The History of Halloween

Why do we make jack-o'-lanterns at Hallowe'en?

There was an old Irish legend about a very mean and sly man called Jack who was always playing tricks on people. When he died, he was not allowed into heaven or hell so he had to walk the Earth from then on. The only thing Jack had to guide him on his way was a hollowed out turnip with a light inside it. This is where we get the name 'Jack of the Lantern' which changed to 'jack-o'-lantern'. When European settlers arrived in America, they realised that pumpkins would be far easier to carve as they were soft and would give out a brighter orange coloured light, than the turnips. Nowadays, most jack-o'-lanterns are carved from pumpkins for this reason.



Why do we go trick or treating at Halloween?

Many years ago, people were not just afraid of meeting ghosts on Halloween night, they were also terrified that ghosts or spirits would come into their homes. They began leaving bowls of food outside their doors to deter the ghosts from entering. Over time, people began to get less fearful of the ghosts and started eating the nice treats themselves. Some people say that this was the start of trick or treating. There are other stories that claim trick or treating started when people started giving cakes in return for prayers being said for their dead relatives on All Soul's Day in England. Instead of just getting cakes, children began visiting their neighbours to look for food, drinks and money as well.

Questions

1. At what time of year did the festival of Samhain take place?
2. Name two traditions the Celts used to celebrate Samhain?
3. What do the words 'All-hallows' mean?
4. Who first decided to make jack-o'-lanterns from pumpkins?
5. What did people do to stop spirits from entering their homes at Halloween?
6. What did the tradition you wrote about in question five eventually turn into? (Hint: People love doing this nowadays at Halloween.)
7. Why did people begin wearing masks at Halloween?
8. According to legend who was 'Jack of the Lantern' and what was he like?
9. Why did people prefer carving their jack-o'-lanterns from pumpkins rather than turnips?
10. If you were to make up a new tradition for celebrating Halloween what would it be? Give reasons for your choice.

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