

5 minutes on... Halloween

The term Halloween is the simplified version of 'All-hallow-even', the evening before All Hallows' Day (also known as All Saints' Day).

The holiday was a day of religious festivities in most northern European Pagan traditions, until 835 when Pope Gregory III moved the existing Christian feast of All Saints Day to November 1 to give the celebration a Christian interpretation.

The original celebration can be traced back to the ancient Celts. The 'bright half' of the year ended around November 1 or on a Moon-phase near that date. October 31st is the last official day of the 'bright half' of the year, the next day meant the beginning of Winter, which the Celts associated with human death, and with the slaughter of livestock to provide meat for the coming Winter.

The exact customs in each region differed, but they usually involved the lighting of bonfires and the reinforcement of boundaries, to fend off malicious spirits.

Many European Pagan traditions hold that Halloween is one of the times of the year when the spiritual world can make contact with the physical world and when magic is most potent.

All Saints and All Souls

Sometimes known as All Hallows, meaning 'All Holy People', October 31 it is a time for Christians to remember the many Christians who did great things for the Church, but who do not have a saint's day of their own. The following day, All Souls, is sometimes called 'The Day of the Dead'. This is a day to remember all people who have died, whatever sort of lives they led.

Modern Halloween

The exact origin of the trappings we associate with Halloween are obscure. What we do know is that Irish, Scottish and Welsh immigrants took versions of the Halloween traditions to North America in the 19th century, including the now-familiar custom of children dressing in costumes and going door-to-door collecting sweets.

Commercial exploitation of Halloween in America did not begin until the early 20th century. Halloween postcards became popular between 1905 and 1915.

In Britain, Halloween is now the third most profitable event for retailers after Christmas and Easter. British spending on Halloween has risen from £12 million five years ago to an expected £120 million this year.

In the US, an average family spends £65 on Halloween decorations, sweets and costumes in a nationwide industry worth £4.7 billion.

Is Halloween un-Christian?

The fact that Halloween and the Christian feast of All Saints Day in the West are on two consecutive days have left many modern Christians uncertain of how they should react to this tradition.

The Bible is very clear about many areas of activity associated with the origins of Halloween, such as sorcery, witches, witchcraft, incantations and spells. It talks in strong terms about the inability of good and evil to coexist and live and condemns those who underestimate or follow the evil one, Satan.

However many Christians ascribe no doctrinal significance to Halloween, treating it as a purely secular entity devoted to celebrating imaginary spooks and handing out candy.

Even Gabriele Amorth, the senior exorcist of Vatican City, said in an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph*:

"if... children like to dress up as witches and devils on one night of the year that is not a problem. If it is just a game, there is no harm in that."

Many other Christians consider Halloween incompatible with their faith, due to its preoccupation with the occult in symbols, masks and costumes, its origin as a pagan festival of the dead and its celebration by Satanists.

Many Jews and Muslims frown on Halloween for similar reasons to Christians.

Ironically, there are members of the Wiccan traditions who feel that the modern Halloween is offensive to real witches because it promotes a misleading and stereotypical caricature of them.