

Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day) in England

Pancakes are eaten and pancake races are held in villages and towns.

What is a pancake?

An English pancake is a thin, flat cake, made of batter and fried in a frying pan.

Caster sugar (*superfine* sugar) is sprinkled over the top and a dash of fresh lemon juice is added.

The pancake is then **rolled**.

Some people put **golden syrup** or **jam** on their pancakes.



Fresh lemon



A rolled pancake

Pancake Races

The object of the race is to get to the finishing line first whilst flipping a pancake in a frying pan a pre-decided number of times. The skill lies not so much in the running of the race but in flipping and catching the pancake, which must be intact when the finishing line is reached.

Tossing Pancakes

The most famous pancake race takes place at Olney. According to tradition, in 1445 a woman of Olney heard the shroving bell while she was making pancakes and ran to the church in her apron, still clutching her frying pan.

The Olney pancake race is now world famous. Competitors have to be local housewives and they must wear an apron and a hat or scarf.

Each contestant has a frying pan containing a hot, cooking pancake. She must toss it three times during the race that starts at the market square at 11.55 am. The first woman to complete the winding 375-metre course (the record is 63 seconds set in 1967) and arrive at the church, serve her pancake to the bell ringer, and be kissed by him, is the winner. She also receives a prayer book from the vicar.

Annual Pancake Grease

At the famous Westminster School in London, the annual Pancake Grease is held. A verger from Westminster Abbey leads a procession of eager boys into the playground where the school cook tosses a huge pancake over a five-metre high bar. The boys then race to grab a portion of the pancake and the one who ends up with the largest piece receives a cash bonus from the Dean.

Skipping

In Scarborough, on Shrove Tuesday, everyone assembles on the promenade to skip. Long ropes are stretched across the road and there may be ten or more people skipping on one rope.

Football

Shrove Tuesday sees the start in Ashbourne, Derbyshire of the world's oldest, largest, longest and maddest football game. The game is played over two days and involves thousands of players. The goals are three miles apart and there are only a few rules. The ball is a hand-painted, cork-filled ball.

Pancake Day in the past

The Pancake Bell

More than a hundred years ago, Shrove Tuesday used to be a half-day holiday. A church bell, called the 'Shriving Bell', would have been rung signalling the start of the holiday and to call people to church to confess their sins. The church bell was rung at eleven o'clock in the morning, as a reminder to housewives to prepare their pancake batter and so the bell became known as the 'Pancake Bell'.

The bell is still rung today in villages across England, although Shrove Tuesday is now not considered a half-holiday.

Cock Fighting

Shrove Tuesday used to be a great day for cock-fighting in England. Cockfighting was introduced to Britain by the Romans.

Superstition

In the Midlands, the first pancake made was given to the chickens, to ensure their fertility during the year.

It was believed that the first three pancakes cooked were sacred. They were each marked with a cross before being sprinkled with salt and then set aside to ward off evil.