

# The Real History of Halloween

## **Halloween: Harmless, or Hellish?**

There are a lot of stories told about Halloween. Some stories are fond remembrances of family celebration, spooky stories, “trick-or-treating” in the neighbourhood, bobbing for apples, and the genial fun of a night of mischief. Some stories are profound and moving worship of God, and mourning the loss of those who have died over the years. Some are stories of the end of labour, as the harvest finally draws to a close and winter begins, bringing with it the care and worries that the season brings to farmers.

All of those stories are true ones, and many of us have heard them one way or another. Yet there are other stories told of this time of year: stories of ancient Druids who terrorized the populace into giving bribes ranging from the best cattle to virgin daughters; stories of gruesome witches who poison candy and steal children for horrid sacrifices; stories of dark occult practices, and of modern-day evildoers, who use the mystery of this night to perpetrate acts of atrocity.

Year after year, Christians are warned of tainted treats, dangerous pranks, or random acts of cruelty that some people play on others on this night. Such warnings are certainly important, and should be heeded. Yet there are also sermons, tracts, and literature that speak of spiritual danger, portraying Halloween as the “Day of the Devil,” and telling a dark history of cruelty and evil. Yet others—some Christian, some not—have come forward to decry these statements as falsehoods,

As Christians, we are called to resist the devil: yet we are also called to speak the truth. If, as some state, Halloween is the Devil’s Day, then of course we should shun it, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” [1] Yet how are we to know the facts of the claims being made? More importantly, once we know the facts, how shall we respond to them in a manner that honours Jesus?

## Do Druids Trick-or-Treat?

There are a great many things we “know” about the Halloween. We “know” that the Druids were the priests of the Celts. We “know” that Halloween was an ancient Celtic festival, where the Druids would go from house to house asking for sacrifices (the origins of “trick or treat”). We “know” that the Druids would take humans as sacrifices (hence the stories that modern Witches and Satanists will do the same). We “know” that the Druids held the Celts in awe and fear by reason of their power, until the advent of Christianity (hence St. Patrick’s confrontation with the Druids, as represented by his “driving the snakes from Ireland”). The problem with all that we “know” is that most, if not all, of it is wrong.

Most people assume that it was the Celts who started Halloween. It's quite true that there was an Irish festival called Samhain (pronounced "SOW-en"), but this was not the name of a god in Celtic mythology; indeed, we cannot even be sure if Samhain was a religious festival as we envisage today.

In modern Irish Gaelic, the word samhain simply means "The end of summer," and refers to the harvest festivals that scholars speculate probably occurred at that time. We can imagine a joyful festival, rather like the modern Thanksgiving in America or the Harvest Home church festivals of the UK, or we can imagine dark rituals of sacrifice and divination, but the honest truth is that we do not know how, or even if, the Celts celebrated Samhain. No evidence survives, and the Celts left no written records, and if anyone definitively says that the Druids did this or the Celts did that for the festival of Samhain, they're either speculating or lying outright.

Scholars are fairly certain that the Celts did not have a "unified" religion. The Gods of one tribe were called by different names than the Gods of other tribes, and though much speculation has been made about the role of the Druids in unifying the Celts, there is no achieve or archaeological evidence to support this.

It must be understood that the Celts were not a single people: though they spoke similar languages, the Celts were over a hundred different tribes that usually got along almost as well as Liverpool and Millwall fans. Surviving Celtic literature—such as the Táin Bó Cúalnge [2] of Ireland, or The Mabinogion [3] of Wales—is rife with tales of raids, wars, and grudges nursed and passed on over generations. Additionally, contemporary authors—including Tacitus [4] and Julius Caesar [5]—tell us that the Celts were just as likely to start a fight between themselves as they were to go to war against the Romans, or the neighbouring Germanic tribes. With this kind of reputation, it hardly seems that the Druids could have been an all-powerful force within the tribes as a group, though it is quite possible that they may have held considerable power within an individual tribe.

What about human sacrifice? At the time of writing, there is one archaeological find that contains sufficient evidence of ritual that has led archaeologists to suppose that he MIGHT have been a sacrifice—or might not have been one. Whilst other bodies have been found within the Celtic time period in contexts that have lead scholars to suggest they may have been murdered or had unusual burial rites performed upon them [6] this is a long way short of the quantities of bodies described by the Roman contemporary historians of that time. The famous "Lindow Man" also known to the press as 'Pete Marsh' was one of four bodies so far [7] discovered in a peat bog near Manchester in 1984, and while Drs. Ann Ross and Don Robins of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London have published a popular book concerning this "Druidic Prince," the fact of the matter remains that many of their arguments are based on weaving a cloak of supposition from a scant few threads of evidence. [8]

And what of the advent of Christianity destroying the power of the Druids? Both in England and in Ireland, many of the Druids converted with out dissent or quarrel: Adomnan of Iona writes in his Life of St. Columbus that several Druids who were converted were granted large tracts of land by the Church, [9] and we know that the class of Druids was recognized by post-Christian Irish law. [10] Indeed, from the evidence now available, the Druids were not the “priests,” but were the intellectual caste of the Irish, skilled in such disciplines as philosophy, poetry, history, astronomy, music, medicine, sorcery, and prophecy or divination; this parallels the Brahmins, who are the intellectual caste of the Hindu. It is probably true that priests were drawn from the Druidic caste, but again, this is speculation, not definite knowledge.

One thing that must be acknowledged about the Druids was their connection with magic and divination, both of which are forbidden by the Bible, and their possible connection with pre-Christian worship. However, it should also be acknowledged that the Druids were a recognized and accepted part of the administration of laws of Ireland well into the late eleventh or early twelfth century.

Indeed, as both the civil and criminal law code of Ireland survive in their most complete form in the 'Leabhar na h Uidre' (Book of the Dun Cow) dating from the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, it might be remarked that there had been no amendment of the laws relating to the Druids by that time. Two reasons can be argued: one, that the Druids still existed with a definite, if diminished, role in Irish society; two, that the Druids had vanished and so no one bothered to change the laws. [11]

It is likely that the Celts, as did most ancient societies, had some form of harvest festival—but we do not know what they did, how they celebrated, or even with certainty whether or not they did. It is quite probable that at least some of the Celtic priests were of the Druidic caste, but not all Druids were priests, and we are not certain that all priests were Druids. It is likely that the Druids did engage in sacrifices, perhaps even human sacrifices, but the only evidence we have for this are the writings of their enemies in war, and the uncertain evidence of a handful of archaeological finds.

Our knowledge of the Celts and the Druids—what little we have of it—does nothing to explain the origins of Halloween. Yet history does show that the roots of this celebration do rest in Ireland and England—specifically, the Ireland and England of the Medieval and Renaissance ages.

### Halloween's Beginnings.

The establishment of All Saints day is relatively well documented. Originally held the first Sunday after Pentecost, the date was moved to November 1st by Gregory III when he dedicated a chapel in the Basilica of St. Peter to “All the Saints.” In 835, Gregory IV permanently moved the celebration to November 1. [12] Originally, All Saints Day was a solemn occasion, to be celebrated with a vigil spent in fasting and prayers the evening,

followed by a “feast day,” a day to attend Mass and refrain from servile work. [13]

For some, however, this release from work devolved into a carouse, but even in this, the medieval Church tried to moderate the worst of the excesses. The solemnity of All Saints Day became combined with the festivity of harvest celebrations. While there may have been parades and bonfires and revelry, the Church worked with the nobility to keep the celebration within reasonable bounds—and also offered the revelers alternatives to debauchery.

Local practices emerged connected with the harvest glut including local cuisine specialties: in Europe, apple dishes were a popular food on this day (especially since the apple harvest ends relatively late in the year), and in England, the custom of making “soul cakes” to distribute to the poor in exchange for prayers for deceased members of the donor’s family.

It is to this time that we must look for some of the customs of our modern Halloween. Late autumn was apple season, and there was a bounty of apples: it becomes evident that this is the most likely origin of such games as bobbing for apples. The “soul cake” custom was the probable origin of our modern “trick-or-treat.” Far from the horrifying pagan blackmail of pre-Christian Druids imagined by some, this was actually a method of not only feeding the poor, but of persuading attendance at Church!

This is not to say that all of these activities were innocent. Even at this time, it is certainly possible that people attempted to divine the future with apple peels, or by roasting chestnuts. Yet it must be remembered that these local customs were just that: local, frequently isolated folk practices that had little influence across cultural or national boundaries. It was not until the Colonial Age, and the advent of cross continental and inter-continental travel that these local practices combined to create the Halloween customs that we are familiar with today.

## Emigration and Travel

Harvest celebrations, and the various local customs that attended them, came to America with the waves of colonists. Just as Europe does not share all its traditions and customs, neither were the American harvest celebrations identical. In New England, with its heavy population of Puritans and Calvinists who disapproved of frivolity in any form, the celebration of harvest festivals was frowned upon; in Maryland and the more southern colonies such celebrations were popular.

As the beliefs and customs of different European ethnic groups, as well as the American Indians, meshed, a distinctly American version of Halloween began to emerge. The first celebrations included “play parties,” public events held to celebrate the harvest, where neighbours would share stories of the dead, tell each other's fortunes, dance, and sing. Colonial Halloween festivities also featured the telling of ghost stories and mischief making of all kinds. By the middle of the nineteenth century, annual autumn festivities

were common, but Halloween was not yet celebrated everywhere in the country. [14]

This American indifference was changed by an event in Ireland. The advent of the Potato Famine in 1846 led to a dramatic influx of Irish immigrants to all parts of the world, including America. While they certainly brought their customs and traditions with them—including their Halloween traditions—they faced many obstacles, including a growing anti-Immigrant and anti-Catholic prejudice. It is possible that the origins of the “Anti-Halloween” movement stem from this prejudice, as many of the complaints directed by Christians against Halloween are also directed against the Roman Catholic Church. [15]

Yet for all of the potential for problems, Halloween adapted to America as readily as the Irish and English immigrants who took it there.

In the late 1800s, there was a move in America to mold Halloween into a holiday more about community and neighbourly get-togethers, than about ghosts, pranks, and witchcraft. At the turn of the century, Halloween parties for both children and adults became the most common way to celebrate the day. Parties focused on games, foods of the season, and festive costumes. Parents were encouraged by newspapers and community leaders to take anything "frightening" or "grotesque" out of Halloween celebrations. Because of their efforts, Halloween lost most of its superstitious and religious overtones by the beginning of the twentieth century. [16]

Yet there are problems with Halloween. It has been known since the 1920s as a night of mischief, pranks, and vandalism, and since the 1950s, there have been tales about poisoned and adulterated sweets, diabolical witchcraft, Satanic sacrifices, and spiritual danger. Is there any basis to these tales? Where did they come from? Most importantly, what is a Christian supposed to do about Halloween?

#### Halloween and Samhain: Today’s Witches

Halloween has long been known as a night of mischief, but in the eyes of many Christians, it has also become a night of devilment—literally. Since the 1950s, various groups in England, the Americas, and Australia have emerged that celebrate the time around October 31st as a night dedicated to their pagan gods.

And we Christians have responded ... though not always with wisdom. Since the 1970s, various Christians have come forward claiming to have once been members of the occult. They have given testimonies that they had witnessed, been the victims of, and even participated in, diabolical acts. Lurid tales of sacrifices, orgies, debauchery and cruelty have sprung up in countless places, and various forces—from Wiccans to Satanists—have been accused of committing crimes that are almost unspeakable in their atrocity. [17]

Both Pagan and Christian authors and reporters have called these witnesses into question,

and many of the tales have been proven false. “Sacrifices” have left no forensic evidence for the investigators; locations where “bodies were buried” prove to have been undisturbed for decades; and those who were supposedly engaged in such activities are frequently nowhere near the location they claimed to have been. Yet these stories continue to circulate, without evidence—and in some churches, without a critical challenge. [18]

Samhain is a pagan and also a wiccan festival occasionally shared by those witches and occultist who have empathy with the Celtic deities and entities. Not all occult practitioners celebrate samhain.

As far as Satanists are concerned Halloween is not their most high of unholy days it was and will remain their birthday. The only Satanists you will find celebrating on October 31st are those who were born on that day. [19] Some satanic lodges do use both Walpurgis Nacht (30th April) and the 31st October to hold initiations for their new ‘recruits’ but this has an awful lot more to do with the new recruits wanting a ‘special’ night in their own eyes a for their initiation to take place. Its part of the sardonic humour you will find shared by the more serious students of the occult.

Perhaps the most crucial story about Halloween is that it provides a gateway to the occult:

Halloween is harmful because it lures people into the occult. Many children are introduced to occultic practices at Halloween parties. I first learned about the occult at a Halloween party as a teenager. Many kids get their first exposure to occultic horror movies at Halloween parties. After the initial exposure to the occult some children are attracted to the occult because of the power it offers them. Others see it as the ultimate means of rebelling against their parents. [20]

So what is a Christian to do?

For any Christian at anytime prayer is an essential part of our relationship with God. [21] Such is its importance that Christ Himself taught people how to pray to God [22] Some Christians feel a special conviction to pray at this time of year so what should we be praying about?

Ephesians tells us that our battle is not against people but in resisting the hard sell of compromise with a fallen world. [23] It is Christ who by his sacrifice upon the cross has the authority to rebuke these entities so we should follow the example of Michael and leave the actual rebuking to him [24]. However we should pray for those who are spiritually seeking especially those who feel that they should explore evil practices at this time of year. Pray that they be touched in such a way that they begin to seek God.

Pray for those whose work and care is with young people. For teachers, youth workers, mentors, social workers and parents. Pray that the example of their lives provides a positive

witness for Christ to young people.

Pray that God protects, blesses and gives His peace to all who find this time of year unnerving or frightening.

Pray that those who celebrate Halloween are not drawn towards practices forbidden by God in his scripture.

Pray that those who plan to use this time of year as an excuse to cause fear, malicious mischief and criminal damage become convicted that such would be wrong and refrain from doing so.

Pray that the emergency services; the police; the fire service; ambulance crews and hospital staff that they have a peaceful night free from the consequences of out of control celebrations.

Pray for those churches that are hosting alternatives to Halloween for their young people that they are honouring to Christ and a good witness for Christ to those who are not Christians.

“ They (the church) are afraid because wolves have come to fleece the flock repeatedly with their fictional stories of sadistic rituals and evil madness.

They are afraid because they ignorant of the truths that come to bear upon this whole matter.

Even IF every urban myth was true. Even IF every witch was out to get you

My God is still on the throne....!!!

If only my brothers and sisters in Christ would study God's word rather than Rebecca's or Bill's then would I no longer fear this season of the year? Let every Christian know that these myths are just not so. Hide away if you feel you must but while you do that pray for the rest of us who feel this season tug at our souls. God made this day too. He is the King of Kings

Let every child of God spend their efforts preparing for this day. How often does the world beat a path to your door? Now you will have extra people to pray for.

So why not give them some treats and pray for them to come to know Jesus?

And in between the precious little ones dressed in weirdness calling read your Bible and pray, having thrown the mislabeled fiction away.

Mark Ex-occultist

## Praise Parties.

As Hallowe'en as opposed to samhain was originally a time of prayer and celebration within the church consider reclaiming it with a praise party and honour God. Many young people have vibrant ideas on ways of worshipping God and can be very creative if given opportunity and encouragement to become more involved in their churches life. Perhaps younger children would appreciate a party in which they celebrate the awe and wonder of God. Older teens might prefer a worship celebration they have organised with opportunity to socialise during and afterwards so they could invite their friends.

Remember most teens would far rather have somewhere warm and safe to have fun and meet their friends away from home than be cold and bored on a dark wet street.

## Building relations with schools.

There are many teachers who welcome the chance to enliven their teaching sessions with seasonal activities. In recent years thanks to the commercial hard sell of Halloween goodies by businesses awareness of Halloween has been raised. There are certainly plenty of books aimed at children with themes of ghosts, witches, fairies, dragons, monsters and the like.

If Christians choose not to partake of school life for the rest of the year and only go in to complain and demand that Halloween activities are evil and should not take place they will appear as fanatics. Its far better to gradually build up a relationship with the school over a period of time so that those involved in teaching and administration at the school appreciate you share their concerns in providing a safe environment for their children. Even pagan teachers will appreciate that concern if you are known and your views are considered, reasonable, thought out and motivated by compassion.

This will then allow you to explain with reason your concerns about Halloween activities and request that it would be sensible to advise youngsters not to experiment with occult activities.

There will always be some who despite warnings from Christians and mature pagans alike do try and experiment so consider also suggesting that if any child is or becomes worried or scared by activities they do over Halloween they can always speak to their parent, teacher or even ChildlineUK. ChildlineUK is there for any child who has worries; has difficulties at school and so on it is not just those who suffer abuse.

\*NB Kathi will happily provide details of similar organisations in the states just ask her\*

## Trick or treat

Christian children and the children of Christians should not be involved in this activity. In the UK more so than the USA the tricks can be rather malicious and frightening. It is not



honouring to Christ to partake of an activity that in essence is pure blackmail to prevent vandalism and reprise attacks.

Encourage children to consider how this activity can frighten the very young and the very old if they were to turn up unexpectedly wearing scary costumes and latex masks. Enter into debate to consider the impact of being repeatedly woken up and disturbed on the frail and elderly. Most young people do have a sense of justice and once they begin to explore an idea they can see injustice and cruelty. Even pagans urge their children to think and act responsibly and take care for their elderly neighbours at this time of year.

Encourage you friends and neighbours to talk to their children into declining to take part in trick or treat and explain the reasons why in a way that allows for debate. You never know you might build a bridge to be able to share about Christ.

If your church fellowship is having an open Praise Party why not extend an invitation to your friends and neighbours inviting their children to that instead.

Please be aware that how you act and react at this time of year can produce or destroy opportunities to building a bridge to share the gospel of Christ with others. Pray that God guides you to act responsibly compassionately and with care for others as Christ Himself had.

For our own children?

Most of our young people will have friends at school who are wiccan; some will be exploring assorted pagan beliefs and a few will perhaps have blown pocket money on Lavey's satanic bible. Our children are less likely to have our hang-ups about being friends with and discussing beliefs with such people. It is important that we as Christian parents provide our children with the most accurate information we can. If we do not they will know we do not know what we are talking about regarding the occult and that could lead them to wonder if we know what we are talking about when it comes to Christ.

Many teens do feel the pressure that wanting to be part of a group they can identify with brings. Pray that your Children know Gods peace and strength about their own convictions so that they feel able to make a stand when they feel they are being pressurised into decisions that concern them or they feel are morally wrong.

As young people grow they appreciate even if they do not like explanations as to why you view something as wrong or evil and would prefer them to refrain from doing something. Allowing discussions on 'sticky' subjects keeps open the door for your child to communicate on your part. As children become teenagers and begin to explore their own morality, belief and faith and yes rebellion this becomes even more important.

If you are banning Halloween parties with friends outright it can help if you are able to

offer an alternative. Check if your church or a neighbouring church has any youth activities planned they could attend instead. Perhaps you could allow them to invite friends back to your home maybe with a take away or other favourite foods on offer. There are a range of DVDs they could share watching that do allow a wide debate on the nature of God ranging from 'Raiders of The lost Arc' well would you steal Gods box?' to 'Bruce Almighty' what happens when man tries to be God' and for those stronger parents of older teens 'Dogma' When angels go Bad and God makes better than new'.

'I celebrate LIFE! Halloween has been forsaken by a lot of (ignorant) Christian who believe (falsely) that if they dress up and go get some candy that they are participating in the pagan and/or occult celebration. Hogwash!

Yep, I said it! Hogwash.

Christians can be some of the most ignorant, well meaning sheep that walk the planet. I do not accept the view that if I purchase my products at Wal Mart that I will become 'possessed' with the spirit of Sam Walton; Greed. Okay poor illustration, but come on the church needs to come to a place that fear isn't the reason that we do/don't do something in relation to observation of sabbaths, holidays etc.

If a person knowingly observes Halloween with its pagan/occult background, then that person is observing Halloween as a pagan/occult holiday. But, to put on someone else that they shouldn't have fun and go get some candy.....PHEW!

Ralph Ex-Satanist.

One final word of caution.

Despite all that has been said there will remain a small group of people who for whatever reasons will attempt occult explorations for the first time this Halloween simply because it's the 31st October. The majority of such people are going to be disappointed but given the unpredictable nature of the spiritual domain some will get a lot more than they ever anticipated possible.

If you have concerns about someone you care about or if you feel you have got out of your depth and want to know more about Christ then please contact Exwitch or Refuge

Ministries

If we can help we will.

I wish to thank all those pagans who have so willingly shared their time, resources and thoughts with me regarding this article.

My most grateful thanks must go to Cern and Veritas.

To Cern thank you for understanding the need for an updated article that would provide insight to allow for constructive dialogue to begin. His comments and suggestions from the point of view as a pagan, a parent and a teacher were most helpful.

Veritas whose willingness to share his scholarly knowledge and resources of early historical achieve resources and social history allowed this article to be compiled so quickly.

It would have taken me far longer to source material without his help.

I also wish to thank those ex-occultists ex-wiccans and ex-Satanists and those practising who read through commented and made suggestions.

Thank you all.

Lottie

--- Footnotes ---

1: 2 Cor. 6:14. All Bible quotations taken from the King James Bible.

2: A translated version of the Tain is available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/cool/>

3: A translated version of The Mabinogion is available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/mab/>

4: A translation of The Annals of Tacitus is available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.html>

5: A translation of Caesar's The Gallic War is available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Caesar/gallic.html>

6: British Archelogy No38 October 1998 'Human Sacrifice in Iron Age Europe. Miranda Aldhouse Green

7: British Archaeology No 13 April 1996 'Plastic Pete and Lindow Man'

8: Ross, Anne and Don Robins. The Life and Death of a Druid Prince: The Story of Lindow Man, An Archaeological Sensation. For the opposing view, please see Ellis, Peter Berresford. The Druids.

9: Sharpe, Richard, transl. Adomnan of Ionia: Life of St. Columba.

10: Ellis, op cit.

11: Ibid.

12: <http://users.rcn.com/tlclcms/saintori.htm>

13: For the definition of vigils within the Catholic Church, see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05647a.htm>. For feasts, see <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06021b.htm>.

14: <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/halloween/hallowmas.html>

It should be noted

that the earlier part of the document engages in some rather irresponsible speculation concerning the “Celtic connection” to Halloween.

15: Bethancourt, W. J. Halloween: Myths, Monsters, and Devils.

<http://www.illusions.com/halloween/>

16: History Channel, op cit.

17: Examples include Michelle Smith and Lawrence Pazder, authors of Michelle Remembers; Mike Warnke, author of The Satan Seller; Lauren Stratford, author of Satan’s Underground; and Dr. Rebecca Brown and “Elaine,” authors of He Came To Set the Captives Free. Please see [http://www.religioustolerance.org/bk\\_fraud.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/bk_fraud.htm) for more information. However, it should be noted that the Religious Tolerance is a “religiously neutral” website: while their research is first rate, they do not solely adhere to Christian standards, and many Christians may disagree with some of their conclusions.

18: Please see [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chrw\\_int.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chrw_int.htm) and [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chrw\\_rad.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chrw_rad.htm). However, it should be noted that the Religious Tolerance is a “religiously neutral” website: while their research is first rate, they do not solely adhere to Christian standards, and many Christians may disagree with some of their conclusions.

19: The Truth about Satanism by Lance King. <http://www.spiritwatch.org/sattruth.htm> One of the best-researched articles on Satanism by Christians available on the web.

20: Quoted from <http://logosresourcepages.org/halloween.html>

21: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6 v18 KJV

22: Matthew 6 5-15

23: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” Ephesians 6 v12 KJV

24: “Yet Michael the archangel when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation but said, “The Lord rebuke thee”” Jude 1 v9 KJV

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