Beyond the Gate 2022

**Let’s Talk About Halloween Traditions**

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**Halloween**: *Nos Calan* *Gaeaf* in Cymraeg (Welsh) “night before the new year”, Allantide in Kerneweck (Cornish), also *Nos Kalen Gwaf* or *Gwav* “night before the new year”, *Hop tu Naa* in Manx, *Samhain* in Irish Gaelic “summer’s done”, *noz an Anaon* in Breton “night of the dead”, *Oidhche Shamhna* in Scottish Gaelic “night before November”. Norse traditions call it *Alfablót* which means “sacrifice to the Elves”. The holiday commemorates the beginning of Winter or the Dark Half of the year.

**Pumpkin Carving** – various claimed origins:

1. The Irish legend of “Stingy Jack” who could not enter Heaven when he died, because he was stingy, but wasn’t bad enough for H\*ll. (Some say that Jack tricked the Devil). He was condemned to walk the earth with a lantern, seeking an honest person. In some legends he’s Jack the Blacksmith. He places a burning coal in a carved turnip to use as his lantern.
2. The Greek legend of Diogenes the Cynic, a philosopher who also used a lantern to seek an honest person.
3. In Ireland, a turnip was originally carved with a scary face. When Irish folks immigrated to the USA, they began carving pumpkins instead. These were used to frighten away baneful spirits and entities and to welcome travelers. They were also carried during house-to-house processions and gatherings.
4. On the Isle of Man, carved pumpkins are called “punkies”.

**Trick-or-Treat** – various claimed origins:

1. In Celtic nations, it was good luck to feed a neighbor, or a stranger, or a traveler on the New Year. Thus, candy, apples, nuts, coins, and other treats were handed out.
2. Itinerant laborers and farmworkers performed skits, or “folkplays” during the winter off-season in exchange for food and beverages at Halloween/ Samhain /Nos Calan Gaeaf.
3. Food was offered to the spirits of the ancestors.
4. Some claim that trick-or-treating started in America during the 1920s as an Irish immigrant tradition, others say it was popularized by “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown”.
5. People are said to dress in costumes, or “guises / guizes”, or “vizzards /vissards” to avoid being taken by the fairies, boggins or bogeys, and to disguise themselves from baleful spirits. This is sometimes called “guising / guizing”, “masking”, or “vizzarding”.
6. In Scotland and on the Isle of Man, kids are expected to sing a song or perform a trick in order to get candy. On the Isle of Man, some kids dress up as Ginny the Witch.
7. In the past, people wore the costumes of animals they identified with.
8. Christians changed the tradition to “souling”, offering “soul cakes” to travelers in exchange for prayers for the souls of the dead. The folk music group Peter, Paul & Mary recorded a version of the *Souling Song* called *A-Soalin*’.
9. In Ireland, kids would sing “Hugadda, hugadda, teapot Jack” for candy. He’s like Stingy Jack.

**Death and Winter** deities and entities:

1. **The “Wild Hunt”** – a deity or entity rides in the skies on Halloween night, looking to round up the souls of the dead.
2. Arawn, the Cymric /Welsh god of death and the underworld, marries the Goddess Rhiannon. During his honeymoon, he wasn’t paying attention to the dead souls underground, and had to ride on the Wild Hunt to round them up. He was accompanied by the *Cwn Annwyn*, white hunting dogs with red eyes and cropped ears, and sometimes an old woman, the *Mailt y Nos*, Old Lady of the Night. (These are folk stories, NOT found in literature like the *Mabinogion*.)
3. Rhiannon is a springtime goddess, so her descent to the underworld causes winter. This is similar to the legends of Kore or Persephone.
4. The Mailt y Nos is similar to the Norse *Haegtessa,* who fly on their broomsticks on winters’ nights, making a whooo noise under the eves of the house.
5. The Wild Hunt can also be led by Odin /Oðin in Germanic, Teutonic, or Norse countries. The Hunt is also said to be led by Herne the Hunter, who was a huntsman for the English Royal Family. He wore antlers like Cernunnos /the Buca. He was said to have hung himself from an oak tree in Windsor Forest. His spirit still haunts that area, scaring people and cattle. Herne was referenced by Shakespeare.
6. In Scotland, the Isle of Man, and Ireland, the Cailleach, which means “old hag” or “the veiled one”, is an elderly woman with white hair, a blue face, and one eye, who brings winter. She is a goddess of destruction then creation, who brings the cold, the winds and the snow. In spring and summer, she appears young. In winter, she is old. (In Ireland, she was often the darker half of Goddess Brighid /Bridget). The Cailleach hammers out the winds with her mallet. The last harvested sheaf of grain is often given to her.
7. *Yr Angau* in Cymru (Wales) and *l’Ankou* in Breton means “the death”. He is viewed as an old man with long, scraggly white hair, a big black hat, in a cart with one squeaking wheel, pulled by a scrawny white horse. The Angau is not the Death God, but a psychopomp, an agent of Death. In Brittany, l’Ankou appears on many gravestones as a skull or skeletal figure. He is the precursor for the modern Grim Reaper. If you sass him, he will strike you dead.
8. The *Hwch ddu Gwta*: A gigantic black sow (female pig) with a cropped (cut) tail is said to roam after dark on Welsh backroads, and she’ll eat stragglers, or drag them to the underworld.
9. In the Celtic countries, kids sometimes dress as “the Man in Black” who might be Arawn, *yr Angau*, Stingy Jack, or the Devil.
10. The *Ladi Wen*, or white lady, would chase people who strayed to far from the Halloween bonfire. If she caught you she’d take your life force or soul.

**Other Customs**:

1. Divination, particularly done by young women seeking their future marriage partner, or seeking omens of death. White rocks were painted with names or initials and put into the bonfire. If someone couldn’t find their stone, they might die during the winter. A clean stone meant good luck. This was called “*coelcerth*”. Fire scrying and gazing into water was also done.
2. Bobbing or duking for apples, also called *twco falla*. Apples are sometimes hung by strings and caught in the mouth as a game.
3. Feasting and the Dumb Supper – eating a meal in complete silence to welcome ancestors and see if they have anything to say.
4. Final Harvest – the traditional feasts celebrate the last harvest. Anything left over in gardens or fields after Halloween belongs to the Puka / Pwca / Puca, a spirit that can assume the form of a horse or rabbit. Eating their food upsets them, and they respond with pranks, bad dreams, and sometimes psychic attacks. All gathering should be done before Halloween! Slaughtering was performed when it got cold enough to keep the meat fresh.

Feast foods include apples, cider, and fruit tarts; nuts; root vegetables; game meats, pork or beef; and baked goods. *Colcannon* is an Irish dish made from mashed potatoes, turnips and/or rutabagas, cabbage and/ or kale, sometimes milk and cheese. Trinkets are baked into black bread or put in bread pudding, which predict the future (see divination, above). Ring = marriage, Horse = travel, Coins = wealth. Ancestors, deities, and our Earth are thanked for their gifts of food.

1. Reverence for ancestors & the beloved dead – besides the Dumb Supper and divination, Halloween is the time to honor those who have passed. Their names are spoken aloud. They are given offerings of food, whiskey, and their favorite items – a crochet hook for Aunt Sally, for example. Places are set for them at the table, or food is placed on an altar /shrine. Mediums and other “sensitive” people can speak with them, on the nights when the veils between the worlds are the thinnest. Descrying in bowls of water or a crystal ball, flames and /or smoke, and mist is used. Spirit boards are sometimes used. Cymric traditions have an ancestor vigil where people stay up late to speak to the Old Ones.
2. Sundown – since the Celts thought of the new day as beginning at sundown, and a new season as beginning on the evening of the prior day, the night before a sacred day was the time to celebrate. Wiccan people see Samhain as being a “cross-quarter” while oldline Celtic people view it as being a “quarter day”. Not only were there celebrations, but it was the time to pay rents and make good debts. Community bonfires were lit, and families let their hearth-fire go out, to be re-kindled on Samhain or Nos Calan night.

**

Adref, adref am y cynta’, Hwch Ddu Gwta a gipio’r ola’

**Be sure you are the first at home, the tail-less black sow is sure to roam.**

**And also**

Hwch Ddu Gwta a Ladi Wen heb ddim pen

Hwch Ddu Gwta a gipio’r ola’

Hwch Ddu Gwta nos G’langaea

Lladron yn dwad tan weu sana.

The black sow and headless white lady,

Will try and catch the last to leave,

Thieves abound knitting stockings,

Beware the tail-less black sow on winter’s eve.

