Footnoted Folklore: Robert Burns's Halloween

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Robert Burns & Friends

essays by W. Ormiston Roy Fellows

presented to G. Ross Roy

edited by Patrick Scott and Kenneth Simpson

This volume of essays about the Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759-1796) pays tribute to the distinguished Burns scholar G. Ross Roy. Subjects covered include writers who influenced Burns; aspects of the writing of Burns and that of his friends and contemporaries; and Burns's influence on later writers. The volume also includes essays on Ross Roy's own accomplishments and on the Burns collection he built (now at the University of South Carolina), together with a checklist of his published writings.

G. Ross Roy, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature, founded the journal Studies in Scottish Literature in 1963, and as its editor for nearly fifty years he has had a central role in establishing international academic recognition for the field. His own scholarly work includes the standard Letters of Robert Burns (2 vols., Clarendon Press, 1985). His contributions to Scottish literature have earned him honorary doctorates from the Universities of Edinburgh (2002) and Glasgow (2009).

The contributors are all former W. Ormiston Roy Visiting Fellows at the University of South Carolina.

This book is also available in a print edition (ISBN: 978-1439270974) through the usual on-line vendors. It is not available for direct purchase from the editors or the University of South Carolina.

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Robert Burns helped to popularize the word "Halloween" with his 1785 poem of the same name. So where does the name itself come from? According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, it's actually two words smushed together. “Hallow” — or holy person — refers to the saints celebrated on All Saints' Day, which is November 1. The “een” part of the word is a contraction of “eve” — or evening before. So basically, Halloween is just an old-fashioned way of saying “the night before All Saints’ Day” — also called Hallowmas or Robert Burns (25 January 1759 – 21 July 1796), also known familiarly as Rabbie Burns, the National Bard, Bard of Ayrshire and the Ploughman Poet and various other names and epithets, was a Scottish poet and lyricist. He is widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland and is celebrated worldwide. He is the best known of the poets who have written in the Scots language, although much of his writing is in English and a light Scots dialect, accessible to an audience beyond Scotland. He also wrote in What Is Burns Night? Five years after Robert Burns died, a group of his friends got together to remember him and his poetry. The tradition became established and now, every year on his birthday, 25th January, Scots all round the world celebrate Burns Night with a Burns Supper which follows a format similar to the original dinner (often with much toasting and drinking of whisky)! Why not include the kids in your Burns Night celebrations, or hold a family Burns Supper? We have lots of ideas for Burns Night activities for kids below, as well as suggestions for food and printables to help your celebration go smoothly! Learn a little about Robert Burns and enjoy a collection of colouring pages, printables of all sorts, and worksheets. You can even learn to draw Robert Burns yourself! Robert Burns. Curiously, though, Burns was not the first Scottish poet to write a poem about Halloween. That mantle goes instead to a largely forgotten poet, John Mayne of Dumfries, who wrote a Halloween poem five years before Burns, in 1780. Mayne's poem mentions the use of pranks at Halloween, reminding us that 'trick or treat' far from being an American invention, was a Scottish tradition before the Americans rebranded it. Although it's not Robert Burns's most celebrated poem, ‘Halloween’ is a poem of celebration. And, like so many of Burns's more famous works, it's about a specific social occasion. Share this: Tweet.