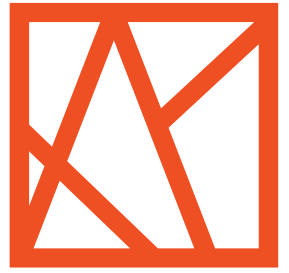


FOLKS AND ROBBERS



READ ABOUT THE QUIRKY CHARACTERS OF REBILD



THE ROBBERS FROM ROLD AND BETTEFANDEN

THE ROBBERS FROM ROLD

The renowned robbers from Rold have been dead and gone for many years, but their spirit is still alive and well. The famous role playing robbers subject tourists to rascal tricks all year round.

For hundreds of years Rold Skov was associated with atrocities and violent robberies and assaults. All the way back in the medieval times, robbers were playing havoc. Especially in the 1800s the robbers were a menace.

The famous robbers were far more brutal than the romantic tales would have us believe. In 1837, the police succeeded in identifying two robbery gangs that had been committing robberies throughout Himmerland. The trial that followed lasted seven years and did not end until 1844. 250 were convicted – the worst were given additional penalty in the form of public flogging with hazel sticks that had been brined in salt the night before. The most renowned robbers are Bettedefanden, Lorenz Meyer, and Petronillen.

BETTEFANDEN (1801-1870)

was actually named Johannes Jensen. He was a short, stooping man of just 145 cm. His distinct build made him easily recognizable, which is not exactly positive when you're a robber trying not to get caught.

The name Bettedefanden, which translates

to 'Little Devil', was given to him after a robbery that scared the wits out of an old lady. On a dark evening, Johannes Jensen had put on a cow's coat with horns and broken into the poor lady's house. Terror-stricken by the horned creature, the old lady was convinced that she had been paid a visit by the devil himself. For that reason she let him finish the robbery without putting up a resistance, and fortunately she was left unhurt.

Not all of Bettedefanden's victims were that lucky. When the network of robbers was unravelled, Bettedefanden was convicted of 47 criminal offences. He was pardoned in 1864.



The robbers would hide in the woods and attack innocent travellers

LORENTZ MEYER AND PETRONILLEN

LORENTZ MEYER (1800-1878)

was a trained cobbler, and he led a debauched night life which was quite expensive. He would get the money from robberies and break-ins, and he did not care who his victims were. In fact, his first robbery victim was his own master. It is said about Lorentz Meyer that he was extremely difficult to keep imprisoned. The myth says that he would always walk around with a piece of metal in his mouth that he used to cut the lock in two every time he was imprisoned. He was sentenced to lifelong workhouse slavery in Christianshavn in Copenhagen for 82 offences.

When Lorentz Meyer was flogged, he was the only one who did not make a sound. Only when the executioner took a short break before the final and twenty-seventh blow, he was heard shouting: "Twenty seven is my right!". And then he was pardoned.



Today's 'robbers' often ravage in groups.

PETRONILLEN

was actually named Ane Pernille Andersdatter Storm. She was the mistress of Lorentz Meyer, and she was not a pleasant acquaintance. She was also a robber – one of the few female ones – and she was not hesitant to pull out a knife to threaten her victims during the robberies. It is also known that she burned two small children on a stove to get her parents to reveal where they kept their valuables hidden.

She was convicted of 14 crimes and her sentence included public flogging and workhouse for life. Like Bettedefanden and Lorentz Meyer, Petronillen was also pardoned.



One of the female robbers as she is portrayed today.

LARS KJÆR

LARS KJÆR (1856-1946)

Lars Kjær lived in Rebild Bakker, in a whitewashed, thatched house, which is almost hidden between the heather hills. Lars Kjær was a poacher, but the kind that was accepted by the farmers in Rebild and the count at Lindenberg because he came from poor conditions and only hunted for 'household use'.

Lars was the youngest of nine kids, and he was given a plot of land at the foot of Rebild Bakker, when he moved away from home. On this modest lot he built the small house that is still there today.

In 1881, Lars married Maren whom he had three children with before she died eight years later from pelvic inflammatory disease. It was difficult for Lars to take care of the children while also managing his job, so he hired a maid named Marie. Marie and Lars got married in 1891, and they had two children.



Lars Kjær's house, tucked in at the foot of the hills.

Lars did not go poaching at night to make money but to keep the wolf from the door. As a supplement to the household Marie could tell fortune from coffee grounds and cards. She told about the bright times that lay ahead and only rarely about the dark times. Lars and Marie were very poor, but their door was always open to anyone in need of a helping hand. Once their own children were grown up they took in three foster kids to bring some life back into the house.

There are many great and definitely almost true stories about Lars. Here is a small selection:

Lars often worked as a hired servant at Bundgaarden, located just a few hundred meters from the spring Ravnkilde. Back then, it did not pay a lot, one Danish krone for a workday from 6 am to 6 pm. By comparison, a loaf of bread cost 1.8 kroner. Part of the pay was a small bucket of milk that he brought home to Marie every day. One day, when he was crossing Ravnkilde as always by balancing on the stepping stones, he tripped, and most of the milk from the bucket ended up in the spring. Lars did not turn a hair, so he refilled the bucket with the water that looked the most white. When he got home, Lars pretended like everything was normal and gave Marie the thinned milk. When she was about to bake bread she saw that the watery milk was useless for baking,

LARS KJÆR

and she yelled in anger about the people at Bundgaarden giving them such bad milk. Poor Lars had to confess and tell her that he was to blame for the thin milk.



Name plate on Lars Kjær's house.

Lars was a proud man from Himmerland. He normally did not lose his composure. But if it happened, he would calmly say in a thick accent: "The spring is burning!". It was the owner of the local tavern, Fri-muth Engelst, who once heard Lars utter these words. He later told: "I had never heard that expression before, but I loved it, and it was typical Lars and his whim. I overheard him use the same expression at other occasions, which meant that something was at stake, because it takes quite a bit for a spring to burn. The 'spring' he was referring to was Ravnkilde".

Lars hunted red deer "so much that they could take up two freight trains and part of a third one", Lars once said. He also told that he had not gone to bed at night

for the past 60 years. Everyone in town knew that Lars poached and fished. A conversation he had with the doctor proves this:

Doctor: "You have a good health, Lars. - But you haven't treated it well".

Lars: "What do you mean, doctor? Because I've been sitting outside waiting for animals?"

The doctor shook his head.

Lars: "Is it all the booze I've been drinking?"

The doctor declined.

Lars: "Then what is it, doctor?"

The doctor: "It's the standing in the creek to catch trout."

Lars: "Well yes, it did give quite a shiver when the water hit my arsehole".

When Lars was almost 90 years old he was convinced that he was getting a third set of teeth. Dentists would come all the way from Aarhus to see this special case. It turned out that it was the roots of the teeth that he had already lost that were showing through his gums. But the dentists from Aarhus didn't have the heart to tell him that it wasn't a third set of teeth. One could wonder why this happened to Lars. In his thick accent he said to a journalist: "God lets everything happen for a reason. I think I'm gonna grow very old!"

It was a big day. A horse and carriage picked up Lars and Marie and took them

LARS KJÆR

from their house via Hulvejen to Rebildhus. In front of the carriage a group of musicians were playing on horns and violins. Every married couple had chipped in with five kroner for a lovely spread in the form of coffee and cake for everyone to share. The coffee and cake cost three kroner, and the remaining two were given to Lars and Marie, which made them feel very proud. Cash weren't very common in their household.



Outside of Lars Kjær's house

On a cold February evening in 1946, Lars suddenly felt sick and went to bed. Once the doctor got there it was too late. Lars was buried on the 16 February at Gl. Skørping cemetery. Marie outlived him by two years and got to celebrate her 80th birthday. On that occasion she was interviewed by the local newspaper Aalborg Amtstidende, whom she told about her many years with Lars. She told about the time when Lars wanted to teach the

children bible history. She children were very interested in angels and asked about what the angels did. "Well", said Lars, "they are very, very busy, especially in the morning, because that's when they have to take down all the stars and put up the sun, and they have to move very quickly so they can get out and play their horns on time". And that's when I decided to take over bible history, Marie told the journalist. Marie died in 1948.

When Lars and Marie were still alive, the little house at the bed of Rebild Bakker was purchased by Buderupholm Statskovdistrikt (State Forest district). It was used as a holiday home for some time. In 1990, the managing director of the establishment Rold Storkro rented the little house from the State Forest with a view to transform it into the house it used to be when Lars and Marie lived there. Their grandchildren could tell him how the house looked down to the very last detail. On the 31 August 1990 the house opened as a museum. Today the little house is a regional museum that depicts how a family lived more than 100 years ago.

You can book a visit to Lars Kjær's house by contacting Rold StorKro on:
+45 98 37 51 00.

DANNIE DRUEHYLD

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Dannie Druehyld (1947–2021), born in the Year of the Fire Pig, was a true living witch. For three decades, she lived and worked from her house in the Rold Forest.

She once said that her first witch's dance took place around the fire at a women's camp on the island of Femø. – "Among the women, I found the path to the goddesses and the witch."

Dannie lived in close connection with nature, which she used for food, medicine, and magic. She was a very helpful, wise, and humorous witch who spoke about the local area, nature, myths, and magic. In her company, one was never bored.

Dannie Druehyld has her own website: www.danniedruehyld.dk. (only Danish).



Dannie Druehyld picking flowers in the forest. (Photo: Niels Fabæk)



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Rold Skov · Rebild Bakker

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