

Shroving and a similar New Year's Day Custom

Shroving

The custom of Shroving took place on Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day). Shrove Tuesday is the last day before the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday. People were expected to fast by giving up foods of animal origin until the Easter feast. Traditionally, foodstuffs like milk, butter and eggs were used up and eaten on Shrove Tuesday before the start of the fast.

Originally, cakes were distributed to poor children by the wealthier households. Photographs from the early 20th century show sweets being thrown to children.



“My husband’s mother was at Newchurch school when they had shroving. It would be about this date.”

“If I remember it was held on what we now call ‘pancake day’. I believe sweets were thrown out for the children to collect.”

“The picture would be not the traditional Shroven but at the time of the photo the ladies would just throw sweets for the children to pick up.”

“I remember in infant school in Newport we had “scrambles day” when our teacher would throw sweets and we’d all dash to pick them off the ground.”

“I thought flowers were taken to houses and a shrove time song sung for them.”



This is an extract from "Popular Rhymes And Nursery Tales: by James Orchard Halliwell, 1849. Describes Shroving on the Isle of Wight. Captain Henry Smith of Arreton Manor supplied the information.

"Until within about the last thirty years, it had been the custom in the Isle of Wight from time immemorial at all the farms and some other charitable houses to distribute cakes on Shrove-Tuesday, called Shrove-cakes, to the poor children of the parish or neighbourhood, who assembled early in the morning at the different villages, hamlets, and cottages, in parties of from two to thirty or more, for the purpose of what was denominated "Going Shroving," and the children bore the name of it. At every house they visited they had a nice Shrove-cake each given them. In those days the winters were much more inclement and of longer duration than at the present time, and it often happened that, in addition to a severe frost, the ground was covered several inches high with snow, yet however cold or intense the weather, it did not prevent these little ones from what they called in the provincial dialect, Gwine a Shrovun, and they jogged merrily along hand in hand from one house to another to obtain their cakes; but, before receiving them, it was expected and deemed necessary that they should all sing together a song suitable to the occasion; those who were considered the best singer sometimes had an extra cake bestowed on them; consequently, there was no want of noise (whatever there might have been of harmony) to endeavour to get another Shroving gift. There were many different versions of the song according to the parishes they lived in. The one generally sang by the children of the East Medina area was as follows: -

*A Shrovun, a Shrovun, I be cum a Shrovun,
A piece a bread, a piece a cheese, a bit a your fat beyacun,
Or a dish of doughnuts, Aal of your own mayacun!
A Shrovun, a Shrovun, I be cum a Shrovun,*

*Nice meeat in a pie, My mouth is verrey dry! I wish a wuz zoo well a-wet,
I'd zing the louder for a nut!* A Shrovun, A Shrovun, We be cum a Shrovun!*

*Composed of flour and lard, with plums in the middle, and made into round substances about the size of a cricket-ball. They were called nuts or dough-nuts and quite peculiar to the Isle of Wight

The song of the children of the West Medina was different:

*A Shrovun, a Shrovun, I be cum a Shrovun,
Linen stuffes good enuff, Vor we that cums a Shroven.
Vine veathers in a pie, My mouth is verrey dry.
I wish a wuz zoo well a-wet, Then I'd zing louder vor a nut!
Dame,* dame, a igg, a igg,† Or a piece a beyacun.
Dro awaay‡ the porridge pot, Or crock to bwile the becazun.
Vine veathers in a pie, My mouth is verrey dry.
I wish a wuz zoo well a-wet, Then I'd zing louder vor a nut!
A Shrovun, A Shrovun, We be cum a Shrovun!*

* The mistress of the house, if past the middle age, was called Dame, i.e. Madame.

† An egg an egg ‡ Throw away.

If the song was not given sufficiently loud, they were desired to sing it again. In that case it very rarely required a second repetition. When the Shrovers were more numerous than was anticipated, it not unfrequently happened that, before the time of the arrival of the latter parties, the Shrove-cakes had been expended; then dough-nuts, pancakes, bread and cheese, or bread and bacon, were given, or halfpence were substituted; but in whatever they were not sent from the door empty-handed. It is much to be regretted that this charitable custom should have become almost extinct; there being very few houses at the present time where they distribute Shrove-cakes."



This is an extract from the book *Stations of the Sun*, a history of the Ritual Year in Britain, by Ronald Hutton.

"The begging song in Newchurch was: -

*A-shroven', a-shroven', we be come a-shroven',
Nice meat in a pie, my mouth be very dry,
I wish'e was a wet, I'd sing a louder for a nut, *
A pancake or a truffle of cheese, Or a bit of your own making,
I'd rather have than none at all, A bit of your own baking.*

From Brighstone: -

*Shroving, shroving, I am come to shroving.
White bread and apple pie, My mouth is very dry;
I wish I was a-wet, As I could sing for a nut."*



Principal to the tradition was the Shroven Song, of which there were many different versions. In 1886, WH Long quoted the most popular in his *A Dictionary of Isle of Wight Dialect*:

*Shroven, Shroven, I be come a Shroven,
A piece of bread, a piece of cheese, A piece of your fat bacon,
Doughnuts and pancakes, All o' your own maaken.
Vine vowls in a pie, My mouth es very dry,
I wish I was zo well-a-wet, I'd zing the better vor a nut.
Shroven, Shroven, We be come a Shroven.*

In Newchurch, until the Great War, a different, and shorter, version was sung:

*Shroven, Shroven, Here we come a-Shroven,
A piece of bread, a piece of cheese, A piece of your fat bacon,
The roads are very dirty, Our boots are very thin.
We have a little pocket To puit a penny in.*

The best singer of the Shroven Song was normally rewarded with an extra treat.

Thank you for information or quotes: Rob Chiverton, Wendy Hayden, Marcelle Edwards-Mitchell, Pat Phillips, Brian Reeves, Olly Teal, John Woodford



New Year's Day

This is another extract from "Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales: by James Orchard Halliwell, 1849. Captain Henry Smith of Arreton Manor supplied the information.

"There was another very ancient custom somewhat similar to the Shroving, which has also nearly, if not completely, disappeared; probably it began to decay within the last half-century: this was the gift of cakes and ale to children on New Year's day, who, like the Shrovers, went from house to house singing for them; but, if we may judge from the song, those children were for the most part from the towns and larger villages, as the song begins "*A sale, a sale in our town;*" there is no doubt but it was written for the occasion some centuries since, when "a sale" was not a thing of such common occurrence as now. And when there was one, it was held in an open field in or near the town"

James Halliwell then comments: So writes my kind and valued correspondent, Captain Henry Smith, but town is, I think, merely a provincialism for *village*. It is so, at least, in

the North of England. As for the phrase *a seyal*, it seems to be a corruption of *wassail*, the original sense having been lost. The following was the song:

*A seyal, a seyal in our town, The cup es white and the eal es brown;
The cup is meyad from the ashen tree, And the eal es brew'd vrom the good barlie.*
Chorus.

*Cake and eal, cake and eal; A piece of cake and a cup of eal;
We zing merrily one and aal For a piece of cake and a cup of eal
Little maid, little maid, troll the pin,* Lift the latch and we'll all vall in; **
Ghee us a cake and zum eal that es brown And we don't keer a vig vor the seyal in the town.*
Chorus. *W'll zing merrily one and aal Vor a cake and a cup of eal;
God be there and God be here, We wish you aal a happy New Year.*

*That is , turn the pin inside the door in order to raise the latch. In the old method of latching doors, there was a pin inside which turned round to raise the latch. An old Isle of Wight song says, -

*Then John he arose, And to the door goes, And he trolled , and he trolled at the pin.
The lass she took the hint, And to the door went, And she let her true love in.*

** "Aal vall in," stand in rank to receive in turn the cake and ale.

The above was the original song, but within the last fifty or sixty years, as the custom began to fall off, the chorus or some other part was often omitted.