

## **Halloween in the UK**

Halloween is a celebration observed in a number of countries on the 31st of October, Halloween is traditionally celebrated in English countries, although it is not an official holiday.

History: Few holidays tell us as much of the past as Halloween. Its origins date back to a time, when people believed in devils, witches and ghosts. Many Halloween customs are based on beliefs of the ancient Celts, who lived more than 2,000 years ago in what is now Great Britain, Ireland and northern France.

Every year the Celts celebrated the Druid festival of Samhain, Lord of the Dead and Prince of Darkness. It fell on October 31, the eve of the Druid new year, the date marked the end of summer, or the time when the sun retreated before the powers of darkness and the reign of the Lord of Death began. The Sun god took part in the holiday and received thanks for the year's harvest.

The Celts believed that on this night Samhain allowed the souls of the dead to return to their earthly homes as witches, goblins, black cats, or in other weird forms. To honour the Sun god and to frighten away evil spirits, the Druids built huge bonfires on hilltops. They sat around the fires watching the bright flames and related eerie happenings they had experienced.

It was believed that evil spirits sometimes played tricks on October 31. They could also do all kinds of damage to property. Some people tried to ward off the witches by painting magic signs on their barns. Others tried to frighten them away by nailing a piece of iron, such as a horseshoe, over the door.

In Ireland, and some other parts of Great Britain, it was believed, that fairies spirited away young wives, whom they returned dazed 366 days later.

When Halloween night fell, people in some places dressed up and tried to resemble the souls of the dead. They hoped that the ghosts would leave peacefully before midnight. They carried food to the edge of town or village and left it for the spirits.

In Wales, they believed that the devil appeared in the shape of a pig, a horse, or a dog. On that night, every person marked a stone and put it in a bonfire. If a person's stone was missing the next morning, he or she would die within a year.

Much later, when Christianity came to Great Britain and Ireland, the Church wisely let the people keep their old feast. But it gave it a new association when in the 9th century a festival in honour of all saints (All Hallows) was fixed on November 1. In the 11th century November 2 became All Souls' Day to honour the souls of the dead, particularly those who died during the year.

Christian tradition included the lighting of bonfires and carrying blazing torches all around the fields. In some places masses of flaming straw were flung into the air. When these ceremonies were over, everyone returned home to feast on the new crop of apples and nuts which are the traditional Halloween foods. On that night, people related their experiences with strange noises and spooky shadows and played traditional games.

When millions of Irish people immigrated to the United States in the 1840s, Halloween traditions came with them. Today, Halloween is celebrated with perhaps even more enthusiasm in the New World than was once in the Old World.

### **Customs and traditions.**

Halloween customs today follow many of the ancient traditions.

### **Jack-o -lantern.**

A favourite Halloween custom is to make a jack-o' — lantern. Children take cut the middle of the pumpkin, cut holes for the eyes, nose and mouth in its side and, finally, they put a candle inside the pumpkin to scare their friends. The candle burning inside makes the orange face visible from far away on a dark night — and the pulp makes a delicious pumpkin-pie.

People in England and Ireland once carved out beets, potatoes, and turnips to make jack-o'-lanterns on Halloween. When the Scots and Irish came to the United States, they brought their customs with them. But they began to carve faces on pumpkins because they were more plentiful in autumn than turnips

### **Trick-or-treating**

Halloween is sometimes called Beggars' Night or Trick- or-Treat night. American children celebrate Beggars' Night as Irish children did in the 17th century. They dress up as ghosts and witches and go into the streets to beg. They go from house to house and say: "Trick or treat!", meaning "Give me a treat or I'll play a trick on you". Some groups of "ghosts" chant Beggars' Night rhymes: Trick or treat, Smell our feet. We want something Good to eat.

They all hold bags open to catch the candy, fruit, or coins that the neighbours drop in. As they give each child a treat, the neighbours exclaim over the costumes and try to guess who is under the mask. Children usually get the treat, so they do not often have to play mischievous tricks.

### **Halloween pranks**

Now most people do not believe in evil spirits. They know that evil spirits do not break steps, spill garbage or pull down fences. If property is damaged, they blame naughty boys and girls. Today, Halloween is still a bad night for the police.

Perhaps the most common trick is soaping house and car windows. Children draw pictures or write on the windows with soap.

In big cities Halloween celebrations often include special decorating contests. Young people are invited to soap shop-windows, and they get prizes for the best soap-drawings.

In old times, practical jokes were even more elaborate. It was quite normal to steal gates, block house doors, and cover chimneys with turf so that smoke could not escape. Blame for the resulting chaos was naturally placed on the "spirits".

### **Halloween parties**

While some young people are out playing pranks, others are gathered for a party (though the party-goers very possibly think of some pranks on the way home).

At Halloween parties the guests wear every kind of costume. Some people dress up like supernatural creatures, others prefer historical or political figures. You can also meet pirates, princesses, Draculas, Cinderellas, or even Frankenstein's monsters at a Halloween festival. They all play games, give clever plays and pageants based on the ancient customs, and feast on the ever-popular candied apples, popcorn, candy corn, and peanuts.