

## 7 Fires and fireworks

The pagans who lived in Britain two thousand years ago celebrated their New Year on 1 November. Then the Christians came and people celebrated Hallowmas, a three-day festival between 31 October and 2 November. 31 October was called All Hallow's Eve and slowly the name changed to Halloween.

In November, winter is near, and hundreds of years ago people thought that bad spirits, like ghosts, came in the winter. They wanted the bad spirits to go away, so they made fires outside and made jack o'lanterns. To do this they took a big autumn vegetable – usually a pumpkin – and cut off the top. They made a big hole inside the pumpkin and cut a face in the side. Then they put a light inside the pumpkin and put the top on

again. People still enjoy doing this today. You can see jack o'lanterns, with their bright eyes and mouths, outside at Halloween.

To keep the bad spirits away people also dressed like witches and ghosts. Children still do this if they go to Halloween parties. People often put up decorations for



Halloween parties, and play games. The decorations are usually black (for dark nights and death) and orange (for the autumn vegetables).

One Halloween party game is called ‘bobbing for apples’. Many apples fall off the trees in autumn so they are easy to find. Someone puts some apples in a big bowl of water. The apples stay on top of the water. The first player often puts something over their eyes so they cannot see. They must keep their hands behind their back and take an apple out of the water with their teeth. Then the next player tries. It can be very difficult and players usually get very wet!

In Canada and the USA, and in some other English-speaking countries, children go ‘trick or treating’. They dress like witches and ghosts, and go, often in a small group, to the houses of people who live near them. When someone answers the door, the children say: ‘Trick or treat?’ Then the person in the house must decide. Either they give the children a treat – something nice, like fruit or chocolate – or the children play a trick on them. For a trick, the children do



something bad like throw an egg or some flour at the house!

November brings more fires and fireworks. Sometimes you will hear people say, 'Remember, remember, the fifth of November'; they are talking about Guy Fawkes Night.

The story of Guy Fawkes Night begins in 1605. At that time James the First was King of England. But some people did not want him to be king, because they followed a different religion from James. So a group of them – a man called Guy Fawkes and his friends – made a plot to kill King James and his government at the Houses of Parliament in London on 5 November 1605.

They put thirty-six boxes of gunpowder in a room underneath the Houses of Parliament because they wanted to kill a lot of people. But the plan did not work. One of the plotters wrote a note to someone about it. At about midnight on 4 November, the King's soldiers found Guy Fawkes and the gunpowder. They sent him to prison but he did not want to give the names of his friends. They tortured him, and five days later he said all their names.

Some of the plotters tried to escape, but in January 1606 Guy Fawkes and some of his friends were killed in front of the Houses of Parliament. When people heard that the plotters were dead, they celebrated with lots of fires in the streets. King James was alive and well!

Since that time, every year on 5 November in most parts of Britain people build a big fire outside, with all the dead leaves and old pieces of wood that they do not want. The fire is called a bonfire. Children push newspaper into old clothes to make something that looks like a man.

They call it a 'guy', after Guy Fawkes, and sometimes they carry the guy around the streets to show people. They say: 'Penny for the guy', and ask people for money for fireworks.

Some people have a bonfire with fireworks in their garden, but fireworks are expensive, so often people have one big party together in a park or a field. It is usually very cold in November, so they have hot food and drinks to keep warm.

And every year, before the government comes to the Houses of Parliament, people go through the building and look carefully for gunpowder!

