

# ROBIN HOOD

## Production Information

Academy Award® winner RUSSELL CROWE reunites with his blockbuster *Gladiator* director, filmmaking legend RIDLEY SCOTT, for the epic action-adventure ***Robin Hood***. Joining with Oscar®-winning producer BRIAN GRAZER (*A Beautiful Mind*, *American Gangster*) and Oscar®-winning screenwriter BRIAN HELGELAND (*L.A. Confidential*, *Green Zone*), they tell the story of the legendary figure known by generations as “Robin Hood,” whose exploits have endured in popular mythology and ignited the imagination of those who share his spirit of adventure and righteousness.

In 13<sup>th</sup> century England, Robin and his band of marauders confront corruption in a local village and challenge the crown to alter the balance of power between the king and all of his subjects. And whether outlaw or hero, one man from humble beginnings will become an eternal symbol of freedom for his people.

*Robin Hood* chronicles the life of an expert archer, previously interested only in self-preservation, from his service in King Richard I’s army against the French. Upon Richard’s death, Robin travels to Nottingham, a town suffering from the corruption of a despotic sheriff and crippling taxation, where he falls for the spirited widow Lady Marion (Oscar® winner Cate Blanchett of *The Aviator*, *Elizabeth*), a woman skeptical of the identity and motivations of this crusader from the forest. Hoping to earn the hand of Maid Marion and salvage the village, Robin assembles a gang whose lethal mercenary skills are matched only by its appetite for life.

With their country weakened from decades of war, embattled from the ineffective rule of the new king and vulnerable to insurgencies from within and threats from afar, Robin and his men heed a call to ever greater adventure. This unlikeliest of heroes and his allies set off to protect their country from slipping into bloody civil war and return glory to England once more.

Crowe and Blanchett lead a cast of accomplished performers, including Academy Award® winner WILLIAM HURT (*The Good Shepherd*, *A History of Violence*) as Sir

William Marshal, MARK STRONG (*Sherlock Holmes, Kick-Ass*) as Sir Godfrey, MARK ADDY (*The Full Monty, A Knight's Tale*) as Friar Tuck, OSCAR ISAAC (*Body of Lies, Che*) as Prince John and DANNY HUSTON (*X-Men Origins: Wolverine, Children of Men*) as King Richard The Lionheart, as well as legendary performers DAME EILEEN ATKINS (*Last Chance Harvey, Cold Mountain*) as Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and MAX VON SYDOW (*Shutter Island, The Exorcist*) as Sir Walter Loxley.

They are joined by rising stars MATTHEW MACFADYEN (*Frost/Nixon, Pride & Prejudice*) as the Sheriff of Nottingham and SCOTT GRIMES (*Crimson Tide, Mystery, Alaska*), KEVIN DURAND (*Legion, X-Men Origins: Wolverine*) and newcomer ALAN DOYLE as Robin's Merry Men—Will Scarlet, Little John and Allan A'Dayle, respectively.

Filmed on location in England and Wales, *Robin Hood* spans the years from the death of King Richard I in 1199 to the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215. It is produced by Scott, Grazer and Crowe, from a story by Helgeland and ETHAN REIFF & CYRUS VORIS (television's *Sleeper Cell*) and a screenplay by Helgeland.

The celebrated behind-the-scenes team is led by a crew of longtime Ridley Scott collaborators, including cinematographer JOHN MATHIESON (*Gladiator, The Phantom of the Opera*), BAFTA-winning production designer ARTHUR MAX (*Body of Lies, Gladiator*), Oscar<sup>®</sup>-winning costume designer JANTY YATES (*Body of Lies, Gladiator*), two-time Oscar<sup>®</sup>-winning editor PIETRO SCALIA (*Body of Lies, JFK*) and composer MARC STREITENFELD (*American Gangster, Body of Lies*).

CHARLES J.D. SCHLISSEL (*Body of Lies, Matchstick Men*), MICHAEL COSTIGAN (*Body of Lies, American Gangster*), JIM WHITAKER (*Changeling, American Gangster*) and RYAN KAVANAUGH (*The Hangover, The Wolfman*) serve as the film's executive producers.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

### Myth and Legend:

#### Discovering Robin Hood

### **A Brief History of the Hero**

The daring tales of Robin Hood have been a part of English literature for decades. As put succinctly by scholar J.C. Holt: “There are a quiverful of possible Robin Hoods. Even the likeliest is just a shot in the gloaming.” Yet this archetypal story has survived and been passed down through generations, morphing as each era adds to the evolving canon. “What began as an oral legend,” reflects Holt, “ended up as a script.”

The stories of Robin are among the oldest in England’s oral histories, stretching far back into the medieval period of the 9<sup>th</sup> century with tales of “Robin the Be-header” and finding literary form with surviving 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century ballads such as *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar* and *Robin and the Monk*. As far as we know, however, there’s no one actual Robin to whom we can look as the single authentic figure. From suggestions that the surname Robehod was often applied to a man after he became an outlaw, to the conjecture that “Robin Hood” was a stock pseudonym used by thieves, theories abound and the legend endures.

The hero has also found a rich legacy on screen. Robin has been featured in upwards of 30 notable film and television productions, ranging from a 1913 *Ivanhoe* adaptation, through the films of Douglas Fairbanks (*Robin Hood*, 1922), Errol Flynn (*The Adventures of Robin Hood*, 1938), Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn (*Robin and Marian*, 1976) and Kevin Costner (*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, 1991), as well as popular television serials such as the BBC’s Patrick Troughton series *Robin Hood* (1953), *Robin of Sherwood* (1984) and the more recent *Robin Hood* (2006).

For all his popularity, however, Robin’s on-screen tale rarely evolves, with filmmakers invariably peddling familiar tales such as those of the evil Sheriff of Nottingham, the malicious Guy of Gisburne and the iconic damsel in distress, Maid Marion. Inevitably, Robin has been portrayed as either a dispossessed nobleman or, more

likely, a gallant rogue with arms akimbo who serves comeuppance to the rich and gives blissfully to the poor.

### **Crafting an Origin Story**

During the filming of *American Gangster* with Sir Ridley Scott, producer Brian Grazer approached Russell Crowe about starring in a new *Robin Hood*. Grazer looked forward to reteaming with the performer, with whom he had already enjoyed two successful collaborations—on *A Beautiful Mind*, for which Crowe earned an Oscar<sup>®</sup> nod, and *Cinderella Man*. For this telling, the men were interested on a unique take on the age-old legend: an origin story that explains how a common archer in King Richard’s army transformed into the legend we know as Robin Hood. Set against the backdrop of the Crusades, this action-adventure would give historical framework to the later exploits that had been covered in many other versions of the tale.

Grazer came aboard to develop and produce the project through Universal Pictures and the company he shares with Academy Award<sup>®</sup> winner Ron Howard, Imagine Entertainment. “Movies about heroes inspire me,” states the producer. “The story of Robin Hood particularly appealed to me because it is about a man who has nothing but the right cause in his mind, and the skill and resoluteness to pursue it.”

“With our film, we explain who the Sheriff of Nottingham, Maid Marion and her father-in-law are, the dynamics of the northern part of England and the barons, and how England was controlled at the time,” Grazer continues. “By the end of the movie, you also know who Robin is. The end of our movie is the beginning of all the dozens or so other films that have been made.”

Grazer found the Australian actor keenly interested in reworking the legend. He admitted an interest in the outlaw that stretched back several decades. “I was very enthusiastic,” Crowe says. “Robin Hood has always been in the back of my mind since I was a child. I was a big fan of the various incarnations I saw when I was growing up. There’s a universal connection that everyone makes to Robin Hood, which is at the core of the story: there might be somebody out there who cares enough to redress the imbalance. There’s an empowerment quality about Robin to which people respond.”

Crowe's agreement, however, came with a caveat. "I said I'd do *Robin Hood*, but only if it were a fresh take," he adds. "It is one of the longest-surviving stories in the English language. That requires due respect. I took the attitude that if you're going to revitalize Robin Hood, it has to be done on the basis that whatever you thought you knew about the legend was an understandable mistake. It has to be different from what has come before. Take Robin and Little John, for example, who don't get on when they first meet. When we first meet them, they have a disagreement. But that doesn't take place on a log over a creek with a staff fight, which has been done to death. What we've done is to redefine the times and shift the timeline."

Crowe and Grazer turned their attention to their only choice to helm the film: Ridley Scott. "It needed a director who could handle tremendous scope," notes Grazer, "someone who embraces authenticity, who is interested in the milieu, the time and the political and historical events that were occurring. Ridley is captivated by all those things. If we were going to make this film, it had to be the *Gladiator* version of *Robin Hood*. I wanted to understand how brutal that time was and have it visually expressed in the most exciting and thrilling kind of action-adventure. Only Ridley can do that."

Scott and Crowe have a partnership that dates back to their wildly successful multiple Oscar® winner, *Gladiator*, the film that reset audiences' expectations of the historical epic. To date, their collaboration has also resulted in *A Good Year*, *American Gangster* and *Body of Lies*. When Crowe and Grazer pitched the idea to the director, he responded enthusiastically.

Scott is a longtime student of history, and his last period thriller, *Kingdom of Heaven*, had focused on the fall of Jerusalem 12 years before King Richard I met his untimely death. "I love period films," offers Scott. "I started with *The Duellists*, and then I've done the Roman epic and now I've gone back to medieval times again."

With Scott on board, *Robin Hood* gathered momentum. The filmmakers shared a common vision: they chose to explore how a humble man could become a champion of the people, and they sought to answer that question by telling his story within a specific historical context. Elaborates Grazer: "We wanted to embrace the political and historical facts of the era: England was bankrupt, threatened both by civil war and by France, and in

the hands of an inept king in John. Against that backdrop, we could explore an origin story of how Robin Hood came to be.”

To fulfill Scott, Grazer and Crowe’s vision, the men turned to screenwriter Brian Helgeland, who had been awarded an Oscar® for his previous collaboration with Crowe, *L.A. Confidential*. After he received a call from Scott to craft the script, Helgeland knew that what would interest him most was the chance to “humanize the legend.”

The writer explains: “Ridley wanted to tell the man-before-the-myth version of Robin Hood. Everyone knows the myth, and obviously that is an exaggeration of the real events. This myth is rooted in the downtrodden and the idea that whenever the powers that be need to be checked, a man will rise up and look after the common people. Especially in English history, it’s been an outlaw that has filled that position. What Ridley wanted to do was imagine what the real events might have been from which the Robin Hood legend sprung.”

Helgeland’s first partnership with Scott would prove a powerful experience. Helgeland remarks: “When there are catapults and phalanxes of guys trying to set castle gates on fire and men are concerned with God—what he is and for what reason he has led them into battle—Ridley’s on ground that he finds intellectually stimulating. The film benefits from it.”

In the script, from a story by Helgeland, Ethan Reiff & Cyrus Voris, we are introduced to archer Robin Longstride as an infantryman in the ranks of King Richard’s army as it returns from the Third Crusade in the Holy Land. Richard—in a bid to reclaim monies paid to the French king who held him hostage as he returned from his Crusade—is laying siege to a French castle. As history records, during the siege Richard suffered a neck wound from an arrow and died soon after. This shattered his mother, Eleanor, and resulted in the crown being passed along to his younger brother Prince John.

Beginning his story with the moment of Richard’s death, Helgeland imagined Robin, who has suffered a restless childhood overseas, seizing an opportunity to return to his native England for the first time since he was five. After he lands on its shore, Robin discovers a nation crippled by poverty and robbed of its men by Richard’s reckless bid to fund his wars. The specter of French invasion looms on the horizon, and Richard’s incompetent brother is content to let his people suffer while he fills his coffers.

It was important to the team to show how demolished the English economy was and how bleak the country had become. They wanted to present how Robin's arrival coincides with John's heavy taxation: citizens were being targeted to pay beyond their means and given little in food, clothing and shelter. Robin's defiance of the ruling class equals not just stealing grain and giving back to the people of Nottingham, but also inspiring his countrymen to take charge of their destiny.

Scott reflects: "Everyone talks about Robin Hood robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, but we felt it was relevant to choose a point in medieval folklore when the environment is on the edge of starvation and neglected by the crown. The hierarchy is the enemy, and the everyman who will come against them is Robin Hood. Within that idea, we have not forgotten the expectation and the romanticism of the legend. Is there humor in this? Yes. Is there a lot of action? Yes."

Key to Helgeland's tale is the birth of the Magna Carta, the great charter signed at Runnymede in 1215 after the uprising by the English barons against King John. In many ways, this moment defines the birth of England, freeing its Anglo-Saxon population from the harsh rule of the Norman kings. "There's a place for the Magna Carta in our film," states Grazer, "not only as a historical event, but also as a cinematic point."

Supplements Crowe: "We have a situation where the man who basically invented taxation is the same King John who signed the first version of the Magna Carta. We have a period between 1199 and 1215, and it felt like that was the ideal breeding ground for revolution...or the birth of a revolutionary figure. As much of the film is predating the Magna Carta, then it's possibly the birth of a nation as well—the birth of England and everything that is great about it."

Establishing a backstory for Robin was fundamental to understanding why he would become champion of his people. In the tale, Robin discovers that his father was stonemason Thomas Longstride, a well-known public speaker and the principal author of what was to become the Forest Charter (*Carta de Foresta*). This precedent to the Magna Carta provided rights, privileges and protection for the common man against the aristocracy. Richard's predecessor, Henry II, saw Longstride's political stance as treasonable and had him murdered in front of his young son.

To prepare for this role, Crowe read more than 30 books about Robin Hood and the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. “Robin is a witness to that death at the age of five,” explains Crowe. “He is then left in a monastery with the Templar Knights in France. His guardians [Loxley and Marshal] go off to the Crusade, but several years later when they come back, he’s not there. He’s had a very hard time, been treated badly, and he’s gone with the one piece of equipment that he was left with, his father’s cuirass. You can imagine a small child dragging around a fully grown man’s chest-plate armor.”

When we are introduced to Robin during Richard’s siege in France, he has no knowledge of life before his father was killed. “He’s suppressed the memory of watching his father die,” says Crowe. “In his mind, his mother and father just got rid of him and stopped loving him. That’s what has been on his mind for 35 to 40 years.

“But now he’s close to England again,” Crowe continues. “Here’s a guy who’s traveled across Europe and all through the Middle East. He’s seen a variety of different ways that people live, and when he gets back to England he’s surprised that this seems to be the most suppressive place. We follow a man on a journey of self-discovery. Along the way he begins to remember his past, and his quest solidifies. He realizes fate has overtaken him, and he has joined in something much larger than he thought it was. In the process of finding out who he is, he takes up his father’s work where he left off.”

With the producers, director, star and screenplay set, it was time to cast the supporting players of the production, beginning with the fairest maiden in all of Nottingham.

### Lambs and Lions:

#### Casting the Action-Adventure

### **Maidens & Matriarchs**

Cate Blanchett’s joining of the production owes much to the humble postage stamp. In early 2009, Crowe attended a function in Sydney with Blanchett, celebrating the fact that the actors’ likenesses were to be etched onto Australian postage stamps. As they sat on stage together, Crowe looked at Blanchett and realized that she should be his Marion.



The actor recounts: “Her demeanor, everything about her...I was kicking myself. Why hadn’t I thought of it before? Cate is a magnificent actress. She has resilience and a resonance. She’s tough, strong and single-minded. Every decision she makes is about truth. She has complete control over her emotional responses, so she can make the smallest gesture a gigantic statement.”

During the evening’s celebration, Crowe asked the crowd if they thought that he and Blanchett should make a film together. “A thousand people loudly supported the idea,” he remembers. “Her eyes were shining, so she obviously thought it was a great idea too.”

Scott agreed that Blanchett would make the ideal Marion for their production. “Cate Blanchett has a very definitive part in this overall story and context,” he says. “It’s a perfect, if you like, marriage of two characters.”

Blanchett discusses her decision to join the production. “Because Russell and Ridley have such a long history together of making films that go straight to the heart of the matter, it was a very exciting combination for me,” she says. As well, the Oscar® winner was drawn to the legend’s enduring appeal. “The power of the forest is at the heart of the Robin Hood myth. We’re so saturated with the power of the state, and the power of the church. As an antidote, the rule of nature is really enticing.”

The classically trained Blanchett had no qualms with a new telling of the age-old story and welcomed an origin tale. “It’s constantly being reinvented,” she offers. “There’s no single truth to the Robin Hood myth. Even in Shakespeare when he mentions it in *As You Like It*—‘like the old Robin Hood of England.’ It’s a myth, and each age retells those myths because it’s searching to have that story reflect something about the society in which they are living. There are certain archetypes that it deals with, such as the band of Merry Men. It’s a timeless narrative construction, and each age puts its stamp on an archetypal story like this.”

With Blanchett on board, the filmmakers developed the “Petruccio and Kate” relationship that evolves after Robin’s return to England brings him to Lady Marion’s home of Peper Harow in Nottingham. According to Crowe, they agreed that Robin and Marion should be “of a kind.” He explains: “The Marion relationship has certain Shakespearean elements to it. It’s very much *The Taming of the Shrew*. Robin and

Marion don't get on at all when they first meet, but there is a latent kindness to both these people. They are similar creatures who have been looking for some sign of that intuitive kindness in other people all their lives."

As the script evolved, so did the role of Marion. In stark contrast to a number of the character's previous cinematic incarnations, in this telling of the story, she is no weak and feeble maiden waiting for men to control her destiny. Helgeland explains how Marion developed: "There was a law that if a noblewoman's husband died and she didn't have a son, the estate would revert back to the crown. If Marion doesn't produce an heir or gain a husband, she's going to lose her land. So Robin and Marion's relationship, rather than start as love at first sight, which is a typical Robin Hood device, is much more a mutual convenience between the two of them. In the process, they become closer and the attraction builds from its mercantile start."

"Ridley has created and set up a world where all the men have been called to war by King Richard, and where Marion has therefore become the lady of the manor," Blanchett adds. "She's presiding over a village that has no men, and so she's having to take on the role—a bit like in the Second World War—where women had to move into industry and do things that they wouldn't otherwise have done."

Joining the cast as Eleanor of Aquitaine, widow of Henry II, as well as Richard and John's aging mother and one of the fiercest women to help rule the Western world, was Dame Eileen Atkins. From *Gosford Park* to *Cold Mountain*, the multi-award winner has often moved audiences with her powerful performances.

Atkins offers a bit of backstory to her character: "It's sad that Eleanor clearly doesn't love John. There's no doubt he's right when he says, 'You only cared ever about my brother.' Nevertheless, the throne is the throne, and he's going to get it. She cares passionately about ruling and keeping the lands that they have. She's fought so hard to extend England halfway across France, and she doesn't want to lose it all. In considering the huge picture, which she's thinking in terms of gaining land, she doesn't think quite enough about how the peasants are getting on. But she has a lot of wisdom, and she's certainly a great manipulator."

One of the puppets on her strings is Isabella of Angoulême, played by young French actress LÉA SEYDOUX of *Inglourious Basterds*. We are introduced to Isabella,

whom Eleanor initially despises, as Prince John's not-so-secret lover. Isabella ultimately marries the future ruler of England and quickly realizes that the only way of guaranteeing her time on the throne is to serve as a mouthpiece for her mother-in-law...as Eleanor secrets her strategy for John.

### **Merriest of Men**

Concomitant to the legend of Robin Hood is the story of his Merry Men, here a band of fellows disillusioned with life under the newly anointed King John. Fellow yeomen in Richard's war, they accompany Robin back to England after the death of Richard allows them to escape the conflicts.

Portraying the troupe are Kevin Durand as Robin's right hand and muscle, Little John; Scott Grimes as the youngest of the gang, Will Scarlet; and acting newcomer Alan Doyle as minstrel Allan A'Dayle. Says Crowe: "The core thing with these guys is that they are all athletes, and they all have a physical side to what they do in the film. Added to that, they are all intelligent, so they can learn new skills quickly. They also have an irrepressible sense of humor. It's been a great benefit to me and to Ridley, and no doubt the movie, that we've had guys like this playing these roles."

Crowe notes that each of the men brings a talent to their parts that mirrors their on-screen characters. "Scott's an incredible singer," he commends. Kevin has the coordination of a ballet dancer, yet the physicality of an ice hockey player; he is 6 feet 7 and 235 pounds. He also has a great singing voice. Then there's Alan, who has never acted. He's a folk singer from Newfoundland, and he knows how to play the lute. I said to Ridley, 'If you're going to have a guy playing the troubadour, let's have a guy who knows how to play the lute. That way, if you don't like a particular tune, you can change it then and there.' He also has a wonderful singing voice. That's a key element with the Merry Men."

No Robin Hood tale would be complete without the iconic Friar Tuck, a plump man of the cloth who prefers his mead and ladies to the dry pulpit that comes with being the local abbot. Played by *The Full Monty*'s Mark Addy, Tuck meets Robin and his band when they are on their way to Peper Harow to deliver the news of Sir Robert Loxley's

(played by DOUGLAS HODGE) sudden death to Sir Walter. A beekeeper and reluctant servant of the crown, Tuck all too readily becomes part of Robin's band of usurpers.

### **Noblemen and Villains**

Alongside Robin, Marion and the Merry Men, the film features a clutch of fascinating characters, not the least of whom is Sir William Marshal, played by William Hurt, and Sir Walter Loxley, portrayed by Max Von Sydow. These gentlemen grew up as friends and colleagues of Thomas Longstride (MARK LEWIS JONES), the author of the Forest Charter and the executed father of a then five-year-old Robin (JACK DOWNHAM).

To protect him from danger, Marshal and Loxley take Longstride's son away from England. They leave the young Robin in a French monastery while they join the Third Crusade, and they earnestly plan to return for him. Later, Marshal will take his position as a leading minister in Richard The Lionheart's royal court, while Loxley will return to his Nottingham estate and eventually become Marion's father-in-law.

"These two men left young Robin in the care of somebody else for three years when they went to war, and they come back and he's not there," offers Crowe. "Their assumption is that he's dead. So, for the previous 35 to 40 years, there wouldn't be a 24-hour period in their lives where they didn't feel some pang of that guilt. It's an interesting journey for both William Marshal and for Walter Loxley to have that guilt overhang their lives. In fact, when Sir Walter hears the name Robin Longstride again, his first thought is that somebody is coming to kill him...that there's going to be a revenge enacted because of his failure."

As it transpires, Longstride meets both men again, with Sir Walter helping Robin come to terms with both his tortured past and aspirational future. "It's an interesting relationship," says Crowe. "Robin remembers nothing from that moment that his father was killed, except a residual love. He knows he was loved, but he never understood why it changed, and Sir Walter uses basic psychology to reach inside him and say, 'The things that you need to know are actually inside you.'"

Hurt was quite pleased at his chance to play the epic hero who was a powerful consort to Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and King Richard I. "Sir William Marshal is an

amazing character from history,” says the Oscar® winner. “In this particular one, he’s a facilitator. He tries to maintain respect for the throne and, at the same time, facilitate change within the system. He has a philosophy that is intensely humane and fair-minded. But he’s also completely loyal to the throne, as in the need for people to have a leader. He combines these two things in a wonderfully diplomatic way.”

While his old friend Sir Walter Loxley rejoices in Robin’s return, he also grieves for his son, Marion’s husband Robert Loxley, who meets his death in France in the wake of Richard’s demise. With her husband gone, Marion and Sir Walter form a close bond. “She has become his caretaker, and he is her mentor and surrogate father,” explains Blanchett. “Very few actors could carry off the soothsayer in the way that Max does. Playing opposite him was a privilege; his body of work is just astonishing. It’s a very poignant touchstone relationship for me in the film.”

While many believe Robin’s primary nemesis to be the Sheriff of Nottingham, the writers crafted another villain in King John’s oldest friend, Sir Godfrey, played by Mark Strong. Godfrey, the man responsible for Robert Loxley’s death, uses his influence in the newly anointed court of King John to betray England to King Philip of France (JONATHAN ZACCAÏ). “What is fascinating about Godfrey is the fact that he exists on so many levels,” says Strong. “He’s a friend of John’s, so you realize early on that he’s close to the seat of power. You also realize he’s a traitor. Every good morality tale has a good and a bad guy. Godfrey’s job in this, in broad strokes, is to be Robin’s nemesis, and the man we love to hate.”

Cast as the royal sons of Eleanor were Danny Huston as King Richard the Lionheart and Oscar Isaac as Richard’s younger brother John, who takes the throne after his sibling is killed. Isaac explains a bit about the ruler: “We meet him as Prince John, and he’s quite hedonistic, a libertine. Nothing is expected of him, so he gladly says, ‘Fine, if you don’t expect anything from me, I’ll give you nothing,’ and he spends his time in bed with his French mistress. Then he finds out that Richard has died and now it’s his turn to be king—his turn to prove everyone, particularly his mother, wrong. He’s full of fear and doubt, but he thinks he can be a better king. The problem is that he has a lot of anger and a maniacal ego; he believes through sheer will and intellect he can make England great.”

Matthew Macfadyen, who shot to international acclaim after his portrayal of Mr. Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice*, stars as the archetypal villain, the Sheriff of Nottingham. Explains Maid Marion herself, Blanchett, of his character and performance: “What I find so interesting about this version of the Sheriff of Nottingham is that it’s the weak who are often the most evil, because they’re the most compromised. There’s a moment, and it’s brilliantly played by Matthew, where he suddenly says, ‘I’m British! No, I’m French!’ and he’s prepared to go over to whichever side. It’s the weak people from whom you have the most to fear.”

#### Forests and Keeps:

#### Shooting on Location

Principal photography on Scott’s latest epic began in April 2009. Producer Grazer commends that the director quickly earned his on-set epithet. “We called him ‘The General,’” he offers. “Ridley Scott is that kind of charging-forward general of our generation in filmmaking. There was once John Ford, and there have been others, but certainly Ridley is a gladiator himself.”

### **Rebuilding the 13<sup>th</sup> Century**

One of Scott’s longtime partners, production designer Arthur Max, was charged with the Herculean task of building medieval England—re-creating as accurately as possible life in the villages and towns, as well as the grandeur of the castles from the period.

The production designer was tasked with giving Scott the experience of what it was like to live in England during this era. The two men drew on a wealth of resource material from museums, libraries, actual reconstructed environments in England and the Dordogne in France, as well as some Iberian villages in the Pyrénées that stand virtually as they did in the Middle Ages.

Scott and Max also referred to the paintings of both the younger and elder Pieter Bruegel, which gave them the tone of dire hardship they were after. While not quite of the period, this art provided a great deal of insight about life in this era; they adapted the

look for *Robin Hood*. “He wanted to see the bleakness and the impoverishment of the Anglo-Saxon population in all its glory,” sums Max.

One of the most important sites was the setting for Nottingham Village, the place where Robin comes to return Sir Loxley’s sword to his father. Built on the Hampton Estate, near Guildford in Surrey, the set was ensconced on a private estate with ancient oaks, rolling fields and stunning topography. The land also offered a pine forest, a stream and a bog, and thus a wealth of shooting options for Scott. “Our primary requirement was a beautiful landscape,” says Max. “Finding the location was a great piece of luck.”

“We built the entire Nottingham Village, which is more than 50 buildings,” explains the designer, “most of them thatched and timber and made from wattle, a form of mud construction.” The buildings he describes were built around a town square, with a grain store, a tavern, a tithe barn and a church—as well as houses and hovels of all shapes and sizes—stretching out beyond the town center.

Max tasked his men and women to build a mill with a working water wheel, in addition to some ruined gates that would serve as a continuity link to another location about a 20-minute drive away. Sticklers for accuracy, they planted (and grew over many months) an orchard. Max explains that for the purposes of the story, they “burned it down in the end. Not entirely, but quite a few buildings. The rest was enhanced with CGI. We had to be very, very careful because most of the buildings were set within the oak trees, which were precious, but we managed to do controlled burns there.”

Fire was a terrifying scourge in medieval times, and with Godfrey’s men pillaging and razing villages at will, the filmmakers had to engage in plenty of controlled burning to capture what was in the script. Much of this was done in Bourne Woods, near Farnham in Surrey—a commercial forestry that allowed the crew to build sprawling sets.

In *Robin Hood*, Bourne Woods served as host to the northern villages of Barnsdale (often acknowledged as one of the origins of the legend of Robin Hood), York and Peterborough. These are the same villages that King John’s men and henchmen, under the leadership of the duplicitous Godfrey, destroy for the crime of unpaid taxes. Bourne Woods also hosted the French castle.

Max was pleased to construct the French castle and the outlying English camp for the film’s opening sequences in the same location. “That was based on an actual French

castle, roughly in the area where the Chalouse Castle existed,” he explains. “We decided it was better to build it on a location near the studio because the landscape there is magnificent. Many castles from that period are now surrounded by towns, so we decided we wanted a castle that was isolated in a landscape. Hence, we decided to build it and extend it with CGI.”

Extending it some 65 feet to the top of its tower on the crest of a hill, the French castle was built using traditional scaffolding and plaster. Moldings from existing English castles of the period were used to fashion the stonework. The team brought in an engineer to ensure not only that the structure would be stable in the wind, but also to guarantee the hillside wouldn’t collapse under the weight of the massive structure.

Shepperton Studios housed sets required to replicate key portions of London and, most notably, the Tower of London, at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. An overgrown, flat field before the design team arrived, Shepperton’s back lot was transformed into an impressive medieval London in a matter of a few months. “We began by doing a lot of grading and ground prep, creating topography,” Max explains. “We dug a moat and created road networks.” To make the Tower of London more imposing, it was raised at least four feet higher than the rest of the site.

Another portion of the Tower of London, the Royal Dock, was built at Virginia Water in Surrey. Max and his team created an actual jetty, as well as the Royal Barge that brings Robin and his men, after many years away from their home, bearing Richard’s crown to Eleanor.

“Our Tower set is based on the last surviving remnant of the Tower of London. I believe it’s called the Barbican Gate, which is of our period,” Max offers. “Its stonework is taken from Carnarvon Castle in Wales, which is probably the most intact castle in Britain. There’s very little left of the Tower of London, so we decided to re-create fragments that were accurate and then extend them with CGI.”

The interior of the Tower, built on sound stages at Shepperton, was every bit as impressive as its exterior, with the same staggering depth of detail seen throughout the picture. A composite set, it included an enormous corridor that leads to a giant throne room, off of which could be found the massive bedroom chambers for Prince John and



Queen Eleanor. The sets were modeled in proportion and shape from rooms Scott, Max and the team had observed when they had scouted existing British castles.

Also built at Shepperton was the interior of Peper Harow, seat of the Loxley family. This space was modeled on a manor farm of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century that had been seen in Shropshire by the scouts. That team fell in love with the Great Hall, detail, character and the patina of age it showed.

Practical reasons prohibited them from actually filming in Shropshire, so Scott’s crew built it on a sound stage at Shepperton. The spaces that Lady Marion and Sir Walter inhabit—including the Great Hall, bedrooms, kitchens and tack rooms—were all crafted from scratch. Max’s team grafted this interior onto Oxenford Farm, an exterior manor farm near Surrey. To complete the look, they added onto the existing structure several barn buildings, a fortified gate, multiple hovels and another water wheel. Thus, Peper Harow was reborn.

The cast was in awe of the efforts of their production designer and his massive team of artisans. Blanchett sums their feelings: “Arthur is truly wonderful and is really committed to preserving these crafts in England. He’s very passionate about the loss of skill sets. I marvel at the level of care that he has employed in the creation of all of the buildings in the Nottingham village set.”

### **Creating the Battle Sequences**

Re-creating the world of the latter Middle Ages would prove quite an ambitious task for all involved in the *Robin Hood* team. To the director who has spent decades making films, however, nothing seemed impossible—not even shooting with the masterful cinematographer John Mathieson on one of Britain’s most sprawling and exposed beaches...in some of the harshest weather conditions the British Isles can muster.

Working every day with anywhere between five and a dozen cameras allowed Scott and DP Mathieson to film scenes with full coverage in minimal takes; it truly enabled the director to generate the remarkable energy he brings to his storytelling. With multiple camera setups, Scott also consciously avoided tiring the actors, crucial on a film in which they faced immense physical challenges. Knowing that they would often be

wearing heavy, uncomfortable costumes and shooting in cold and wet weather conditions, Scott decided that every shot had to count.

Offers Blanchett, who watched the director at work for the first time on *Robin Hood*: “Ridley loves the adrenaline and the energy of shooting the way he does. He wants to capture that the first time, so we didn’t rehearse a lot. He prefers to rehearse on film, and with so many cameras, he knows he can then cherry-pick his way through it. He is astonishing to watch.”

Halfway through the shoot, the production relocated to Wales and to Freshwater Beach in West Pembrokeshire to shoot the epic battle scenes as the French, under the command of King Philip, seek to invade English soil and reclaim the land. It was a vast undertaking that marked the climactic scenes of the film, and the filmmakers assembled more than 1,500 cast and crew to pull it off.

The team undertook an ambitious series of sequences, with nine standard cameras, a steadicam, a Wescam and a helicopter contributing to Scott and Mathieson’s vision. “In Australia we’d say, ‘That’s bigger than *Ben-Hur*,’” laughs Crowe, “and that’s how it felt.”

Naturally, the experience was not without its challenges, and the production faced a good deal of difficulty trying to land an invading French army off the windswept Pembrokeshire coast. The surge was so high during the first days of photography, and the team faced enormous swells on the way out to sea that the most seasoned of sailors buckled with motion sickness. That necessitated building a portable dock in the nearby Pembroke to get the shots necessary.

Lensing in this uncontrollable environment for nearly two weeks in weather conditions that ranged from unexpected blasts of heat to torrential rain, the crew fought its own battle with the tide coming in at approximately a meter a minute. This required them to keep relocating 1,500 people and 150 vehicles up a beach that is half a mile long.

For the actors playing Robin’s Merry Men, however, the epic battle sequence was worth all the hardship. “What we did in Wales, I was scared out of my mind every single day there,” laughs Scott Grimes, who plays the flame-haired Will Scarlet. “We had 130 horses riding side by side, galloping down the beach, and we had no idea where the cameras were. It felt like we were in the war. The whole shoot was incredible.”

Little John himself, Kevin Durand, agrees. “Trying to explain what I did that day to a friend on the phone, or to my fiancée on Skype, was wild. She’d tell me, ‘I went to the gym and to work. What did you do today?’ I’d reply, ‘I rode at the front of a 130-horse cavalry across the beach in Wales. Then, I attacked a bunch of Frenchmen and killed about 17 of them before lunch.’ How do you explain that? That’s been this entire movie. It’s been amazing.”

The actor who portrays the murderous Godfrey also had his share of showmanship on the battlefield. After he betrays his childhood friend King John and defects to the French side, Godfrey must face off against Robin in the final battle.

Mark Strong recounts how he almost got too into character: “As I wheeled my horse around, in front of me were 130 horsemen galloping toward me through these kneeling Frenchmen. Out of that, I had to pick out the two who I was due to fight and slash one around the head and take one around the chest as they fell off their horses. It was incredibly exhilarating. So much so that when I’d done that bit, that was all we’d rehearsed. But, of course, the cameras were still rolling and I decided to turn my horse around and join the melee and start whacking everybody I could find—my own men included. I felt the bloodlust.”

### Readying the Soldiers:

#### Physical Training

Already a master horseman, Crowe embraced the physical challenges of production by undergoing a grueling workout regimen and becoming an accomplished archer, quite skilled with the difficult longbow. Following in the steps of Robin Hood, he became proficient at shooting the very challenging weapon while wearing heavy chain mail. As well, he trained for three months in Australia and would hunt in the forest barefoot. “You’ve got to make the thing that’s part of your character part of you,” Crowe advises. “If you’re going to fire a bow and arrow, then you need to learn how to do it because the circumstances are never going to be perfect.”

A stickler for detail, the actor spent many months in training, soon learning that shooting Robin’s arrows was much more difficult than it initially seemed. “You’re going

to have to fire at a certain mark, in a certain place, and you're going to be firing while you're running, while it's raining," Crowe offers. "There was an extended period where I was firing 200 arrows a day." That is roughly equivalent to what an Olympic archer would do in preparation for a competition. "It's just what you do," he adds. "It's the quiet contemplation and the work before there's film in the camera that creates the character."

Helgeland reflects on the efforts that Crowe made to achieve realism for his character. "Russell took the same attitude he brought to *L.A. Confidential* to *Robin Hood*; he wanted to be as true to the period as he possibly could. For example, he wanted his bow to be as close to the bows that were actually used back then. And he wanted to know how to use it."

Like her fellow star, Blanchett was inspired to get back in the saddle. A seasoned horsewoman after her years shooting the *Elizabeth* sagas, she was up for the challenge. The performer recalls: "Ridley said, 'You can do this if you're game for it.' He set the challenge. If someone says 'Are you game for it?' you're not going to say, 'Well, no...I'm not.' I do like riding a horse, and they're film horses so they were pretty well trained. It was a thrill."

Still, the performer knew there would be days ahead she'd rethink her promise to the director. "There is a sequence where Marion gets all dressed up in chain mail and rides off into battle. We had these feral kids on wild ponies and some of the ponies were really difficult to get on. None of them had saddles; it was wild. My very first day on set was a night shoot where I was shooting a flaming arrow."

A veteran of action films including *Tristan + Isolde* and *Stardust*, Strong felt quite comfortable with sword and shield in hand. But he still needed to spend a good amount of time training to learn how to ride at speed while swinging a very heavy weapon. This gave him, and the rest of the cast and crew, much respect for what soldiers in the Middle Ages must have had to do to battle.

"You begin to realize how phenomenally difficult wearing the chain mail and the armor must have been," the actor offers. "These guys must have been barely able to move or have had some kind of superhuman strength. Or fights consisted of a few blows

until somebody went down and couldn't get up and then they got a sword through the visor and it was all over.”

Durand describes the boot camp that Scott set up so that the actors could get in peak condition and train with the dozens of expert stuntmen and stuntwomen: “We did a training camp in Australia, and it was basically just getting really fit. We were all on a specific diet and did cardio and lifting every day. Then, we worked with the bows and arrows; my big thing was becoming a master with the staff. I felt like a badass when I carried that thing.”

### Tunics and Mail:

### Dressing the Cast

Facing challenges every bit as demanding as those confronting production designer Max was another of Scott's frequent collaborators, Academy Award<sup>®</sup>-winning costume designer Janty Yates. “There's a shorthand between Ridley and I now that is great,” she says, “and with every film I do with him I learn more about his genius, his vision and his creativity.”

Yates' work underscores Scott's authentic take on the Robin Hood story, turning the conventional, rather lyrical image of the icon on its head, and instead emphasizing the hero as a man at war. Crowe is seen at first as a Bowman in Richard's army, wearing leather trousers and a lamellar breastplate adorning his chest. This piece is understood to be a family heirloom, which bears the symbols of the Forest Charter.

“When he takes the guise of Loxley,” explains Yates, “he's resplendent in Loxley's chain mail, crest, tabard and cloak. When he gets to Nottingham, we actually had a free reign because he could have raided Loxley's cupboards and he could have put on anything. But Russell wears blue very well, and we've got a great, skirted tunic that he wears in grey and blue suede. We thought that in those days people didn't really change their clothes very much, so that became his civilian wear for most of the time.”

The costumes proved to be both functional, as well as authentic, as Mark Strong recalls: “Every detail has been meticulously observed, and the authenticity helps. The chain mail actually protected you, should somebody accidentally get one of the moves

wrong and clout you with a sword. The weight of it ensured you understood quite how strong the men were, and so helped you carry yourself as a knight would have at the time.”

From the long scarves and flowing outfits created for Lady Marion by Yates, Blanchett was quite impressed with her designer. “It’s the second time I’ve had the pleasure of working with Janty. Her detail and restraint are exquisite. She is simultaneously able to be faithful to an era whilst making you feel you are seeing the clothes and silhouettes for the first time.”

The astounding attention to detail in the costumes is equally as important as the set dressing, and its importance should not be underestimated. Remarks Yates: “The painterly textured quality Ridley demands gives the film an added dimension, and the costumes contribute greatly to creating that texture.”

The designer began the process of designing *Robin Hood*’s costumes in Italy, where she bought “a million miles of fabric”—from leathers to linens and silk. She says: “Ridley has always loved silks that can actually bounce the light, or that reflect the light. We use those enormously in our costumes, more for the royals, obviously. But he also is passionate about the earthiness of linens and likes Matka silk, which is the very rough, gnarly silk that looks like it’s been handwoven in the Afghan hills. He loves texture—anything that looks as if it is 100 years old and gives atmosphere. The one juxtaposes the other, which is perfect for this film because we do have that great separation between the peasantry and the royals.”

Returning with Scott to the same period as an earlier collaborative effort between the two, Yates explains: “This is the same time frame as *Kingdom of Heaven*, more or less, but we only did military costumes for that film, with the exception of a few royals. Here, we have a greater range of characters to cover, and we have worked more with the shapes from that period.”

Simple t-shaped garments, while true to the period, are not hugely flattering on screen, relates Yates. “We have cheated there quite a bit. While we have kept everything as close as possible to the period, we have tried to accentuate the shape of each actor, as well as the character that they’re portraying. They really should look like they’re wearing sacks, because that is what they wore then, but we’ve flattered them.”

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Universal Pictures and Imagine Entertainment present, in association with Relativity Media—a Brian Grazer Production—in association with Scott Free Productions—A Ridley Scott Film: Russell Crowe, Cate Blanchett in *Robin Hood*, starring William Hurt, Mark Strong, Mark Addy, Oscar Isaac, Danny Huston, Eileen Atkins and Max Von Sydow. The music is by Marc Streitenfeld, and the costume designer is Janty Yates. The action-adventure’s editor is Pietro Scalia, ACE, and the production designer is Arthur Max. The film’s director of photography is John Mathieson, BSC, and the executive producers are Charles J.D. Schlissel, Michael Costigan, Jim Whitaker, Ryan Kavanaugh. *Robin Hood* is produced by Brian Grazer, Ridley Scott, Russell Crowe. The action-adventure’s story is by Brian Helgeland and Ethan Reiff & Cyrus Voris, and its screenplay is by Brian Helgeland. The film is directed by Ridley Scott. © 2010 Universal Studios. [www.robinhoodthemovie.com](http://www.robinhoodthemovie.com)