

# Shrove Tuesday

The celebration of Shrove Tuesday in advance of Lent is a custom long practiced not just here in Ireland but in many Catholic countries around the world. In fact from the early middle ages to the last century not only was meat given up during Lent but the consumption of eggs and milk products such as butter, milk and buttermilk were also forbidden. So it was only natural that households found a way to use up surplus produce such as milk and eggs in advance of Lent. As Lenten observations were more strictly adhered to in the past it must have made for a very restrictive and difficult diet.

Like many other days in the traditional Irish calendar Shrove Tuesday was also used as an opportunity to divine the future, especially marriage divination. For us this continuous focus on marriage or the lack thereof can seem unusual but it must be remembered that in Ireland during the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was seen as a neglect of one's social duty not to marry. Unmarried men and especially women were considered lesser individuals and often the target of fun and ridicule.

The tossing of pancakes on Shrove Tuesday was an opportunity to determine one's future marriage prospects. Family and neighbours would gather round the fire to take part in tossing the pancakes. The eldest unmarried daughter of the host was given the first turn before the other girls and boys also took turns. Her luck in romance – good or bad – during the year hinged on her success or lack of in tossing the pancakes. If she successfully tossed it she would have her pick of the boys. However if she was unlucky enough to toss it unsuccessfully or even let it fall into the fire she would be doomed with no chance of marrying for at least a year.

Shrove Tuesday was also a popular day for weddings during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, probably due to the fact that no marriages were allowed to take place during Lent. Match makers would have been busy arranging matches from The Feast of the Epiphany/Little Christmas onwards ensuring many weddings were planned.

Food and Culinary historian Regina Sexton has recorded a short video for Tipperary Museum of Hidden History demonstrating the art of making traditional Buttermilk pancakes and also discussing the traditions of Shrove Tuesday. Watch the video, including ingredients and method on [https://youtu.be/uaE\\_A3xHNio](https://youtu.be/uaE_A3xHNio)