



November 1
Festival: All Saints Day

Germany and England began celebrating a feast of all martyrs and saints on 1 November in the 8th century, instead of on 13 May, as was done in Rome; eventually the rest of Western Christendom also adopted the November date. Although in itself a joyous festival, it was also the eve of All Souls' Day, so in medieval times it became customary to pray for the dead on this date. At dusk, torchlit processions and church vigils were held, and bells were rung till midnight. At the Reformation the custom was forbidden, but many people were defying the ban and ringing church bells as late as the 1580s. Later still, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, some villagers in Lancashire and Derbyshire would light small fires in the fields at midnight on All Saints' Day, to see in All Souls, and kneel round them to pray for their dead.

This date falls between Halloween and All Souls, so in those areas around Shropshire and Staffordshire where souling was prevalent, All Saints did not have a separate identity but was swamped by these other two festivals. In other areas, however, a range of customs took place on this day, though none of them seems to be widespread, or at least widely reported. At Goadby (Leicestershire) in the 18th century, a children's bonfire custom is recorded. In Derbyshire it was customary to strew flowers on the graves of departed loved ones. In Hampshire and the Isle of Wight special cakes were made and eaten. A 19th-century love divination is reported from Worcestershire as special to All Saints' Day: 'A young woman took a ball of new worsted and holding it in her fingers, threw the ball through the open window at midnight, saying "Who holds?" It was assumed that her future husband would pick up the worsted, mention his name, and disappear' (*N&Q for Worcestershire* (1856), 190).