

Little John

John Little was a fearsome fighter and athlete, standing at 6'6 (very tall for the medieval period). Due to his size he gained the "humorous" nickname Little John. He would regularly fight those who tried to cross the River Leen. He would also swim in the Leen, battling against its strong current upstream all the way from Old Basford to Moor Bridge.

He was born in Bulwell in 1163 on a site which is now Morrisons. His family were labourers and John quickly joined the family business, helping to build the priory at Lenton, wells at St Ann's and, most famously, St Martin's of Tours church in Bilborough. Whilst working at Lenton, he hauled a wagon – designed to be pulled by oxen - all the way up to the top of Derby Road from what is now QMC to Canning Circus to collect building materials and then pushed the fully laden cart back down again!

He met Robin Hood in 1193, not long after Robin had returned from the Crusades. Robin, attempting to cross the River Leen at what is now Bulwell Bogs – fleeing from the Sherriff's goons after only recently being outlawed, came up against the fearsome John who challenged him to a fight with quarterstaves (large poles of wood that you would bash together). John beat Robin by knocking him off the bridge and into the water but it was a close fight. When the Sherriff's soldiers arrived John scared them all off with a terrifying roar and John agreed to join Robin in helping the needy of Nottingham. He became the first and most trusted of Robin's companions.

Little John tipped over the Sherriff's wagon when he was trying to escape with the food belonging to the people of Clifton and held open the great wooden door while Robin escaped from the Castle after his capture before they evade the Sherriff's soldiers on Robin Hood's Chase in St Anns.

After nearly twenty years of robbing the rich and giving to the poor, in 1212, Robin and Little John were hiding in Kirklees Abbey in Yorkshire. It is here where Robin was tricked by the Prioress, Elizabeth de Staynton, who gave him poisoned soup. As he died, with the help of Little John, Robin fired one last arrow from the window of his room. Little John buried Robin on the spot where this last arrow had landed.

After Robin's death and subsequent pardon of all of Robin's companions after King John's death, John retired from heavy labouring and began a successful crocus growing business in the Meadows, near the site of the current Portland Leisure Centre.

Little John died in 1247 at the ripe old age of 84 and was buried in Hathersage in Derbyshire where he had a holiday cottage.