
Folklore, Traditions and Customs

The game of marbles was played in the village churchyard in the 19th century on Good Friday. This was often spoken of in Sussex as 'Marble Day'.

A Curious Wager

In 1797 a flax-dresser attempted to eat a square foot (about 42 pounds) of plum pudding in a fortnight as a wager. A number of bets were taken on the outcome. A week later the man was feeling a little sick, but eating about four pounds of pudding at his seventh meal. He varied the flavour with mustard and vinegar. A day later his jaws refused to work any longer and he was forced to give in.

The Sleeping Maid of Cuckfield

On 15th September 1807 a female servant of Mr Wood fell asleep in the attic bedroom of the house where she worked. The girl then slept continuously for eight days. When her employer called the village doctor, he could not account for the condition but reported that her body temperature had dropped. She awoke on 22 September, having suffered no ill effects. She remarked on hearing the bells chime for church, that her indisposition had caused her to lie beyond her ordinary hour, and her story became just another Cuckfield legend.

St Crispin's Day

Cuckfield

was one of the Sussex Villages which celebrated St Crispin's Day (25 October) with a bonfire. It was the anniversary of the Battle of Agincourt which had taken place in 1415. This day can truly be called 'Old Bonfire Night', for it was celebrated with bonfires and late night revelling in exactly the same manner as 'Guy Fawkes Day'. By the second half of the 19th century St Crispin festivities had dwindled, but Cuckfield, Hurstpierpoint, Warninglid and Slaugham were places which still kept the tradition. As late as 1900 'blazing brooms' and 'tar balls' were still in evidence. At Brighton, in the 1780s, the following ditty was sung:

If ever I Saint Crispin's day forget

may my feet be never free from wet,

But ev'ry dirty street and lane pass through

Without one bit of sole to either shoe.

Boys went round Cuckfield blacked-up, asking for pennies. St Crispin's Day was the Cobbler's feast day and it was the custom for shoemakers to give their employees a dinner in the evening.

Long Rope Day

On

Good Friday it was the custom for Brighton fishermen to skip in the fish market. The rope was swung by two men and everyone was expected to run in and skip. The religious origins are thought to be that the rope represented the one with which Judas hanged himself.

Bending-In Day

Bending in day, sometimes called Brencheester-and-beer day, was another custom of fishermen, this time from

the Shoreham area. This day marked the beginning of the mackerel season in the spring when a party was held on the beach. The fishermen and their wives had bread, cheese and beer and the children drank ginger pop. It is thought that "Bending in" is a corruption of Benediction and that its roots started when priests would go down to the beach to administer Holy Communion and a blessing before the fishermen set sail.