

NEWSLETTER

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HALLOWE'EN in 1882

We feature extracts from the
Daily Telegraph of that time

Images from
Hallowe'en games
in 1930s



Children participating in Hallowe'en games, 1935.

Images from The Schools' Collection, dúchas.ie



'All very foolish and inconsistent with the severity of this matter of fact age'

Explaining the traditions of Hallowe'en to its readers in 1882, the Daily Telegraph divided the 'amusements or superstitions, or revels' into three groups; witches and witchcraft, rustic love and courtship, and simple fun and harmless amusement.

Keeping witches and other mal-intentioned spirits away from crops and homes was the aim of the first category. The paper suggested that *'the farmer carry a bunch of straw fired about his corn, and all will be well with the crop. Let the labourer light a torch and flash the fire in the air, and away will fly the witches, baffled and undone'*.

Predicting the future, and especially one's marriage prospects, was a central part of Hallowe'en tradition. Two hazel or walnut shells were halved and set side by side and set alight. If the flame was 'mutual, steadfast and enduring' or 'sudden, fitful and impetuous' it would foretell how any potential romance might work out. Hallowe'en, the paper concluded, *'is rich in the art of untidiness, and is therefore one of the gaudy days of youth. All of its best ceremonies are connected with messing'*.

Spare a thought then for the man who took two neighbours before the Ballina Petty Sessions Court in 1903. On his way to visit his neighbour on Hallowe'en night, two young men of his acquaintance shouted after him through the darkness. Before he knew any more, he had been hit on the head with a lump of cabbage, closely followed by a second one which hit him between the eyes.

The victim took his assailants to court, but His Lordship was clearly a believer in keeping old traditions alive.

The defendant's advocate was quick to point out to the afflicted man *'this was November night, you knew well it was! When you were a young man, did you ever pull cabbage on November night?'* Try as the poor man might, he was losing the argument. *'It was a Hallowe'en revelry'* said the judge.

One of the defendants then deposed that when their victim reached his neighbour's house, he took a stave of wood and tried to hit them with it. After another round of cabbage flinging, he succeeded in hitting one of his assailants over the head with a saucepan. His Lordship had heard enough. *'The honours were equally divided, the case is dismissed.'*

Hallowe'en 'tricks' from 106 years ago:

The Connaught Telegraph of the 4th of November, 1916 listed some now forgotten customs for the season:

Melting Lead: a small piece of lead was melted in a saucepan. The shape the lead took once it hardened was a foretaste of what life held in store for the person who melted it:

A table meant good cheer for the future.

A chair meant a position of authority was in store for them.

A shoe, a ship, a bag or a trunk foretold travel.

A shelf or pick meant a life of hard work.

A sofa meant a life of idleness!

The writer was keen to point out that *'a little stretch of the imagination is required to twist something resembling a lump (of lead) into something resembling one of these shapes'*.

And in case anyone got the wrong impression, the writer concluded *'any sort of nonsense serves for Hallowe'en predictions'*!

Ships of Fortune: Half a walnut shell hollowed out became a 'ship'. Each shell was filled with a little paraffin wax from the lamps which lit every home at the time. A little tuft of cotton inserted into the wax made for a wick.

Each player gathered around a tub of water was given one of these 'ships', which were lighted and set to float on the water, to foretell the destiny of each player:

Two ships floating side by side foretold lifelong friendship for the owners.

Ships that drifted apart meant that the owners would too.

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If a ship clung to the side of the tub, the owner would never leave their home patch. If it floated into the middle of the 'ocean' they were destined to travel. If your ship capsized you were in for financial loss!

Sources:

The Ballinrobe Chronicle, the 04-Nov-1882

The Connaught Telegraph, the 04-Nov-1916

The Western People, the 14-Nov-1903



Jack-o'-Lantern

As the story goes, an Irish man named Stingy Jack tricked the devil and therefore was not allowed into heaven or hell — so he spent his days roaming the Earth carrying a lantern; hence the name "Jack of the Lantern."

Old Games Remembered

A Hallowe'en game played in Co. Mayo in 1938 was recalled by Ellie Finnerty, Massbrook, as part of **The Schools' Collection**, dúchas.ie: Three saucers were placed on a table with "a ring in one saucer, clay in the other and water in the third. A blindfold was put over the person's eyes. If she put her hand in the saucer with the ring, she will be the first to marry. If she put her hand in the saucer with the clay, she would die soon. If she put the hand into the saucer with water, she will cross water to a foreign land"