

# Shrovetide Football

by Margaret Chittenden



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- 1 A visitor who arrives in Ashbourne, England, on one very special Tuesday of the year might wonder if the town is preparing for battle.
- 2 Shutters are locked over house windows. CLOSED signs hang on the doors of most offices. Hammers ring as shopkeepers nail boards across their windows.
- 3 Strangest of all is the feeling in the air that something is about to happen.
- 4 This particular day is known as Shrove Tuesday. It is the last day before the beginning of Lent, the forty-day period of prayer that comes before Easter. In countries in many parts of the world people have special celebrations on this day. And the people of Ashbourne are getting ready for theirs.
- 5 Shortly before two in the afternoon, hundreds of people hurry to a small field in the heart of town. Most of them are wearing their oldest clothes. Laughing and cheering, they surround a tall man who is holding a large ball.
- 6 It is a most unusual ball. The outer cover is formed of pieces of leather, stitched together with waxed thread. The cover is coated with layers of red, white, and blue paint. The stuffing is fine cork dust, packed tightly for strength. The ball must be strong, for during the next nine or ten hours it will be kicked, punched, and pulled. It will be fallen upon again and again in the Shrove Tuesday football game.
- 7 The tall man is raised upon the shoulders of several other players. He makes a short speech.
- 8 "The game must be played fair," he says.
- 9 "Yes!" roars the crowd.
- 10 "We must keep the ball out of the streets."
- 11 Again the crowd shouts agreement, but this time with much laughter. The game will go into the streets. It always does. That's why people board up their windows.
- 12 Then everyone sings "God Save the Queen." Next the tall man throws the ball into the crowd, and the game is on.
- 13 Watching the hundreds of players who are wrestling for the ball, the visitor might not realize that the crowd is divided into two teams. There are the Up'ards and the Down'ards. Up'ards are those born on the north side of Henmore Brook, which runs through the town. Down'ards are those born on the south side. All who want to join in may do so—men, women, boys, and girls. There are no rules, except that the ball must end up at the mill wheel at Sturston for the Up'ards to win. And it must end up at Clifton for the Down'ards to win. These goals are about five kilometers (three miles) apart.
- 14 At first the ball is kicked, pushed, and thrown from one team to the other. It seems as though it will never go beyond the middle of the field. Then a young Up'ard girl hugs the ball close to her body. Her teammates surround her and carve a path through the crowd.
- 15 At the edge of the field a woman punches the ball out of the girl's hands. A Down'ard boy kicks it clear, and his team presses forward. Kicking and pushing, they try to force the play onto the road to Clifton.
- 16 With loud shouts the Up'ards try to push the ball back the other way. And sooner or later the ball ends up in Henmore Brook.
- 17 Without a pause the players jump into the freezing water. Before long everyone is soaked and muddy. But the play goes on—through the streets, into the water, back to the streets. Hour after hour, through twilight into dark, the crowd plays until at last one of the goals is reached.
- 18 A tired Up'ards player touches the mill wheel with the ball, and the game is over.
- 19 The winner smiles triumphantly. The ball now belongs to the person who reached the goal. The once bright paint is faded. The ball and its victorious owner are covered with mud. But later the ball will be repainted with its bright designs and the winner's name.
- 20 Shrovetide football is played in other towns in Britain, but Ashbourne's game is the best known of all. And should you visit there on one very special Tuesday of the year—be prepared to do battle.

## How Well Did You Read?

Write the letter of the best answer for each question.

- 1 The story is about a contest or struggle that occurs once a year. What is the reason for the struggle?
  - a It is a way of celebrating the last day before Lent.
  - b It decides who will govern Ashbourne the following year.
  - c It is a means of finding out who is more physically fit—the adults or the children.
- 2 Why might a visitor think that the town is getting ready for a battle?
  - a The people look worried and upset.
  - b Trenches are being dug.
  - c Windows are being shuttered and boarded up.
- 3 What two groups oppose each other?
  - a The people of Ashbourne and the people of Banbury
  - b The adults of Ashbourne and the children of Ashbourne
  - c Ashbourne's north side and Ashbourne's south side
- 4 Who may take part in the struggle?
  - a Only the adults
  - b Only the men
  - c Anyone who wants to join in
- 5 Why did the Up'ards win the contest described here?
  - a They carried the ball to the village square.
  - b They carried the ball to the mill wheel.
  - c They scored 12 points more than the Down'ards.
- 6 Why are the windows boarded up?
  - a To keep thieves out of the houses and shops
  - b To keep the windows from being accidentally broken
  - c To show that all shops are closed until the end of Lent

- 7 What happens to the ball after the contest?
  - a It is put on display in the village hall.
  - b It is burnt in a bonfire by the winners.
  - c It is given to the person who carried it to the goal.

## Learn about Words

### Vocabulary

- A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 movable covers for windows (2)
  - 2 sewn (6)
  - 3 struggling (13)
  - 4 gather around; encircle (14)
  - 5 half-light of evening (17)
  - 6 in a joyous way (19)
  - 7 dimmed; made less bright (19)
- B** A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used. The word *watch* is an example.

A guard stood *watch*.  
My *watch* is fast.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** below is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a** or **b**. Write **a** or **b**.

- 8 **offices** (2)
  - a places of work
  - b positions, especially in the public service
- 9 **boards** (2)
  - a broad, thin pieces of wood
  - b groups of persons who manage something
- 10 **presses** (15)
  - a pushes with steady force
  - b makes smooth; flattens

## Word Study

- C** *servé* + **ant** = servant (one who serves)  
deliver + **ance** = deliverance (act or fact of delivering)  
wreck + **age** = wreckage (result of wrecking)

Many nouns end in *ant*, *ance*, and *age*. Often *ant* means "one who," *ance* means "act or fact of," and *age* means "result of." Read each word in **heavy type** and the incomplete definition of it. Write the word that completes the definition.

- 11 stoppage**: result of \_\_\_\_  
**12 appearance**: act of \_\_\_\_  
**13 observance**: act of \_\_\_\_  
**14 guidance**: act of \_\_\_\_  
**15 claimant**: one who makes a \_\_\_\_  
**16 performance**: act of \_\_\_\_  
**17 wreckage**: result of \_\_\_\_  
**18 attendant**: one who \_\_\_\_
- D** There is an incomplete word in each passage below. Choose the suffix *ance*, the suffix *age*, or the suffix *ant* to complete the word in a way that makes sense. Write *ance*, *age*, or *ant*.
- 19** Because of the flood, the water leak\_\_\_\_ was very damaging to the basement.  
**20** My class and I attended the concert. The attend\_\_\_\_ was quite large.  
**21** The person complaining about the noise could scarcely be heard. It was hard to hear the complain\_\_\_\_.  
**22** Jack Coggins was the only contest\_\_\_\_ left. He was the only person who was left in the contest.  
**23** They don't admit anyone into that room. The sign says no admitt\_\_\_\_.

- 24** Cold will delay the spoil\_\_\_\_ of meat.  
**25** The university accepted many students this year. Its student accept\_\_\_\_ was higher than last year.  
**26** The pack\_\_\_\_ Nick received was damaged. It wasn't packed correctly.

**E** I've been feeling **weak** this **week**.

Words that have the same sound but different spellings and meanings are sometimes called homonyms. For example: *weak* and *week*. The words in the list below are homonyms of the words in **heavy type** in the sentences. Find the homonym of each word in **heavy type**. Write the homonym.

pear	fare	hair	flue
flower	eye	mail	wrap

- 27** It is part of a chimney. It sounds like **flew**.  
**28** It is a yellow green fruit. It sounds like **pare**.  
**29** It is what we see with. It sounds like **I**.  
**30** It is what we comb. It sounds like **hare**.  
**31** It is what we pay to ride a train. It sounds like **fair**.  
**32** It is letters and packages. It sounds like **male**.  
**33** It is the blossom of a plant. It sounds like **flour**.

## Use Your Imagination

The story describes one unusual contest, but there are many others as well. Perhaps you have taken part in a tug-of-war or a three-legged race. Write a brief story describing a contest in which you took part. Did you win or lose? What were your feelings during the contest? When you've finished your story, read it to your teacher or a classmate.