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THE EARLIEST MENTION OF HALLOWEEN? JOHN MIRK'S "FESTIVALL" OR "FESTIAL" OR "LIBER FESTIVALIS"

This evening I happened to come across Lisa Morton, *The Halloween Encyclopedia* (2011). I can see some errors in it, but on the whole it is an admirable effort. On p.148, under "Parties", we find this statement:

One of the earliest written mentions of Halloween, from the 1493 *Festivall*, contains this description of what sounds like a contemporary Halloween party: "Good frendes suche a daye ye shall haue all halowen daye."

Appendix I : Chronology of Halloween, (p.203), has the first mention of halloween as:

1493—*Festivall* mentions celebrating Halloween with "good frendes"

There is no reference, unfortunately. What on earth is "Festivall"?

The old Bodleian "Catalogus Librorum Impressorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae" vol 2., p.40 (online [here](#)) tells us of a "Liber festivalis [anglice]" printed in Westmonesterio [by W. de Worde] in 1493 - this is perhaps the source of the date given above -, and below also of "The boke that is callid festivall" printed at Oxford by Theod. Rood and Th. Hunt in 1486. None of this is easily accessible, and what is the book anyway?

Some intensive googling later, I discover that it is a book composed in the late 1380s by the Augustinian canon John Mirk, and one of the most commonly printed English books before 1500. It is a sermon collection, organised by saint's day, and written in English rather than Latin. The sermons usually contain stories and anecdotes. The book is today often referred to as "John Mirk's *Festial*".

The standard edition is Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk), *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe; series: Early English Text Society extra series XCVI, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. for the Early English Text Society, 1905. This thankfully is [online at Archive.org here](#). Unfortunately it is printed in Middle English, complete with weird letters. The text is readable enough, with a bit of effort. There is a glossary at the back.

A new edition is [in progress by Susan Powell](#), but this I was unable to access.

I have not been able to find the text given, not even by searching for "frend". Possibly Morton used the more up-to-date edition? But on [p.266](#), we find the start of the sermon for All Saints Day (click to enlarge):

64.

DE FESTO OMNIUM SANCTORUM SERMO BREUIS.

Good men and woymen, such a day N. 3e schull haue a solen fest yn all holy chyrche, pat ys, pe fest of all halowes of Heuen.

4 Wherfor yn worschyppe of God and all pes seyntys 3e schull fast pe euen, and come to pe chyrch to pe fyrst euensong, and on pe morow to matens, and to masse, and to pe secunde evensong, and worschip God and all hys haloues for oure neglegence of all pe

8 3ere before. Then 3e schull know pat þys fest was ordenet to gret helpe of all cryston pepull fore þre skylles pat þer ben, pat ys: for a tempull halowyng, for omissyons fullyng, and for neelygence clansyng.

12 Fyrst hit was ordeynet for a tempull halowyng. For when pat pe Romaynes wern lordes of all pe world, þay maden a tempull yn Rome rownde as a dofhowse, and callet hyt Pantyon, and setten yn pe mydyll of pe tempull an ymage pat was pe cheff mawmete

16 of Rome, and þen of yche a lond anopir ymage¹ rownde all aboute by pe wall, and pe nome of pe lond pat pe ymage was of wrytton vndyr his fote. And all wern made so wyth nygramancy, pat when any lond turnet from pe Emperour of Rome, anon pat

20 ymage of pat lond turnet hys face to pe wall and his bake to pe ymage of Rome. So, when pe byschoppys comen ynto pe tempull and seen any ymage turnet, þay loket what lond pat ymage was of, and soo 3eoden forth and told pe Emperour. And þen he wold

24 gedyr a gret ost, and send þedyr and sett hom yn rest and pece a3eyne. Then duret pis tempull tyll pe pope² Boniface pe furþ come. The whech 3ede to pe Emperour pat was callet Foca, and prayde forto 3eue hym pe tempull pat he myght put out of hit pe

28 multutud || of fendes, and halow hit yn pe worschyp of oure lady 152 a and of all martyres; and soo he dydde. Then aftyr com anoper pope² pat was callet Gregory, and he ordeynet þys day forto be halowet yn worschip of God and of all pe seyntys, and so com-

32 mawndet all holy chyrche forto do to þis fest as furst was begonnen.

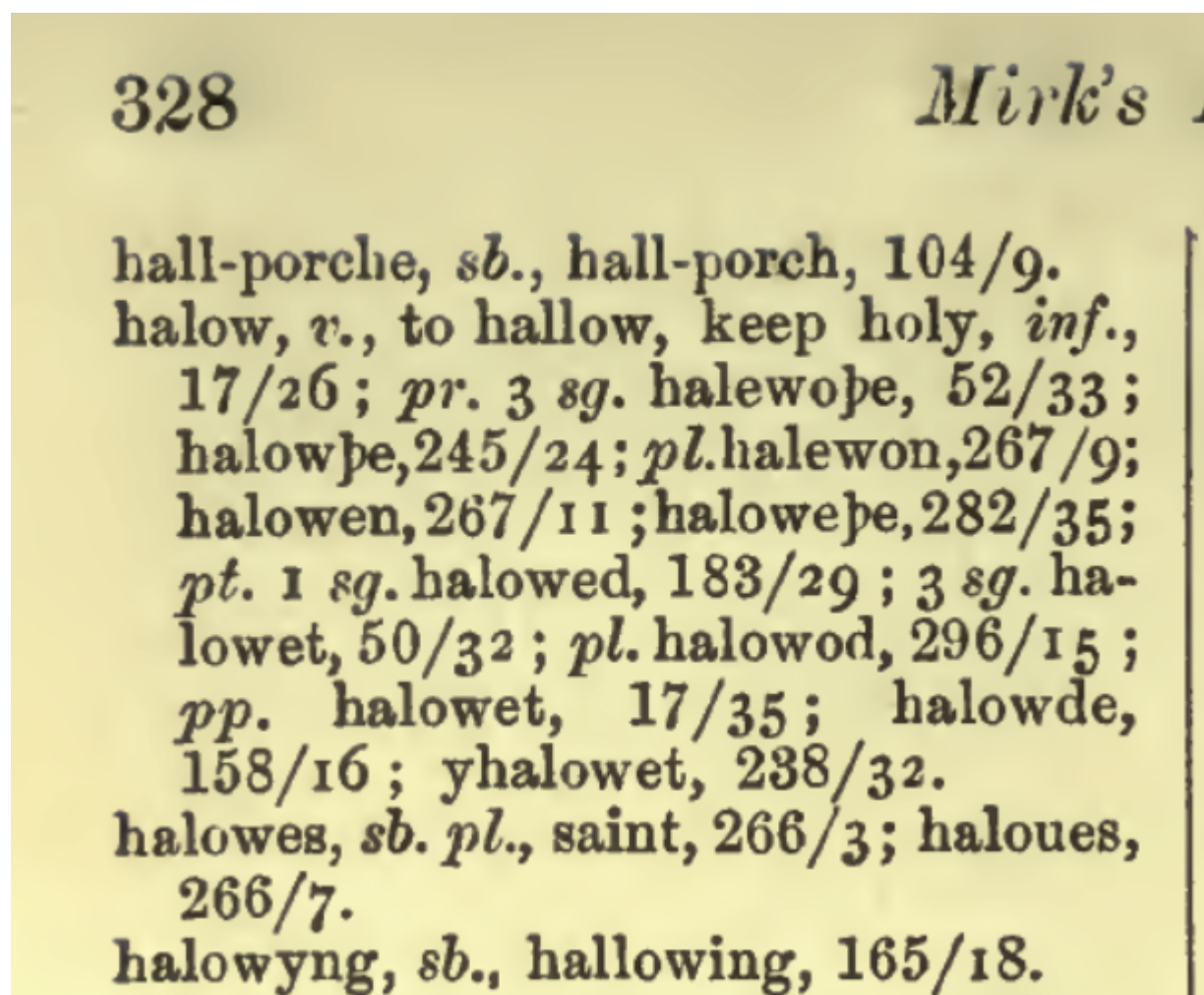
This fest was alsoo ordeynet of pe same pope², forto be fulfullet

¹ MS. ymages.

² pope scratched out.

It gives a history of the celebration of All Saint's Day, referencing Pope Gregory (IV).

The text uses "halowen" to mean "hallow, keep holy", rather than Halloween. This is confirmed by the glossary at the end, on p.328:



This all rather suggests that Morton is in a mistake here - that this is not a reference to Halloween at all.

All the same, the *Halloween Encyclopedia* is both useful and interesting. I sympathised entirely with the statement in the preface about "sources":

Unfortunately, many of those source books are little more than collections of fairy tales. They often seem to have been poorly researched, and displayed prejudice or predilection on the part of their authors.

So it still is.
