

"Able Goes On The Spike"

Able was a tinker who travelled all over Banburyshire, using his skills to sharpen the knives at farms and large houses, leaving his family at Tadmarton for weeks at a time. Sleeping in barns, occasionally in servants quarters, and often "On The Spike" in the poor houses of the parishes, where he, and others, would spend the mornings, using the spikes set into the workbenches to tease apart the fibres of old ropes. The wardens would then sell the sisal and hemp strands to the rope-makers yards, such as at Allcocks in Banbury. Hence the term "Money for old rope".

In this way Able managed to save enough money to buy his wife a new shawl, and have his children's boots mended, so they would be warm and dry in the winter months.

On the feast day, Able always invited family, friends and neighbours to their cottage, and, as was his custom, he asked that they all spend a few moments to think on those less fortunate than themselves. Then thanking all present for the assistance, laughter and love they had brought to him and his family over the course of the year, he raised his drink, booming out "Wassail!", and the reply came back "Drin Hail!".

And so the festivities started in earnest, as he expertly carved the goose, the privations of being On The Spike fading from his thoughts.