

WHAT IS PANCAKE DAY?

Pancake Day or Shrove Tuesday (the Tuesday which falls 41 days before Easter) is the traditional feast day before the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday.

Lent - the 40 days leading up to Easter - was traditionally a time of fasting, and on Shrove Tuesday Christians went to confession and were "shriven" (absolved from their sins). It was the last opportunity to use eggs and fats before embarking on the Lenten fast and pancakes are the perfect way of using up these ingredients.

Some parts of Britain celebrate the day with pancake races. The oldest and most famous is held at Olney in Buckinghamshire. The race is run over 415 yards by women aged sixteen or older. They must flip their pancake in the frying pan at least three times during the race. The winner receives a kiss from the Pancake Bell Ringer – church bells were traditionally rung to remind parishioners to come to confession – and a prayer book from the vicar.



TRADITIONS

Pancakes are associated with the day preceding Lent because they were a way to use up rich foods such as eggs, milk, and sugar, before the fasting season of the 40 days of Lent. The liturgical [fasting](#) emphasized eating plainer food and refraining from food that would give pleasure: In many cultures, this means no meat, dairy, or eggs

FESTIVITIES

In England, as part of community celebration, many towns held traditional Shrove Tuesday "[mob football](#)" games, dating as far back as the 12th century. The practice mostly died out in the 19th century, after the passing of the [Highway Act 1835](#), which banned playing football on public highways. A number of towns have maintained this tradition.



Shrove Tuesday was once known as a "half-holiday" in England. It started at 11:00am with the ringing of a church bell. On Pancake Day, *pancake races* are held in villages and towns across the United Kingdom. The tradition is said to have originated when a housewife from [Olney](#) was so busy making pancakes that she forgot the time until she heard the [church bells](#) ringing for the service. She raced out of the house to church while still carrying her frying pan and pancake. The pancake race remains a relatively common festive tradition in the UK, and England in particular, even today. Participants with frying pans race through the streets tossing pancakes into the air, catching them in the pan whilst running.



THE PANCAKE RACE

The most famous pancake race, at [Olney](#) in [Buckinghamshire](#), has been held since 1445. The contestants, traditionally women, carry a [frying pan](#) and race to over a 415 yard course to the finishing line. The rules are strict: contestants have to toss their pancake at both the start and the finish, as well as wear an apron and a scarf. Traditionally, when men want to participate, they must dress up as a housewife (usually an apron and a bandanna). The race is followed by a church service.

The women of Olney recreate this race every Shrove Tuesday (known in some countries as [Mardi Gras](#) or [Fat Tuesday](#)) by running from the market place to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, a distance of about 380 metres. There is also a children's race, run by children from the local schools. The children have to run a distance of about 20 metres. This competition has been run every year since 1950.

