

Did You Know? An Anglican Glossary



A beadle, the parish constable, leads boys who carry green boughs for whipping. This was also called “going a-ganging,”

Beating the Bounds/Rogation Days

Beating the Bounds is an ancient custom that dates before the Norman Conquest. The custom is mentioned in the laws of Alfred the Great and Æthelstan. The people preceded by the parish priest would walk the boundaries of the parish as boys beat the ground at intervals. Its practical purpose was to publicly establish and remind everyone what those boundaries were. Psalms 103 and 104 were recited and hymns sung. Preferred times for this exercise were Rogation Days or, later, Ascension Day.

Rogation days (from the Latin *rogare*, to ask) are four days set apart to bless fields. April 25 is called the Major Rogation; the three days preceding Ascension Thursday are called the Minor Rogations. This observance is believed to have been introduced into England in the 7th century. Sarum texts date from 1173-1220. They were days of fast and abstinence. They continued to be observed after the Reformation and some English parishes still observe them and the beating of the bounds.