time and it therefore became the 'alleged' site of Robin Hood's marriage to Maid Marian. By the 1890s, Edwinstowe had its own railway access and the large Dukeries Hotel was established to cater for those tourists who wished to stay longer in the area.

The rise of the coal industry may have lessened the village's rural and historic charm, albeit temporarily, but its fall has certainly triggered a new interest in tourism as an alternative local economic base, with the Nottinghamshire County Council developing the Sherwood Forest Country Park and Visitor Centre on the edge of Edwinstowe. This is now a tourist site of national significance. The Major Oak (now kept alive by miracles of tree surgery) is its most notable attraction and its displays and exhibitions focus on forest ecology and on the Robin Hood legend, in both cases feeding off the, perhaps convenient, status of the oak as England's 'heritage tree'. Not only are many private gift shops, restaurants etc. in Edwinstowe

(such as the 'Robin Hood's Plaice' fish and chip shop) heavily dependant on the Robin Hood tourist trade, but the county, district and even European governments have invested development funds in several tourism-related projects such as a craft centre and a Youth Hostel. In the adjoining village of Walesby, *The World of Robin Hood* exhibition added some props and costumes from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* to a former Crusades exhibition brought in from Southern England, but, perhaps with the passing of Costner's film into history this, like the actor, has lost its drawing power and has recently closed.

As in Shropshire, the medieval 'brand' has been appropriated by the whole county, rather than by the immediate locality. Nottingham, of course, has the Sheriff's castle and its own mini theme park, *The Tales of Robin Hood*, which proudly states in its brochure that *The Independent* has called it 'a little Disneyland'. More generally, however, the County Library began to develop a Robin Hood archive as long ago as 1868. Nottinghamshire County Council brands itself as 'Robin Hood Country' and uses both the oak tree and the colour green widely in its 'corporate style'.

Conclusion

Both the examples discussed here clearly illustrate the symbiotic relationship between the tourism and the media industries. This has been widely noted in the literature and is evident from Avoca in Ireland (*Ballykissangel*) and Talkeetna, Alaska (*Northern Exposure*) to Barwon Heads in Australia (*Seachange*). Why this relationship has been particularly successful in the two instances documented here is, I would argue, a feature of time, at least as much as that of place. It may be more than coincidence that Eco (1986) juxtaposes his essays on *Travels in Hyperreality* and *The Return of the Middle Ages*. He considers the 'renewed interest in the Middle Ages to be a curious oscillation between fantastic medievalism and responsible philological examination' (1986, 63) – or perhaps between Selwyn's 'Hot' and 'Cool' authenticities. More specifically he identifies several 'little Middle Ages', which still attract our interest today, both as tourists and more generally. These include:

Pretext – a mythological stage on which to place contemporary characters;
 Ironic Visitation – in the same way that Sergio Leone and the other masters of the 'spaghetti western' revisit nineteenth century America; A Barbaric Age – of elementary and outlaw feelings; Romanticism; National Identities – a celebration of past grandeur; Decadentism; Philological Reconstruction; So-called Tradition (Eco 1986, 63).

In short, Eco identifies the Middle Ages as both visually and dramatically engaging and as central to the development of national and cultural heritages. Clearly, romances and mysteries such as those of Robin Hood and Brother Cadfael, are

particularly likely to appeal to our visual and emotional senses of all of these 'Little Middle Ages'. As such, they provide a very effective tourist 'hook', not only to attract visitors to these areas, but also to contribute to their economic, and even landscape, regeneration. Many of the former mine sites are being reforested and cloned Major Oaks are a popular item at the Sherwood Forest Country Park. With the construction of a bypass and the recent movement of the football ground, Abbey Foregate is now gentrifying. These tourist centres also act as foci for tourism promotion over wider areas covering much of Nottinghamshire and Shropshire. Clearly, in these cases of literary and media generated tourism, it is cool to be tepid.

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