

The Ballad of Hereward the Wake

A modern ballad about the Saxon Hero by Maureen James

'Twas a bright sunny day in the Autumn
in the year of ten-sixty two
when young Hereward said to his mother
"I'm going out for a minute or two".
"Be sure to be back before tea-time"
said his mother as he walked out the door.
"Don't worry ma", the young man replied
"I'll be back before half past four".

It was nearly seven years later
when home came the wandering son.
His tea was stone cold like the fire
and his ma and the family were gone.
A note on the wall said 'twere Normans -
the new king William the first
who had put fear into the Saxons
their days they were numbered and cursed.

Well, Hereward, he would have none of it..
he took out his anger and hate
on the monks in the Abbey of Peterborough,
and he stole all their money and plate.
He used it to set up a trust fund
to help in the good Saxon cause
and having no place to go home to
he stayed on to fight in the wars.

He set up his base camp at Ely
on an isle, in the middle of fens.
But King William found out about Hereward
and set out to make his amends.
He built Norman camp o'er at Cambridge
to be staffed by the students and such..
well they may have been fine academics
but you can't sail the fens on your luck.

King William was getting more angry
his patience was running quite thin.
So the Normans resorted to magic
to help the new monarch to win.
They built a tall wooden tower,
on an island not far from Ely,
and commissioned a witch to live in it
for the price of the minimum fee.

Her job was to shout out strong curses
and to work on some magic and spells
to put great fear into the Saxons
and to send all their souls down to hell.
The Saxons they soon solved the problem
they quickly got rid of the crone
by setting alight to the tower
until all that was left were her bones.

Well, this made King Will really angry
he determined to beat them this time.
He hired himself some good eel men
all young Fenland men in their prime.
Getting over to Ely was easy
and he found all the leaders and more.
He sorted a truce just to please them
and he swore not to settle old scores.

But as soon as they got off the island
King William went back on his word.
He locked up, or killed, all the Saxons,
except for the young Hereward.
For our hero had used all his cunning
and all of the tricks of the trade.
He'd hid on the floor of an eelboat
that was moored in a leafy wet glade.

As soon as the Normans had scattered,
he'd come out of hiding so fast
and embarked on a new kind of warfare
that made King Will look aghast.
The one day and offer of marriage,
to a pretty young heiress came through,
and with it came a promise of pardon
which Hereward accepted as true.

The King he did now keep his promise
but for his knights he just could not speak.
They had heard of the tale of Hereward
and his riches decided to seek.
They thought they would kill our brave Saxon
one day as he ate up his tea..
Well, he never did sup in his armour
and he just wasn't ready to flee.

The Normans they had the advantage
of six of their men against one.
Hereward showed them his courage
and stood up to fight them as one.
he fought them off ever so bravely
until his sword and his dagger were broke
and still he didn't surrender..
he just wasn't that kind of bloke.

Eventually our hero grew tired
and the Normans they pounced straight away.
They speared his sides with their lances
and Hereward started to sway.
he fell to the ground in slow motion
trapping one man to break up his fall
but sadly our hero expired
and they stole all his money and all.

But they left his with a big reputation
and the tales of Hereward the Wake,
for all who lived in the Fenland
it was enough for a legend to make

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