



NEWSletter

Number 57

Springtime ...

The start of the farming year ...

In the Victorian era, the village of Appleby Magna, faced the challenges and rewards of March weather, which significantly influenced local farming practices. March marked the transition from winter to spring, a critical period for agricultural activities in this rural community. Farmers relied heavily on the changing weather to dictate their planting schedules and crop management.

Early March often brought unpredictable weather, with cold temperatures and occasional frost still lingering. These conditions delayed the sowing of crucial crops like wheat and barley, as the soil remained too cold for effective planting. Farmers in Appleby Magna had to remain vigilant, monitoring local weather patterns to decide when conditions would become favourable for sowing. Frost could devastate young seedlings, leading to substantial losses if farmers acted too hastily.

As the month progressed, warmer temperatures began to emerge, providing a welcome relief. This shift allowed farmers to prepare their fields for planting. The arrival of milder weather encouraged the growth of winter crops, such as barley and oats, which had been sown in the autumn. Farmers took advantage of this time to

till the soil, apply manure, and prepare for the planting of spring crops.

March weather could also bring heavy rains, creating challenges like waterlogged fields that hindered plowing and planting. However, the rains were essential for replenishing the soil moisture needed for successful crop growth. Farmers learned to adapt their practices, often employing crop rotation and diversifying their planting strategies to mitigate the risks posed by adverse weather.

In Appleby Magna, the farmers' resilience and adaptability in the face of March's unpredictable weather not only shaped their agricultural productivity but also influenced the local economy. Successful harvests during this crucial time were vital for sustaining the community, illustrating the profound connection between weather patterns and rural life in Victorian England.



Another Spirited School ...

H.E. Bulstrode looks into the haunted history of Ashbourne Grammar School

Not far from the impressive parish church of this Derbyshire town sits the old grammar school. It was built in 1585, and so it is little surprise to learn that it has over the years acquired

staring down from the windows of the building, although there is one particular phantom identified with the school which was reputedly seen by a number of living pupils when it still functioned as an educational establishment. This apparition was reported as taking the form of a boy, his features pinched with hunger, a consequence, apparently, of a onetime headmaster's tendency to hoard food for himself and withhold it from his pupils. It is thought that the boy died from starvation.

A third ghost – that of Lady Cockayne, wife of one of the school's founders – is also said to have frequented one of the boy's dormitories, although it would seem that no specific accounts of any of her manifestations have survived.

something of a haunting reputation. It ceased to be a school many years ago, but a number of its pupils, apparently, may still be seen, along with the figure of a mysterious and forlorn black boy who sits on the cobbles to the front of the building, very few of which now remain. The latter, it has been suggested, may have been a Georgian servant who fell from his lady's carriage and was run over in the street, but there are no records to substantiate such a sad event. As for its former pupils, their faces may occasionally be glimpsed

If you should be able to cast any further light on the spectral traditions associated with Ashbourne Grammar School, we'd be interested to hear what you have to say.



The village cobbler

Anne Sillins remembers the village shoemaker

As a little girl I found our small village to be a safe and wonderful place to play in and grow up in, we children were happy among our villagers. Every person in our village helped to raise and teach each child, yes even the naughty ones. I remember Appleby Magna being blessed with friendly people and quite a number of 'special characters'. All of these characters were interesting, all of them were admired for their various talents. I will write about three people who meant a great deal to me as a child. Each person who lived and worked within Appleby borders played a part to make the children's lives special. I do remember hearing about the odd 'to do' between a couple of people, occasionally voices would be raised, but a few days later these same people would share a walk along a village lane or footpath, sit together in one of our pubs and calm was restored again. Perhaps being at war had something to do with any adult squabbles being put aside quickly. Many men were away on military duty, some far overseas. Some women were raising their children alone with villagers often lending a hand with the little ones. Farm workers were needed for growing our food and they usually did their war service in the Village Home Guard. They walked the village lanes, with a sharp eye open for strangers and strange vehicles travelling the lanes. In the evenings they climbed the stone steps to the church steeple where they were on lookout duty.

I have fond memories of our village Cobbler. In the 1940's his work place was in a Church Street garden, it was a wooden shed. This shed was behind the home of Mrs. Spencer. Her house was a two story house in Church Street. If you locate the Crown Inn, walk past their parking lot, and then her home was the second house going towards Bowley's Lane. That was Mrs. Spencer's home during the 1940's.

Today we would say, our village cobbler was a throwback to a simpler time. If I am correct his name was Mr. Clewes, but I cannot be certain of this, it was a long time ago. He lived in the house which was immediately beside the Crown Inn parking lot, and adjoining Mrs. Spencer's house. Our Cobbler's skin was

leathery and his nails often stained from the leather, powdered dye and polish he used each day. But his hands were gentle just like his smile. The shop smelt of leather and polish, the aromas created a workman like scent of their own which we children liked and we were always made welcome. We often visited him after our 'tea' with our group of friends. Pairs of shoes were lined up on a rack, heel side out, and this offered evidence of the feet that had filled them. Each fallen arch and wrecked sole was a hands-on problem to



be solved by our cobbler with his careful precision and dexterity. We children understood that people needed and loved their shoes, especially their old comfy ones. A good shoe repair, done at the cost of a few pennies, could and would double the life of their shoes and work boots. Money wasn't thrown away just because something was old, it was war time, money was scarce. Footwear of any kind was never thrown out, they were mended to be used again. Most villagers didn't have extra pennies, so off to the cobbler they went for help.

A lady squeezed in beside us children one evening, her face intent, she leaned towards our cobbler, she poked her finger vigorously into a worn hole in her shoe, its mate lay on the ground at her feet. Our cobbler took this event in his stride with a little smile. He took hold of her shoe, with a wink of his eye to us children, he then studied the shoe. The woman's hands were work worn, with knotted knuckles, but clean as we knew she was a washer woman, she watched the cobbler intently. He could

and would repair the shoe, she smiled her thanks and was on her way home.

For boys who scuffed their boots, they would have cleats hammered on to the toe and heel to extend the life of their boots. Our Cobbler took only a few minutes to attach these cleats, and the boys were off. In the evening these boys walked the lanes and they slid and scuffed those cleats along the tarmac causing sparks to fly in the dull evening light. Each boy was trying to outdo the others. It was a competition to see which young man could produce the loudest, brightest and highest sparks.

The Cobbler used leather, needles, thread, powdered dye and often rawhide. Whether it was a sole being replaced, or stitching, new buckles, eyelets or a new heel, our Cobbler had the experience and expertise to bring new life to your comfy old shoes. We children were always welcome and we sat on wooden boxes or stood beside his work bench to watch as he used his many tiny hammers, cutters, pliers, nails and tacks repairing a shoe. Our Cobbler also made and repaired the horse's harness. This could be the making of new long reins with which the farmer controlled the horses, repairing a horse collar by adding extra padding or a new leather surround or even adding decorative brass for a horse show. Our endless questions we continually asked never seemed to bother him, he answered us as he worked. After a while he would look at his pocket watch which hung from the edge of a shelf, and wave us off to our homes and to bed.

At this time young people learned a trade through apprenticeship or family tradition, as we youngsters stood in our Cobbler's shed, many of us boasted that we could be a cobbler. We dreamt of having such a shed and being surrounded by the smell of new leather, banging the tiny hammers, and being part of a village community.

*In our village old timers told us,
The seasons rule the land,
The weather rules seasons.*

Fridays have just got better ...

Sally has arranged a new series of exciting talks on Friday evenings

Upcoming events.

2025

APRIL
11

LESLEY SMITH

Meet Elizabeth I and be transported back to the time of Raleigh and Drake in this glittering performance

MAY
9

DAVID MOYLAN

A fun and lively performance, celebrating the lives of the great comedians of days gone by

JUNE
13

DANNY WELLS

Get ready for the summer with this light hearted investigation in to the beginnings of the package holiday - and the life of Thomas Cook

JULY
11

DAVE ANDREWS

The former BBC Radio Leicester presenter tells us about his life on the radio, discussing the arts, theatre, and local history

AUG
8

ANDREA ZUVICH

A fun and compelling royal investigation in to the badly behaved lives of the scandalous Stewarts

SEPT
12

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE

A celebration of strings, performed by leading musicians

ALL PERFORMANCES START AT 7PM



101 Top Street, DE12 7AH

Tickets: £15

www.sirjohnmoore.org.uk

<https://sirjohnmoorefoundation.eventbrite.co.uk>

New at The Sir John Moore Foundation Museum for 2025. The Museum is hosting a series of lively talks each second Friday from April to September.

These are starting with a talk by Lesley Smith who is renowned for bringing characters to life and this is your chance to meet Elizabeth I in all her glittering glory. This is one not to be missed ...

Click on the link below for tickets for all events:

<https://sirjohnmoorefoundation.eventbrite.co.uk>



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