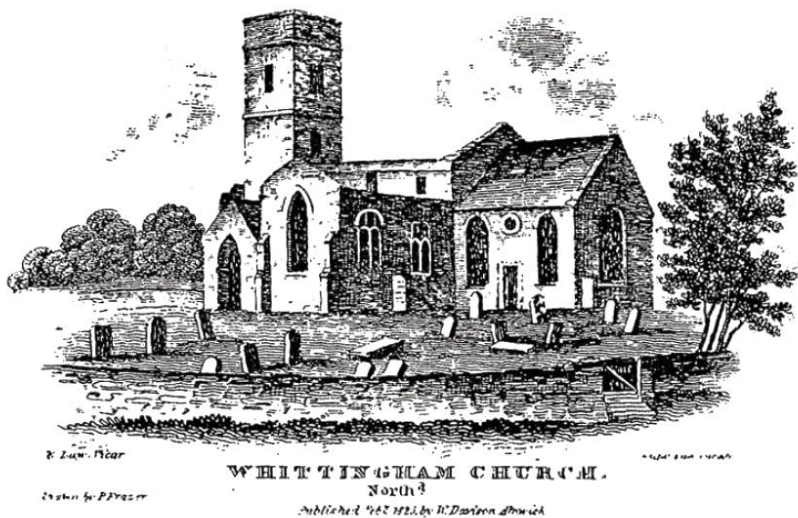


Are you going to Whittingham Fair? ...

Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme ...

You may know it as *Scarborough Fair* but the song was about Whittingham Fair long, long before Simon and Garfunkel immortalized it in 1966. Here's the story;

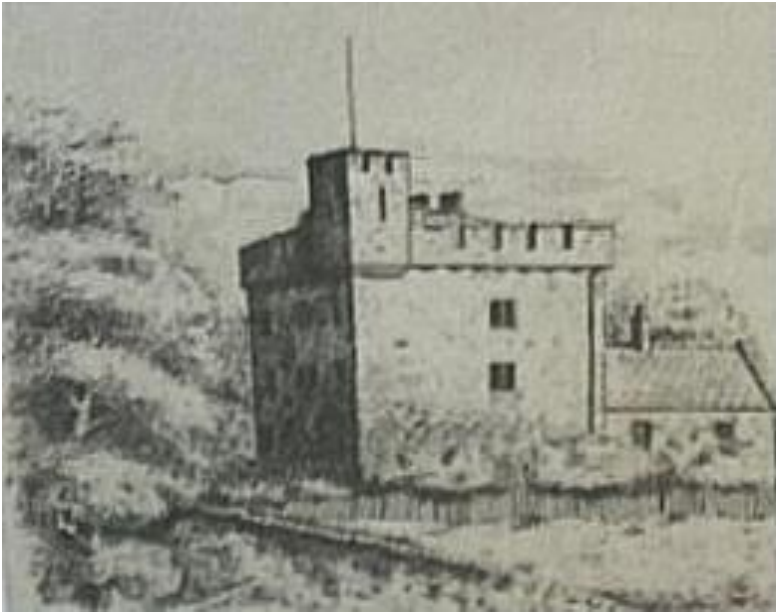
The fair grew out of the celebration of St. Bartholomew's day on 24th August.



St. Bartholomew's Church, Whittingham

From early medieval times a dedication service was held annually to celebrate the saint's day, followed by a village feast. Country people took advantage of the meeting to celebrate a holiday and bring goods and services for barter. Out of this grew the fair.

By Victorian times, festivities began with a parade of horsemen, accompanied by a fiddler, riding out of the Castle Inn. After processing through the village, on both sides of the river, the fair was proclaimed in an open space 'under the shadow of the old tower'.



The Pele Tower, Whittingham

There were refreshment tents, boxing booths and huckster's selling everything from cutlery, hardware, shoes and hats to cheese, nuts, oranges and gingerbread. One part of the green, where the village pant now stands, was entirely taken up by the 'muggers' with their display of crockery [from David Dippie Dixon's *Whittingham Vale*, 1895].

Amusements were numerous and varied, including showmen, comedians, musicians, nine pins, three sticks a penny, roley-poley, wheel of fortune, boxing booths, jugglers, tight rope dancers, quoits and free-fights on the green.

Large numbers of cattle were sold at the fair. These occupied the wide grassy areas either side of the road in front of the Castle Inn. Horses too were bought and sold, and shown off on the lane in front of the inn.

Hundreds of Irish reapers and shearers attended, seeking to be hired. Like many others at the fair, they consumed a large amount of alcohol, and with their sickles under their arms formed a dangerous element when drinking turned to fighting, as it often did. 'The year the Irish took the fair' saw them wreak havoc among the stalls, smashing everything in sight and terrifying fair-goers, until a brave-hearted joiner snatched a rail from the nearest fence and charged the mob out of the fair.

Whittingham Games

'In 1860 Whittingham Fair degenerated into Whittingham Games' – *David Dippie Dixon*.

Wrestling developed as a big part of the games; the Wrestling Association bestowed upon them the All Weights Championship Wrestling for the world, and by 1913 the record prize money of £150 was offered. The veterans' pipe band from Newcastle played, and there were exhibitions of highland dancing during the afternoon.

Throughout the period following the first world war, there was a movement, led by Alexander Browne of Callaly Castle, to encourage local farmers. The *Alnwick Gazette* and *County Advertiser* referred to the event as 'The Whittingham Athletic Festival and Dog and Cattle Show'.

By the 1930s the games included a large number of industrial and agricultural classes as well as sheep dog trials. Here we see the Committee in 1937 leading a brass band through the village at the start of the games;



The trend away from games and towards agricultural and industrial competitions became more marked after the second world war, until it was firmly established as the Whittingham Show.

Whittingham Fair in song - Thomas Hepple (Alnwick) 1855

This manuscript, by Thomas Hepple of Kirkwhelpington, was sent to the Committee following an appeal by the Duke of Northumberland. The Duke, having been approached by the Committee, offered prizes of £10 and £5 for the two best collections of ancient Northumbrian music in score. Hepple's collection of songs appears to have been the only set of Northumbrian music to have been entered. It was nevertheless warmly received by the Committee, who included Hepple's fine Whittingham Fair in their final publication.

Whittingham Fair.

Is he you going to Whittingham fair, Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time, Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 Remember me to one that lives there, for once she was a true lover o mine -

2 Tell her to make me a Cambric shirt,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 Without even a seam or needle work,
 Then she shall be a true lover o mine.

3 Tell her to wash't in yonder well,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 Where it never sprung where never rain fell,
 Then she shall be a true lover o mine.

4 Three hard questions he's putter to me,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 But I'll match him with other three,
 Before he shall be a true lover o mine.

5 Tell him to buy me an acre of land,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 Between the sea, & the sea-land,
 Then he shall be a true lover o mine.

6 Tell him to plow it with a hunting horse,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 And sow it with the seckerly corn,
 Then he shall be a true lover o mine.

7 Tell him to sheard with the hunting leather,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 And bind bind it up in a pea-cock feather,
 Then he shall be a true lover o mine.

8 Tell him to thrash it on yonder well,
 Par ee-ly sage yeas merry in time,
 And never let one corn of it fall,
 Then he shall be a true lover o mine.

Hepple's manuscript of 1855

Some theorise that the song is a riddle for the composer's lover. The lyrics put forward the concept of unrequited love; yearning is felt through the song. A young man delegates certain impossible tasks to his lover with condition that she would have to finish those to be able to come back to him. She also requests equally impossible things from the man, with the condition that she would complete her tasks when he would complete his.

In later versions, some suggest the young man is dead, as the four herbs of parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme were once associated with death.

Whittingham Fair - from Hepple's manuscript, c.1855



1 'Are you going to Whittingham fair?
Parsley, sage, grown merry in time
 Remember me to one that lives there;
 For once she was a true lover of mine.

2. 'Tell her to make me a cambric shirt,
 Parsley, sage, ...
 Without ever a seam or needlework,
 Then she shall be a true lover of mine.

3. 'Tell her to wash't in yonder well,
 Parsley, ...
 Where is never sprung, where never rain fell,
 Then she shall be a true lover of mine.

4. 'Three hard questions he's gotten to me,
 Parsley, ...
 But I'll match him with the other three
 Before he shall be a true lover of mine.

5. 'Tell him to buy me an acre of land
 Parsley, ...
 Between the sea and the sea-sand,
 Then he shall be a true lover of mine.

6. Tell him to plow't with a hunting horn,
 Parsley, ...
 And sow it with the sickerly corn,
 Then he shall be a true lover of mine.

7. Tell him to shear'd with the hunting leather,
 Parsley, ...
 And bind it up in a pea-cock feather.
 Then he shall be a true lover of mine.

8. Tell him to trash it on yonder wall,
 Parsley, ...
 And never let one corn of it fall,
 Then he shall be a true lover of mine.

9. After he has ended his work,
 Parsley, ...
 Go tell him to come and to have his shirt,
 Then he shall be a true lover of mine.

Whittingham Fair - Bruce & Stokoe (Alnwick) 1882

Stokoe's text published 1882, "popular in the north and west of the county of Northumberland; usually sung as a nursery-ballad."

1. 'Are you going to Whittingham fair?

Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme

Remember me to one who lives there;

For once she was a true-love of mine.

2. 'Tell her to make me a cambric shirt,

Without any seam or needlework.

3. 'Tell her to wash it in yonder well,

Where never spring-water nor rain ever fell.

4. 'Tell her to dry it on yonder thorn,

Which never bore blossom since Adam was born.'

5. 'Now he has asked me questions three,

Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme

I hope he will answer as many for me;

For once he was a true-love of mine.

6. 'Tell him to find me an acre of land

Betwixt the salt water and the sea-sand.

7. 'Tell him to plough it with a ram's horn,

And sow it all over with one pepper-corn.

8. 'Tell him to reap it with a sickle of leather,

And bind it up with a peacock's feather.

9. 'When he has done, and finished his work,

O tell him to come, and he'll have his shirt.'

[From: Thomas Hepple's MS c.1855, then arranged and published by J. C. Bruce and J. Stokoe, "Northumbrian Minstrelsy," 1882, pp.79-80. Bronson 2.22. Child reports in Additions and Corrections: 17, II, 495 b. In The Monthly Chronicle of North Country Lore and Legend, III, 7, 'Whittingham Fair' is given by Mr Stokoe with a few variations. See also The Denham Tracts, II, 358, from D. D. Dixon's tractate on The Vale of Whittingham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1887.

The version published by Stokoe "Northumbrian Minstrelsy," 1882 is different form Hepple's version which supposedly it's based on. The melody has been transposed but is fairly accurate to Hepple's original. R. Matteson 2018]