

October 31

Memory verse:

Thus saith the Lord,
Stand ye in the ways, and see,
and **ask for the old paths**,
where is the good way,
and walk therein,
and ye shall find rest for your souls.

But they said,
We will not walk therein.

Jeremiah 6:16

Tiny children could learn the words in bold. More about today's memory verse in tomorrow's lesson.

Something to read from engineering history

Last month we looked at how the old Thames walls were discovered.¹ Today we continue the story of the control of the Thames.



The picture above shows the Thames Barrier. Between each of the strange shaped piers in the middle of the river is a stainless steel barrier or gate which can be raised. In the picture the barriers are not visible because they are resting under the water on the river bed.² The purpose of the barrier is to prevent flooding in central London. This could be caused when a high tide coincides with weather conditions that create a larger than normal flow of water down the river. When the barriers are raised the upstream area is protected from the rising tide. To close all the barriers takes an hour and a half.³ The water level in the downstream area rises when the barrier is raised and here the embankments have been built up to 7.2m above sea level and strengthened to prevent flooding. On **31st October** 1982, the Thames Barrier became operational when all the gates were raised into place for the first time.

Construction of the Thames Barrier began in 1974. It received its first test in February 1983 when it was first raised in response to a flood warning. From then until 19 Mar 2007, the barrier was

¹ See the lesson for 8th September.

² You can see how this works here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp4Y1HrRBD0>

³ Time lapsed video of the barrier closing can be seen here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHefDLYnapc>. Best watched with sound off. There is no commentary.

raised 100 times in response to potential floods. It is also tested every month and also at least once a year at high tide.

The Barrier was designed to function until 2030 but in fact it is unlikely to be replaced before 2070. One of the reasons for this is very interesting. The Environment Agency says that it will not need replacing partly because it was designed to allow for a rise in sea level of 8mm per year. In other words, 2030 was the year in which it had been predicted that the sea level rise would reach a point where a higher barrier would start to be needed. The Environment Agency says *this has not been happening*, despite the warnings of global warming and associated sea level rise.⁴

Something to think about

I would be surprised if you have not noticed that today is Hallowe'en. All the shops have found it a very good way of selling extra sweets and also lots of special Hallowe'en goods that people would not buy otherwise. But what exactly is Hallowe'en and how did it start?

Most experts say that it all began in the days of the ancient Celts. They lived in Britain and all along the Atlantic edge of Western France and Spain down as far as Morocco and shared a common language, long before Christianity came to Britain. When the harvest season was over, the food gathered in and the hard work done, the Celts had a festival called Samhain. The children of Israel were commanded by God to bring him the first fruits of their harvest under the old system of sacrifices. God gave them this sacrificial system to help them understand that one day Christ would come and be the sacrifice for sin. Bringing the first fruits to God of everything they grew helped the children of Israel remember that everything was provided by God and belongs to Him. Is this what the Celts were doing?



No! The Celts were a pagan people. They had lost the knowledge of the true God. They thought that there was a world of physical things (the world we can see) and a world of spiritual things (the world we cannot see). Dead people were in the spirit world too. They thought that at Samhain, it was possible to get through the barrier that separated the two worlds. Their priests would have huge bonfires lit and they would pray to their spirit gods. The breaching of the barrier between the spirit world and the physical world worked both ways. They expected that spirits would cross it into the physical world. To protect themselves from being stolen by the spirits they would dress up as animals or monsters to frighten the spirits away.

By the 7th century, the leaders of the church were moving away from the teachings of the Bible. Many of the traditions, customs and beliefs which had to be set aside at the Reformation⁵ were growing up. Special saints days⁶ were one such tradition. November 1st was called All Souls' Day, a day commemorating the dead. The idea was to replace Samhain by converting the festival into a church feast or "church ale". Like the Hebrews in the Bible, the Celts continued the tradition (begun by God himself in Genesis 1) of starting each new day in the evening rather than the morning. That is how **October 31st** became All Hallows E'en or Hallowe'en.

4 See the lesson for 9th May on graphs.

5 See below.

6 See lesson for 28th January (yet to come).

The Reformation, when it arrived in England, dealt a blow to such practices. They lingered on in remoter areas or as superstitions practised surreptitiously, which, of course, added to their mysterious and “magical” character. After the foiling of the gunpowder plot,⁷ however, the major celebration of Guy Fawkes Night on 5th November soon absorbed the remnants of All Hallows E'en and replaced it with an exuberant celebration of deliverance from Roman Catholic tyranny and the saving of Parliament – complete with bonfires.

In Ireland, where the Reformation never really took hold, All Souls' Day continued to fascinate the people. The poor would visit the houses of wealthier families and receive pastries called soul cakes in exchange for a promise to pray for the souls of the homeowners' dead relatives. This custom was called “souling.” It was later taken up by children, who would go from door to door asking for gifts such as food, money and ale.

What about the pumpkin face carvings? These Jack-o-lanterns also came from Ireland and parts of Scotland and originated in the 19th century. An Irish myth about a man nicknamed “Stingy Jack,” was the starting point. He was said to have tricked the Devil and was forced to roam the earth with only a burning coal in a turnip to light his way. Superstitious people carved scary faces into turnips or potatoes and placed them on windowsills or near doors to frighten away Stingy Jack and other wandering evil spirits – a lingering remnant of the idea that the barrier between the two worlds was broken down at this time of year.

And there the matter would probably have rested with Guy Fawkes Night in nominally Protestant areas and Hallowe'en in Catholic ones. However, sadly, the superstition crossed the Atlantic to America. Here there was no Guy Fawkes Night to supplant it. At first only Catholic-dominated Maryland and some other southern colonies had Halloween celebrations since early America was largely Protestant, in name at least. But in the mid-19th century, millions of Irish fleeing the Irish Potato Famine arrived in America, bringing their Halloween superstitions with them.

At this point Halloween customs in the USA diverge completely from those in Britain. The Irish immigrants celebrated as they did back in their homeland—especially by playing tricks. In the late 1800s, common Halloween tricks in America included placing farmers' wagons and livestock on barn roofs and uprooting vegetables in gardens. But as Halloween celebration moved from the rural areas into the American cities, the behaviour of the participants worsened.

The Economic depression of the 1930s made things worse in the USA. Boys would steal or commit acts of vandalism and in 1933 things reached such a pitch that the evening was called “Black Halloween”. Telegraph poles were sawn down, fire hydrants opened to cause flooding, fires were started and windows broken.

As a response to this, organisations such as the Scouts and the YMCA as well as schools began to offer alternative, non destructive Halloween entertainments including parties, parades, carnivals, dressing up and competitions. The question “Trick or Treat?” seems to have originated in the 1930s too, although the costumes came later. After the Second World War the “Trick or Treat?” custom became firmly established alongside the ending of sweet rationing.



⁷ See lesson for 5th of November.

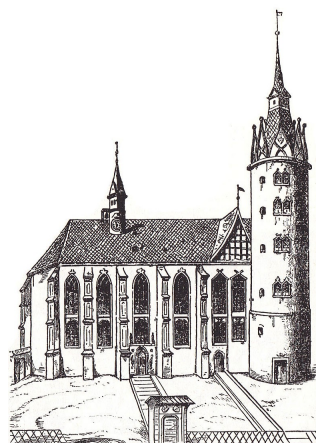
You will notice that all the familiar elements of modern Halloween, although very ancient in underlying origin, began in the USA. When did they reach Britain? The answer is only about 30 years ago! Before that British children were more likely to have a Guy dressed in old clothes and pushed about on a wheel barrow or old pram as a prop for the traditional British request, “Penny for the Guy?” which did not involve any threat of a “trick” if no “treat” was forthcoming! Any money collected would be used to buy fireworks for 5th of November.⁸ The children from Caernarfon in the 1950s pictured above are typical. Their Welsh sign reads, “A Penny for the Old Guy”.

Having gone through the history of Hallowe'en from the earliest times we can establish that it does not have anything to commend it. It is pagan in origin, Catholic in development and in its most recent form irrelevant to Britain. Better stick with Guy Fawkes Night!

Something to celebrate

If you want to have a celebration on **31st October** and you don't want to celebrate Halloween (who would after what we just read about it?) Reformation Day could be a good alternative.

Reformation Day has been celebrated since at least 1567, although not always on exactly the same date. Nowadays it is always **31st October** because it was on that date in 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. You can see the church in the picture on the left. We looked at this important event in the lesson for 16th July. If you did not do that lesson it might be good to look at the part about Luther today. In today's optional resources file you will also find H E Marshall's retelling of the event. Some say it was no accident that Luther chose this date. A large number of ordinary people would be coming to the church that day (All Saint's Day) and his theses would thus get maximum exposure.



Something to write



Theses is a plural word. The singular form is *thesis*. But what is a thesis? I looked in Samuel Johnson's Dictionary (which you may remember from the lesson on 15th April) to find a definition. He says:

“THE'SIS. *n.s.* [*these*, Fr. *thèse*.] A position; something laid down; affirmatively or negatively.”

In other words, a thesis is proposition or a statement. It may be stated for discussion or it may be a statement supported by arguments.

Here is the first of Martin Luther's 95 Theses:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

⁸ By Geoff Charles - Children from Bontnewydd, Caernarfon, collecting for the “Guy”, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=38725639>

You can see from this that the 95 Theses were of the type that are statements set out for discussion. Here is an example of a thesis that is a statement supported by arguments:

Toast is the best food for breakfast because it is nutritious, simple to prepare, inexpensive and tasty.

If you look at this thesis you will see that there is a statement (Toast is the best food for breakfast) and some supporting arguments (it is nutritious, simple to prepare, inexpensive and tasty).

Look out for theses in what you read. Even adverts contain theses! We in Britain live in a society where there is democracy and ideas can be freely discussed. Being able to form one's ideas into a supported thesis is an important skill in such a society. A thesis can also form an important part of essay writing. The main point of an essay can often be found expressed as a thesis in the opening paragraph of the essay.

Try your hand at writing some supported theses yourself. You could begin by thinking of your own favourite breakfast food. Or what about a book you have enjoyed reading? Here is my thesis about one of my favourite books:

The Tale of Peter Rabbit is one of the best children's books of the twentieth century because it is simple, has a wide vocabulary and an engaging plot, is illustrated with charming detailed pictures and has a useful moral.

If you choose a topic such as one of your hobbies or interests you may be able to expand your thesis into a complete essay by following the thesis with a short paragraph about each of the supporting statements.

Something to sing



Whether or not you celebrate today as Reformation Day it would be a good idea to sing an English translation of Luther's famous hymn "Eine Feste' Burg ist Unser Gott" today. You will find it in your hymn book translated as "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" or "A Safe Stronghold Our God is Still." On the left you can see it as Martin Luther originally wrote it. Can you see his signature at the bottom of the page? The original rhythm which you see here is much more varied than in the version we now sing as it has been smoothed out over the years.⁹

⁹ You can hear what it would have sounded like in Luther's day here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uI7QMtXBLgY>