

# ALMANAC



WEST STREET SIBLEBY

## BYGONE SIBLEBY

Series

FEBRUARY

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY, 1972

With notes of interesting events in the past.

TUESDAY, 1st:

St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, Martyr, 107 A.D.  
St. Bridget, Patroness of Ireland  
David Garrick, famous actor, buried in Westminster Abbey in 1779  
France declared war against England and Holland, 1793  
Buster Keaton, cinema comedian, died 1966  
Pheasant and Partridge shooting ends

WEDNESDAY, 2nd:

Candlemas, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple  
Queen Victoria's funeral at Windsor, 1901

THURSDAY, 3rd:

St. Blase, Bishop of Sebaste, Martyr, 316 A.D.  
Fritz Kreisler, Austrian violinist, born in Vienna, 1875  
Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the U.S.A. died 1923, aged 67  
Editor of the Times fined £100 for a libel on the Prince of Wales 1790

FRIDAY, 4th:

Ceylon Day  
Rev. George Herbert, poet and hymn writer died in 1633, aged 43  
He wrote, "Let all the world, in every corner sing" and  
"King of Glory, King of Peace"

SATURDAY, 5th:

St. Agatha's Day  
The Prince of Wales sworn in before the Privy Council as Regent, 1811  
Lord Darnley, husband of Mary Queen of Scots, and father of King  
James, the First of England, murdered in Edinburgh, 1569

SUNDAY, 6th:

Sexagesima Sunday  
Accession of Queen Elizabeth the Second, 1952

MONDAY, 7th:

St. Richard, King of the West Saxons, died, 745 A.D.  
Mary Queen of Scots beheaded in Fotheringhay Castle, 1587, aged 45  
Charles Dickens born, 1812

TUESDAY, 8th:

John Ruskin, author, born 1819  
Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, Church architect, died 1960, aged 80  
Anniversary of the Sibley Mothers' Union

WEDNESDAY, 9th:

St. Nicephorus, Martyr, 260 A.D.  
Rene Descartes, father of modern philosophy, born at La Heye, 1596  
Prince Christian of Denmark proclaimed King of Norway, 1814  
Ronald Colman, actor, born 1891

THURSDAY, 10th:

Queen Victoria married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 1840  
William Norman Birkett, K.C., died 1962  
Harold Macmillan, former Prime Minister, born 1897  
Edgar Wallace, novelist, died 1932  
Lady Jane Grey, executed at the Tower of London, 1554

FRIDAY, 11th:

The Vatican State recognised by the Lateran Treaty, 1929  
The Congress of the U.S.A. resolved to abolish the slave trade 1817  
Thomas Edison, American inventor, born at Milan, Ohio, 1847

SATURDAY, 12th:

Benvenuto Cellini, Florentine Sculptor and goldsmith, died 1571  
Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the U.S.A., born in Kentucky, 1809  
Lily Langtry, actress, "the Jersey Lily", died in 1929, aged 77

SUNDAY, 13th:

Quinquagesima Sunday  
The massacre of the Macdonalds by Campbell at Glencoe, 1692  
The English Revolution, 1688. The transference of power from  
King James the Second to William, Prince of Orange.

MONDAY, 14th:

St. Valentine's Day

TUESDAY, 15th:

SHROVE TUESDAY  
New Moon  
Kimberley in South Africa besieged by the Boers in 1899, was  
relieved in 1900, by Sir John French, after a siege of 124 days

WEDNESDAY 16th:

ASH WEDNESDAY

King George the Third buried at Windsor, 1820, aged 82. King 60 years  
Prisoners of War aboard the Altmark, rescued off Norway, 1940  
William Burke, murderer and body stealer (with Wm. Hare) executed 1829

THURSDAY, 17:

Albert, King of the Belgians, killed when mountaineering in the Meuse  
Valley, 1934  
The last British troops were evacuated from Crimea, 1857

FRIDAY, 18th:

St. Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, Martyr, 116 A.D. An ancient  
tradition states that he was the son of Cleophas, the brother  
of Joseph, the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Martin Luther, the German Protestant Reformer, "the monk who  
shook the world", died at Eisleben in 1546, aged 63

SATURDAY, 19th:

H.R.H. Prince Andrew born, 1960  
Nicholas Copernicus, founder of modern astronomy, proved the  
theory of the Solar System, born at Thorn, in Poland, 1473

SUNDAY, 20th:

First Sunday in Lent  
Benedict Spinoza, one of the greatest philosophers of all time,  
died at The Hague, in 1677, aged 44  
Countess Mountbatten died, 1960  
Joseph Hume, Scottish politician and reformer, died in 1855, aged 78

MONDAY, 21st:

Trinidad captured from the French, 1797  
Cardinal John Henry Newman, born 1801  
Identity Cards abolished, 1952

TUESDAY, 22nd:

George Washington, first President of the United States, born in 1732  
William Pitt the younger, English statesman, buried 1806, aged 47

WEDNESDAY, 23rd:

Sir Edward Elgar, Master of the King's Music, died 1934, aged 77

THURSDAY, 24th:

St. Matthias, Apostle, replaced Judas Iscariot as one of the Twelve  
St. Ethelbert, the first Christian King among the English, reigned  
56 years, and died in 616 A.D.  
Drury Lane Theatre destroyed by fire, 1808

FRIDAY, 25th:

Sir Christopher Wren, architect of St. Paul's, died 1723, aged 90  
Sir John Tenniel, political cartoonist, died 1914, aged 94

SATURDAY, 26th:

William Ralph Inge, Dean of St. Paul's, 1911-34, died 1954, aged 94  
Sir Harry MacLennan Lauder, Scottish entertainer, died 1950, aged 80  
France declared a Republic in 1848  
Thomas Moore, Irish poet, died 1852, aged 73  
Hare hunting ends

SUNDAY, 27th:

Second Sunday in Lent  
John Evelyn, famous for his Diary, died 1706, aged 86  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, poet, born in Portland, Main, 1807  
Reichstag fire, 1933. An early incident in the Nazi revolution  
which led to the rise of Adolf Hitler as Fuhrer

MONDAY, 28th:

Ladysmith, in South Africa, named after the wife of Sir H. Smith,  
Governor of the Cape in 1851, was beseiged by the Boers for  
121 days, and relieved 28th February, 1900

TUESDAY, 29th:

A Leap Year  
A Full Moon at 3.12 a.m.  
James Ogilvie, husband of Princess Alexander, born 1934

A S T R O L O G Y :

There are two of the Zodiac signs in February -  
AQUARIUS, the water-carrier, 20th January - 19th February  
PISCES, the fishes 20th February - 20th March

Gems, Birthstones and Colours associated with these signs:

AQUARIUS - Lapis Lazuli, Amethyst and green  
PISCES - Chrysolite, Bloodstone and Silver or grey

FEBRUARY THE SECOND

This was always an important day in the calendar of the Church, and would be particularly recognised at Sileby, where the Parish Church was dedicated to the Nativity, or birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The second of February was known by three titles :

- (1) The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- (2) The Presentation of Christ in the Temple
- (3) Candlemas

(1) The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The festival took place 40 days after Christmas, as a memorial of the visit of Mary the Mother of Jesus, with Joseph, to the Temple in Jerusalem, where she offered, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" in the rite of purification after childbirth. (Leviticus, chapter 12, verses 2 and 4; St. Luke, chapter 2, verse 22)

(2) The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

After the Purification, the infant Jesus was presented to the Lord. As the first born son in every family was regarded as belonging to God, the child was redeemed, or bought back by the parents by a payment of five shekels of silver. The aged Simeon recognised the Holy Child as the Messiah, and holding Him in his arms, spoke the words of the Nunc Dimittis, with the prophesy that he should be a "Light to the Gentiles"

(3) The Feast of Candlemas

In ancient documents relating to Sileby, the second day of February is called Candlemas. The name came from the practice of the congregation in medieval times attending the Parish Church with candles, which were blessed at the altar and lit by the priest. The people, walking in pairs carried their candles round the church in solemn procession at the Mass.

This custom of carrying candles continued even after the Reformation. A proclamation of King Henry the Eighth, in 1539, ordered :-

"On Candlemas Day, it shall be declared that the bearing of candles is done in memory of Christ the spiritual light, who Simeon did prophesy, as it is read in churches that day."

After the service, the congregation gave their candles to the church, to reduce the wax bill.

It seems that small candles or tapers were distributed to the villagers by the Vicar on Candlemas Day, which were popularly believed to drive away storms and evil spirits.

Candlemas became associated with secular affairs, and is the first of the Quarter Days in the year. In former times, farmers went to their landlords to pay their rent at Candlemas, and were invited to join him at a specially prepared fine dinner. Some of the farm workers changed their employers on this day.

On Candlemas Day, the Christmas decorations of holly, rosemary, bay and mistletoe were ~~removed from the houses~~. In their place, sprigs of the box tree were used until Easter.

Candlemas was the time to look for signs in the weather. It was believed that a stormy 2nd February meant a good summer. Fine weather at Candlemas was a sign of a further 40 days of winter. Snow on that day would remain for some time. There was an old saying in Sileby:-

"Snow at Candlemas  
Stops to handle us."

The snowdrop was called the "Candlemas Bell". It was generally believed that it made its first appearance on that day each year. Bunches were picked and taken into houses as a sign of purity, as this was the feast of the Purification.

#### FEBRUARY THE THIRD

St. Blaise, Patron Saint of Woolcombers (and any with throat complaints)

In the Middle Ages, when the wool trade was of importance to Sileby, the woolcombers and their families, together with shepherds, weavers and others concerned with wool, went to church on the 3rd February to remember Saint Blaise, the Patron Saint of Woolcombers.

St. Blaise was Bishop of Sebaste, in Armenia. During the fierce persecution of the Christians by the Emperor Diocletian, the bishop was arrested and tortured by iron combs used in the carding of wool. When he still refused to deny his faith, he was beheaded. His death took place in the year 316 A.D.

A legend tells how St. Blaise became a doctor before he was elected bishop, and used his medical skill to heal both sick people and wild animals. On the day of his arrest, as the soldiers were leading him away, a frantic mother laid a child at his feet who was choking to death from a fish bone stuck in his throat. The bishop laid his hand on the boy and the bone fell from his mouth. In the ages that followed, those afflicted with throat troubles attended church, where a prayer was offered that through the intercession of St. Blaise, God would deliver those present from all ills of the throat, and every other evil.

Until two centuries ago, it was the custom to gather wood in January to light bonfires on St. Blaise's night. Perhaps the name Blaise suggested blaze, and so a bonfire. Every village tried to have a bigger bonfire than their neighbour.

## FEBRUARY THE SIXTH

Records show that in olden days, most of the Sileby farmers had brew-houses attached to their homes, where they brewed their own beer. There was a custom handed down from ages past, to make the sign of the Cross over the malt on the 6th February, to ensure good brewing that year.

## FEBRUARY THE FOURTEEN

### ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

Saint Valentine was a priest in Rome during the reign of the Emperor Claudius the Second. After great and faithful service to those who were being persecuted for their Christian faith, St. Valentine was beheaded on the 14th February, 270 A.D.

St. Valentine had nothing to do with the later customs associated with his name. However, in ancient Rome, on the 15th day of this month, the festival of Februarta Juno, maidens placed their names in an urn in the public square. Young men then ran forward to the urn to take out the name of the girl who would be his sweetheart during the festival. The Christian world adopted the celebration, but identified it with St. Valentine.

The sending of love tokens on St. Valentine's Day has been practised for centuries. At first, they were simply sheets of paper with a verse written on them. In 1669, a book was published called "The Young Man's Valentine Writer," to help the lover put pen to paper. The coming of the Penny Post in 1840 helped to make Valentine messages more popular. By 1900, the idea had been so neglected, that it was simply a memory "of the old days." The sale of commercial Valentine cards to-day is a big business, but the message of love is still the same as it ever was.

It used to be believed that the birds chose their mates on the 14th February.

In years gone by, St. Valentine's Day was very popular with the children. Groups would make their way round the village to visit houses for gifts, where they recited :-

" Good morrow, Valentine,  
A piece of bread and cheese  
And a bottle of wine.  
If you've got a penny in your pocket,  
Slip it in mine.  
We used to come at eight o'clock  
Now we come at nine."

A shorter version was also used in Sileby :-

" Good morning, morning Valentine,  
All your pence and half-pence  
Shake your pockets into mine.  
Hip, Hip, Horray."



The children carried a bag for gifts. They were rewarded with either a half penny, or a few Valentine Buns.

On St. Valentine's Day, girls looked through the keyhole at dawn, and if they saw a cock and hen together, it was said to be the sign that they would be married within the year.

The pansy was known as "St. Valentine's Flower." In the village it was known by its other name, "Kiss me Quick".

#### FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-NINTH

On the last day of February in a Leap Year, anyone going on a journey was presented with Forget-me-not seeds.

#### SHROVE TUESDAY

The day before Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, was called Shrove Tuesday from the custom of people attending church to confess their sins, and being shriven before the Lenten fast. The word Shrove was derived from the Anglo-Saxon, Scrifan = shriven, meaning "absolved".

After the morning service, the people returned to their homes to prepare pancakes. The object was to use up the fat, eggs and other ingredients which were not to be eaten during the long fast of Lent.

In Sibley, the signal for housewives to begin pouring the batter was the Pancake Bell, which was rung at noon. This custom is still being maintained at Sibley Parish Church. With traditional enthusiasm, the pancakes were shaken in the pan, and tossed high in the air before being eaten with great satisfaction by the family and friends.

Someone once wrote :-

"In every house are shouts and cries, and mirth and revel rout,  
With wooden tables spread, and all beset with guests about."

On the morning of Shrove Tuesday, it was the custom for poor and elderly women in the village to call at houses, where they were given eggs and milk.

Shrove Tuesday was always a half-holiday for the school children. They arrived at school early that morning, and greeted the Schoolmaster with the chant:-

"Pardon, master, pardon,  
Pardon in a pin,  
If you don't give us a holiday,  
We won't let you in."

This was usually followed by the rhyme:-

"Pancake Tuesday is a very happy day,  
If you don't give us a holiday,  
We'll all run away."

## Shrove Tuesday Games

After school ended at mid-day, the children ran home to feast on pancakes, and to beg for coppers to buy the traditional Shrove Tuesday toys. The boys bought a Whip and Top; the girls, a Shuttlecock and Battledore. They were sold at newsagents and general stores for three half-pence a pair.

The Whip was a wooden rod about a foot long, stained bright red or green. The lash, similar to a leather boot-lace, was threaded through a hole at the top of the stick, and secured by a knot.

Tops were of various kinds, and were made of wood, with a metal tip. They were stained red, yellow, green or purple, and known according to their shape as Carrots, Dummies, etc. One man remembers, "gret big uns, wi gret spikes at the bottom," which were known as Turnips. Boys who could not afford the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for a new top, decorated the upper surface of an old one with coloured chalks, which produced a pattern as it rotated.

The top was spun either with the fingers, or by winding the lash round the wood, then flinging it towards the ground. As the lash unwound, it spun, then was whipped to keep it rotating.

The most popular top used by older boys, was the Flyer, known among Sileby lads as a "Winder-breker." It had an uncanny attraction towards the glass in neighbour's windows. It was of mushroom shape, and was painted a creamy-yellow, with red and blue stripes. This top was never spun in the ordinary manner, but wedged between cobble-stones, and whipped into motion from the standing position. It would fly through the air a number of yards, and bounce several times before it came to rest still spinning rapidly, ready for the next lash of the whip. One lad would call to another "let's ay a game o'top," and a race would take place from one lamp-post to another. The village "winder-menders" found much business after Shrove Tuesday.

Girls played with a Shuttlecock, which was a piece of cork, in which a number of white feathers had been inserted, and a Battledore, a small racket made from cheap wood, with a coloured handle. When the Shuttlecock was hit up into the air, it floated down gently and was hit up again by the Battledore. The object of the game was to prevent the Shuttlecock reaching the ground. Girls had a rhyme to sing as they played the game:-

"Great A, little A,  
This is Pancake day."

The game of Shuttlecock and Battledore was popular for centuries. It was described as a pastime in a book published in 1609.

Young men in the village played "Tip-Cat" on Shrove Tuesday. In Sileby, it was known as "Tit-Tat". A piece of round wood, 4 to 6 inches long and pointed at both ends, was thrown by the opponent into a circle scratched on the ground, 8 or 10 inches in diameter. When one of the pointed ends of the peg was tapped with a stick by the player, it leaped into the air, and was hit with force to drive it as far as possible.

If the peg was thrown into the circle, the player was entitled to one hit, on the line of the circle two hits, and if the peg fell outside the circle, he had three hits. The distance covered by the peg was paced out by the opponent, or, as they said in Sileby, "the number of stryemes it went."

In bygone days, a favoured game on Shrove Tuesday was a rough and tumble football, played in the fields, with numerous men and boys making up each side, and the goals about a mile apart.

In the early 1800's, and long before, one of the Shrove Tuesday customs was the cruel practice of throwing sticks at cockerels. Men came to the village to set up cock-shies. The poor bird had a length of cord tied to one leg, which was attached to a stake in the ground, and villagers stood at a distance of 22 yards, and threw three sticks for 2d. If the cock was knocked over, they kept it. These cockerels were trained to avoid the sticks, so as to win more money for their owners. A foreign visitor wrote in disapproval :-

"The English eat a certain cake on Shrove Tuesday, upon which they run mad, and kill their poor cocks."

As Ash Wednesday dawned, the village was still. The Shrove-tide festivities were over, and the solemn fast of Lent began.

#### A S H     W E D N E S D A Y

This was the first day in the season of Lent. The old Latin name was Dies Cinerum, "the Day of Ashes". In the Middle Ages, it was the custom to use the ashes of palms which had been in church the previous Palm Sunday, to make the sign of the cross on the heads of those who attended the Ash Wednesday service. As the priest came to each person, he said, "Remember O man, that thou art dust, and unto dust shalt thou return."

In olden days, the villagers actually went into mourning during the 40 days of Lent. No meat of any kind was eaten, and fish was the main item of food. There was a high demand for fresh water fish, and most people had to manage with salted or smoked fish, brought from the Lincolnshire fishing towns.

Years ago, there was a custom of carrying a black budded ash twig on the morning of Ash Wednesday. The penalty of being caught without an ash twig was to have the toes trodden on.



SOME OLD RECORDS OF FEBRUARY WEATHER

- 759 A.D. The worst frost ever recorded, lasted 5 months from 1st October until 26th February, 149 days
- 1434 Frost from 24th November until 10th February, 78 days
- 1684 Frost from 1st December until 5th February, 36 days
- 1715 Frost from 30th November until 9th February, 73 days  
Booths were erected on the Thames and two oxen roasted
- 1784 In Leicester, A Masquerade was held on the river Soar, near the Bath Gardens during a long hard frost.
- 1789 Deep snow covered England on the 17th February
- 1806 16th February, great snowstorms blocked all roads to the north
- 1814 22nd February a thaw after a long frost brought floods
- 1841 A severe frost during February. Temperature in Leicester 25 deg.
- 1910 Sibley Church Magazine: "Sunday, 20th February, a gale of terrible force did considerable damage throughout the country. Part of one of the chancel windows was blown in, and many heavy slates torn off the Church Schools."

THE AURORA BOREALIS

- 1780 29th February. "An extraordinary phenomenon appeared in the sky; the light resembled a great fire, and the elements seemed to flame, and flashed of sparkling fire seemed to shoot from the horizon."

This unusual display of the Northern Lights was seen all over Europe.

EARTHQUAKE

- 1756 Wednesday, 18th February.

A series of earthquakes shook Leicestershire during the day