

ROYAL SHROVETIDE, ASHBOURNE

Shrove Tuesday ~ Ash Wednesday



Considered to be one of the oldest forms of football in the world, this exciting and dramatic game is played in Ashbourne every Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. Each year, the town's streets, fields and streams are filled with hundreds of players and spectators following the match.



Shrovetide Football differs from conventional football as it is played over two eight hour periods. It is similar to rugby, however the goals are set three miles apart and there are few rules. An early rule was 'no murder' and the ball cannot be carried in a motorised vehicle. The ball is hardly kicked but moves

through a giant 'hug'. There is no set pitch, the game is played throughout the town with shops and businesses boarding up their windows in preparation.

Two teams are chosen with hundreds of players involved, dividing the town and reigniting local rivalries. Your team depends on which side of Henmore Brook you were born; those to the South of the Brook are the 'Down'ards' and try to goal the ball at old Clifton Mill. Those born to the North are the 'Up'ards' and try to goal the ball at old Sturston Mill. Traditionally, the goals were scored by entering the wheel house and tapping the ball 3 times against the mill wheel. Since both mills are now demolished, purpose-built stone plinths were erected to represent the mill wheel.

The game starts on Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday at 2pm when the ball is 'turned up' from a stone plinth on Shaw Croft car park. It is thrown into the air and into the 'hug' by the 'turner up', a respected local person especially chosen for this honour.



Famous ‘turner-ups’ have included the now King Charles III and The Duke of Devonshire.

who as a result, often becomes a local celebrity.



The Shrovetide Anthem was written in 1891 and is sung each day at the pre-game lunch in the Green Man & Black’s Head Royal Hotel in Ashbourne.

*There’s a town still plays this glorious game
 Tho’ tis but a little spot.
 And year by year the contest’s fought
 From the field that’s called Shaw Croft.
 Then friend meets friend in friendly strife
 The leather for to gain,
 And they play the game right manfully,
 In snow, sunshine or rain.
 ‘Tis a glorious game, deny it who can*

Once play starts, a large number of players try to move the ball towards their goal. A player needs to hit the ball against their millstone goal three times in order to score whilst standing in the river. The match continues until 10pm. If a goal is scored before 5pm, a new ball is ‘turned up’ again and a new game begins. If the goal is after 5pm the game ends for the day.

Weighing about 4lbs, the ball is a specially prepared, hand sewn leather ball filled with cork chipping to help it float in the river. It’s then carefully handprinted to a design chosen by the local person who has been picked to ‘turn up’ the ball. If the ball is ‘goaled’, it becomes the proud possession of the scorer,



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