



Trick or Treat

Children would go “souling” door- to- door, in medieval times begging for “soul cakes”, simple bread deserts with a currant topping. For every cake a child collected, he or she would have to say a prayer for the dead relatives of the person who gave the cake. These prayers would help the relatives find their way out of purgatory and into heaven.

There is also some evidence of trick-or-treat type activities in the original Celtic tradition. Historians say the Celts would dress up in ghoulish outfits and parade out of town to lead the wandering spirits away. Additionally Celtic children would walk door to door to collect firewood for a giant communal bonfire. Once the bonfire was burning the revelers would extinguish all the other fires in the village. They would then relight every fire with a flame taken from the Samhain bonfire as a symbol of the people’s connection to one another.

The Celts believed in fairies and other mischievous creatures and the notion of Halloween trickery may have come from their reported activities on Samhain. There is also good reason to suppose that the Celtic New Year’s Eve, October 31st, was something like our own, a time when people let go of their inhibitions, drank heavily and got into trouble.

A lot of the Samhain celebration had to do with honoring Celtic gods and there is evidence that the Celts would dress up as these deities and as part of the festival. They may have actually gone door to door to collect food to offer to the gods.

Samhain, being the festival end of the summer, the last harvest of the year, and the beginning of the dark half of the New Year, the veil between the living and the dead became permeable, and the dead, ghosts, fairies and a host of other creatures were about throughout the land. It was a good idea to leave a treat upon the doorstep to appease what might be their malicious intents, and remain safe inside.