

# What is Plough Sunday?

The Sunday after Epiphany – the first Sunday after January 6<sup>th</sup>

## Why is it important?

Much of Modern Plough Sunday activity was a Victorian invention

In Medieval times the communal plough was kept in the church.  
(This was still the case in N & S Collingham in 1638)

Traditionally the last day before the ploughmen returned to work after Christmas the plough would be awakened and prayers would be said for a good agricultural year.

Recognition may be given that the plough is the foundation, the soil must be prepared, the seed sown, the grain ripen and the bread baked to ensure our prosperity.

Seed and soil from the fields were sometimes brought in for blessing.

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In later years this was probably often the day that the plough was retrieved from the local blacksmith after being repaired ready for the new season

After the blessing the decorated plough would be dragged through the village to the local inn.

Perhaps on its route it called at the houses of the richer local people, especially the landowners with demands for a contribution of money, food or drink.

Food and ale would be consumed. With much with dancing and merriment.

Thus, the ploughmen would be fortified and ready to start the new agricultural year.

Some churchwardens accounts show that money raised on Plough Sunday went to the church for the maintenance of a 'Plough Light'.

And, in nearby Rolleston in 1681, it was agreed that the church bellringers should have an allowance of Ale on Plough Monday.

C15<sup>th</sup> book on the Ten Commandments – a discussion between a Dives (wealthy layman) and spiritually poor Pauper – **Dives and Porter** included the lines

‘holde your plough, repe your coin’

*and of*

'ledinge of the Ploughe aboute the Fire as for gode begynnyng of the yere, that they shulde fare the better all the yere followyng'



The Victorians added to this tradition which was prevalent in our part of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire with the creation of Plough Plays. Of which there are many variants, most of which were degenerate and ribald. Including *'Fools Wooing'* usually coarsely of the farmer's/householder's wife. And demands for food Ale and money – often backed up by the threat of ploughing up the garden if they were turned away 'penniless'

**Good Master and good Mistress,  
As you sit by the Fire,  
Remember us poor Ploughlads,  
That runs through Mud and Mire.  
The mire it is deep,  
And we travel far and near.  
We will thank you for a Christmas Box  
And a mug of your strong Beer.**

**Here comes I who've never been before  
Seven merry actors are waiting at your door  
Some can dance and some can sing  
If you give consent they will all walk in**

**God bless the master of this house  
Likewise his mistress too  
And all the little children  
That round the table go.**

**Good health to the man who kills a pig and  
sends his neighbours a fry.**

**Washed down with a drop of best brewed  
ale and a thumping big pork pie.**

If all goes well and the visiting players have been well looked after they would end their visit with something like

**You see our song is ended,  
You see our Fool is gone;  
We're making it our business  
To follow him along;  
We thank you for your civility  
And what you gave us here;  
We wish you all good night  
And another happy year.**

**We are not London actors T  
hat act upon the stage;  
We're just the country plough lads  
That plough for little wage;  
We've done our best that best can do,  
And best can do no more;  
We wish you all good night  
And another happy year.**

If turned away some mischief may occur

Academics have found local Plough Plays from South Scarle, Swinderby, Bassingham, Muskham, Carlton-le-Moorland, Brant Broughton and there is apparently a fragment from a Collingham Plough Play (Collingham: Mr. A. Helm has obtained from Mr. N. M. Beaumont a fragment [Barley 1955]).

**In 1960 Mrs Hawkins of South Collingham wrote:**

**Plough Monday was observed but not much today**

God speed the plough,

Give us good seed and strong horses.

Give us the wisdom and the will to work,

That we may sow well and gather well.