

## **History of Wicca in England: 1939 to the Present Day**

by Julia Phillips

### ***Introduction to the 2004 Revised Edition by Julia Phillips***

*This chapter is adapted from a talk I gave at the Australian Wiccan Conference in Canberra, 1991. It is mainly about the early days of Wicca in England – specifically what we now call Gardnerian and Alexandrian traditions.*

*The notes from which the original talk was derived were compiled during the 1980s from a myriad of sources, and were intended only for private use within my own coven. I did not gather the material alone – Paul Greenslade and Rufus Harrington were equally involved in the research, and it gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to record their important contribution in this introduction.*

*When I immigrated to Australia at the end of 1988, I quickly discovered that very few Australian Wiccans had a very detailed concept of the origins of Wicca or of their own place within the Wiccan family. I therefore accepted an invitation to speak on the history of Wicca at the 1991 Australian Wiccan Conference, and consolidated the notes mentioned above into a lecture intended to clarify to Australian Wiccans how the path came to be and where they fitted in. It was for this reason that I included information and anecdotes about influential people within the Craft (though I initialized names where those people were not known publicly).*

*The lecture was subsequently published in the collected papers of the Conference in a limited numbered edition of 200 copies. From there, it was later posted to the internet and now exists on over 500 websites in a non-tarted up form. This, in case you were wondering, is its first appearance in the sort of format you can put in your bookshelf.*

*In September 2002, the owners of [www.gardnerian.com](http://www.gardnerian.com) contacted me to ask for permission to place the lecture on the site, and also to see whether I had any plans to revise the text. I hadn't ever thought about it, but on reflection it seemed a good idea as a great deal of material had become available since the 1980s, and it would give me the opportunity to correct some errors and provide some additional information.*

*In closing, I would like to record my thanks to Ronald Hutton and Philip Heselton for their outstanding research on the subject of Gerald Gardner and the origins and development of British Wicca. Their work goes way beyond the simple lecture that you see here, and I am indebted to both of them for material used in this revised copy. This 2004 version of the lecture has also been edited, tweaked and twiddled about with by Liam Cyfrin especially for this anthology. Any errors that remain in the text are, however, almost certainly the author's, and the erudite souls she mentioned above should not be blamed for any inaccuracies.*

### **GBG 101**

As Professor Ronald Hutton of the University of Bristol has observed (in his foreword to *Wiccan Roots* by Philip Heselton, Capall Bann, 2000), Wicca is “the only religion [as opposed to denomination] which England has ever given the world.” From its humble

beginnings it spread throughout Europe and North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and today there are also Wiccans in Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Fiji, and probably a great many more places I know nothing about. The areas of biggest growth have been in North America and Australia, where the numbers of Wiccans/Witches – according to the latest census data – exceed that in its homeland.

There are, of course, numerous other forms of Witchcraft still thriving that have as much to do with Gerald Gardner as Tibetan Buddhism has to do with a certain stable in Bethlehem (and please try hard not to draw any loopy inferences from that comparison), but Hutton is, as ever, right on the money when it comes to tracing the primary source of the modern intermingling of Pagan revivalism and practical Witchcraft to a select number of English ladies and gentlemen who were, by divine intervention or otherwise, clearly in the right place at the right time. Would the Craft today as practiced in the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so many other lands exist if it were not for these individuals? It's hard to determine, and fortunately academic. Gardner, Valiente and the other founders of contemporary Wicca were indeed around when they were needed, and their legacy continues to change lives on a daily basis.

To understand the Craft today, it is necessary to examine where it came from. To this end, there are three main strands of this I intend to examine in this chapter: first, Gerald Brousseau Gardner's claim of traditional initiation and its subsequent development; secondly, magical traditions to which Gardner would have had access; and thirdly, literary sources.

As we look at these three main threads, it is important to bear in mind that Gardner was 55 years old at the time of his claimed initiation, that he had spent many years in Malaysia, and had an enormous interest in magic, folklore and mythology. By the time he published *High Magic's Aid*, he was 65, and he was 75 when *The Meaning of Witchcraft* appeared. He died in 1964, at the age of 79.

Gardner was born in 1884, and spent a great deal of his childhood, and most of his working adult life, overseas. His adult years were spent mainly in Malaysia, with a period of three years in Borneo. Between 1900 and his retirement in 1936, Gardner made four visits to England, each for a period of several months.

Upon his permanent return to England in 1936, Gardner and his wife Donna took a flat in London, and joined a naturist (nudist) club in Finchley, North London. Gardner found the winters in London hard though and, in 1936-37 and 1937-38, took long holidays to Cyprus where he found the inspiration for his novel, *A Goddess Arrives*.

The Gardners remained in London until the threatened outbreak of war in 1938 caused them to seek a home in the country. Probably through friends made at the naturist camp, Gardner was introduced to the New Forest area, and he purchased a house at Highcliffe, a small town between Poole and Lymington in Dorset. Very soon after moving there, Gardner came into contact with the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship

and the Rosicrucian Theatre near Christchurch, and it is thought that he met his fellow Coven-members there.

I chose 1939 as my arbitrary starting point as that was the year that Gerald Gardner claimed that he was initiated into a Coven of the Old Religion that met in the New Forest area of Hampshire. In his own words:

“I realised that I had stumbled upon something interesting; but I was half-initiated before the word, ‘*Wica*’ which they used hit me like a thunderbolt, and I knew where I was, and that the Old Religion still existed. And so I found myself in the Circle, and there took the usual oath of secrecy, which bound me not to reveal certain things.” (Gerald Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, 1959.)

It is interesting that in this quote, Gardner spells Wicca with only one “c” – in the earlier *High Magic’s Aid* (1949) and *Witchcraft Today* (1954) the word “*Wicca*” is not even used. His own derivation for the word, given in *The Meaning of Witchcraft*, is as follows:

“As [the Dane and Saxon invaders of England] had no witches of their own they had no special name for them; however, they made one up from ‘*wig*’ an idol, and ‘*laer*’, learning, ‘*wiglaer*’ which they shortened into ‘*Wicca*’. It is a curious fact that when the witches became English-speaking they adopted their Saxon name, ‘*Wica*’.”

In *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* (Hale, 1973), Doreen Valiente did not have an entry for Wicca but, when discussing Witchcraft, mentioned a Saxon derivation from the word “*Wicca*” or “*Wicce*”. In *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft* (Hale, 1989), however, she rejected this Saxon theory in favour of Professor Russell’s derivation from the Indo-European root “*Weik*” which relates to things connected with magic and religion.

Doreen Valiente (1922-1999) strongly supported Gardner’s claim of traditional initiation, and published the results of her successful attempt to prove the existence of Dorothy Clutterbuck, reputedly the High Priestess of the Coven into which Gardner was initiated, in an appendix to *The Witches’ Way* by Janet and Stewart Farrar (Hale, 1984). It is a marvelous piece of investigation, but proving that Old Dorothy existed does not, of course, prove that she was a Witch or that she initiated Gardner. More recent research suggests that there is another contender for Gardner’s initiator, a woman known as “Dafo” but whose real name was Edith Woodford-Grimes, and in Philip Hesleton’s latest book – *Gerald Gardner and the Cauldron of Inspiration* (Capall Bann, 2003) – he makes a strong case for Rosamund Sabine, known as “Mother Sabine.”

In his book, *Ritual Magic in England* (Neville Spearman, 1970), occultist Francis King offers some anecdotal evidence in support of Gardner’s claims. It is only fair to point out, however, that in the same book he virtually accuses Moina Mathers of murder, based upon a misunderstanding of a story told by Dion Fortune. With that caveat, I’ll recount the tale in full.

King relates that in 1953, he became acquainted with Louis Wilkinson, who wrote under the pen-name of Louis Marlow, and had contributed essays to Crowley's *Equinox*. Wilkinson later became one of Crowley's literary executors. King says that in conversation, Wilkinson told him that Crowley had claimed to have been offered initiation into a Witch Coven, but that he refused, as he didn't want to be bossed around by a bunch of women. (This story is well-known and is frequently repeated, but it is almost impossible to track down the origin.)

Wilkinson then proceeded to tell King that he had become friendly with members of a Coven operating in the New Forest area, and he thought that while it was possible that they derived their existence from Margaret Murray's *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (OUP, 1921), he felt that they were rather older. King draws the conclusion that these Witches were the very same as those who initiated Gardner. King claims that the conversation with Wilkinson took place in 1953, although *Ritual Magic in England* was not published – or presumably written – until 1970. However, on September 27, 1952, *Illustrated* magazine published a feature by Allen Andrews, which included details of a working by “the Southern Coven of British Witches” where seventeen men and women met in the New Forest to work magic intended to repel an invasion by Hitler.

Wilkinson had told King of this working during their conversation, which King believes to be proof that such a Coven existed. Despite some differences in the two stories, it is possible that they are reporting the same event, but as Wilkinson's conversation with King came after the magazine article, we shall never know.

Of one thing we can be certain though: whatever its origin, modern Wicca derives from Gardner. There may, of course, be other traditional, hereditary Witches, but even if they are genuine, then it is unlikely that they would have been able to “go public” had it not been for Gardner.

There have been many claims of “hereditary” origin, none of them able to be proven one way or the other. Roy Bowers, who used the pseudonym Robert Cochrane, was perhaps the best known of these controversialists. Doreen Valiente describes her association with him in *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, and the Roebuck Tradition, which is still active in the USA today, derives directly from Cochrane via Joe Wilson. *Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed* by Evan John Jones with Doreen Valiente (Hale, 1990) describes a tradition derived from Robert Cochrane. Alex Sanders, of course, is another who claimed hereditary lineage, and like Cochrane, deserves his own place in this history, and we'll get to both of them later.

Many people have been suspicious of Gardner's claims, and have accused him of making the whole thing up. They suggest that the Wicca is no more than the fantasy of an old man colored by a romantic imagination. One particularly virulent attack upon Gardner came from Charles Cardell, writing under the pseudonym of Rex Nemorensis.

One of Gardner's initiates who is still active in the Wicca today [at the time of the original lecture] has an interesting tale to tell about Cardell, whom he knew:

“Cardell claimed to be a Witch, but from a different tradition to Gardner’s ... He managed to get a woman called Olive Green (Florannis) into Gardner’s Coven, and told her to copy out the Book of Shadows so that Cardell could publish it, and destroy Gardner. He also contacted a London paper, and told them when and where the Coven meetings were held, and of course the paper got quite a scoop. Cardell led people in the Coven to believe that it was Doreen Valiente who had informed on them. Doreen had just left Gardner in a bit of a huff after a disagreement; another Coven member, Ned Grove, left with her. Anyway, the day the paper printed the exposure, Cardell sent Gardner a telegram saying, ‘Remember Ameth tonight’.” [Author’s note: “Ameth” was Valiente’s Craft name, and as it has already been published, I see no reason not to use it here.]

My informant also said that Olive Green was associated with Michael Houghton, owner of Atlantis Bookshop in Museum Street, London, and publisher of *High Magic’s Aid*. Through this association, she encountered Kenneth Grant of the OTO, although their association was not friendly.

Cecil Williamson, the original owner of the Witchcraft Museum on the Isle of Man, and later owner of the Witchcraft Museum in Boscastle, has also published a number of articles in which he states quite categorically that Gardner was an utter fraud, but he offers only anecdotes to support these allegations.

Although Gardner claimed his initiation occurred in 1939, we don’t really hear anything about him until 1949, when Houghton published *High Magic’s Aid*. This novel has very strong Solomonic leanings but, like Gardner’s own religious beliefs, it combined the more natural forms of magic with high ceremonial. In his introduction to the book, Gardner says that: “The Magical rituals are authentic, partly from *The Key of Solomon* (MacGregor Mathers’s translation) and partly from magical MSS in my possession.” Gardner did indeed have a large collection of such manuscripts, which passed with the rest of his goods to Ripley’s in Toronto after his death.

Scire was the name Gardner took as a member of Crowley’s branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis (my first edition copy of *High Magic’s Aid* is credited to “Scire” on the dust jacket, but to “Scire” on the frontispiece). Although it is generally agreed that his membership was purely nominal, he was certainly in contact with people like Kenneth Grant and Madeline Montalban (founder of the Order of the Morning Star). Gardner was given his OTO degree and Charter by Aleister Crowley, to whom he was introduced in 1946 by Arnold Crowther. As Crowley died in 1947, their association was not long-lived, but Crowther said that the two men enjoyed each other’s company.

So, after that brief introduction we can have a look at the first of the strands I mentioned.

## **Gardner and the Golden Dawn**

In 1888, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was born, beginning a renaissance of interest in the occult that has continued to the present day. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Golden Dawn to modern occultists; not only through its rituals, but also through its personalities and, of course, the Order's making available a large body of occult lore that would otherwise have remained unknown or hidden in obscurity. I will be looking at this body of occult lore with other literary influences later, and will here concentrate on the Order's rituals and personalities that have influenced Wicca.

We cannot look at the Golden Dawn in isolation from its own origins. It is descended from a myriad of esoteric traditions including Rosicrucianism, Theosophy and Freemasonry – the latter in its own right, as well as via the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA), a scholarly and ceremonial association open to Master Masons only.

Whether the German Lodge or its obliging representative Frau Sprengel actually existed is a matter still under debate but, either in fact or in spirit, these were the source for the *Cipher Manuscripts* which were used to found the Isis-Urania Lodge in 1888.

Isis-Urania was founded by Dr. William Wynn Westcott, Dr. William Woodman, and Samuel Liddell (“MacGregor”) Mathers. Not only were all three Master Masons, Westcott and Mathers were also members of the Theosophical Society. Most importantly though, the three were a ruling triumvirate that managed the affairs of the SRIA. This is significant, for the SRIA numbered among its members Hargrave Jennings, who is reputed to have been involved with a Pagan group at the end of the 19th century which drew its inspiration from Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*.

But back to the Golden Dawn. Whether the *Cipher Manuscripts* actually existed, or Westcott manufactured them is now largely irrelevant. Mathers was commissioned to edit the rituals into a workable shape, and thus the Golden Dawn was born. Members of the Isis-Urania Lodge at various times also included Allan Bennett, Moina Mathers, Aleister Crowley, Florence Farr, Maud Gonne, Annie Horniman, Arthur Machen, William Sharp (aka novelist “Fiona Macleod”), Arthur Waite and WB Yeats. Also associated were Lady Gregory, and GW Russell or “AE” whose *The Candle of Vision* was included in the bibliography of *The Meaning of Witchcraft*. The literary and Celtic influences within the Golden Dawn were immense.

From the Isis-Urania Lodge sprang all the others, including the so-called Dissident Orders derived through Crowley. It is this line that some commentators trace to modern Wicca, so it is upon the one that we will now concentrate.

Aleister Crowley was initiated into the Isis-Urania Lodge on November 18, 1898. He later quarrelled with Mathers, and in 1903 created his own Order, the Argenteum Astrum (Silver Star). In 1912, Crowley was initiated into the OTO, and in 1921, succeeded Theodor Reuss as its Chief.

According to Arnold Crowther's account, it was in 1946, a year before Crowley's death, that Crowley gave Gardner an OTO Charter. Itthell Colquhoun says only that it occurred in the 1940s, and further states that Gardner introduced material from the OTO – and, less directly, from the Golden Dawn – into “the lore of his covens.”

As Doreen Valiente also admits, “Indeed, the influence of Crowley was very apparent throughout the [Wiccan] rituals.” This, Gardner explained to her, was because the rituals he received from his Coven were very fragmentary, and in order to make them workable, he had to supplement them with other material. To give an example of some of the lines by Crowley which are rather familiar to modern Wiccans:

“I give unimaginable joys on earth; certainty, not faith, while in life; upon death, peace unutterable, rest, ecstasy; nor do I demand aught in sacrifice.” (*The Book of the Law*, (1904), ch 1, v 58.)

“I am Life, and the giver of Life, yet therefore is the knowledge of me the knowledge of death.” (*ibid*, ch 2, v 6.)

And of course, Crowley's Gnostic Mass has been immensely influential.

Not only poetry, but also magical practices in Wicca are often derived from Golden Dawn sources. For example:

- The method of casting the circle – the visualization of the circle and the pentagrams at the quarters – is based upon the standard Golden Dawn Pentagram Ritual;
- Both the concept of and word “Watchtowers” are from the Enochian system of Magic, passed to Wicca via the Golden Dawn (although I would like to make it very clear that their use within Wicca bears no relation to the use within Enochia – the only similarity is in the name);
- The Elements and colors generally attributed to the Quarters are those of the Golden Dawn;
- The weapons and their attributions are a combination of Golden Dawn, Crowley and *The Key of Solomon*.

In *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner says, “The people who certainly would have had the knowledge and ability to invent [the Wiccan rites] were the people who formed the Order of the Golden Dawn about seventy years ago ...”

The Golden Dawn was not the only influence upon Gardner. Freemasonry has also had a tremendous impact upon the Wicca. Not only were the three founders of Isis-Urania Temple Masons, so too were Crowley and Arthur Waite. Gardner and at least one member of the first Coven, Edith Woodford-Grimes, were both Co-Masons.

Gardner was also a friend of JSM Ward, who had published a number of books about Masonry. Doreen Valiente describes Ward as a “leading Mason” but Francis King refers to him as “a bogus Bishop ... who had written some quite good but far-fetched books on masonry, and who ran a peculiar religious-cum-occult community called The Abbey of Christ the King ...” However far-fetched Ward’s books may have been, we can assume that some of the many similarities between Wicca and Masonry are in some ways due to Ward’s influence. Some of these concepts and phrases include:

- The Three Degrees
- “The Craft”
- “So Mote It Be”
- The Challenge
- “Properly Prepared”
- The First Degree Oath (in part)
- Presentation of the Working Tools at First Degree.

It seems to me quite clear that even if Gardner received a traditional set of rituals from his Coven, they must have been exceptionally sparse, as the concepts that we know of as Wicca today certainly derive from ceremonial magic and Freemasonry to a very great extent. Indeed, Gardner always claimed that they were sparse.

It could be argued that all derive from a common source; that the appearance of a phrase or technique in one tradition does not automatically suggest that its appearance elsewhere means that the one was taken from the other. However, Gardner admits his sources in many cases, and Valiente confirms them in others, so I think it is safe to assume that the rituals and philosophy used by Wicca descended from the traditions of Freemasonry and ceremonial magic, rather than having been derived from a single common source. However, as D Hudson Frew points out in his commentary upon Aidan Kelly’s *Crafting the Art of Magic* (Llewellyn, 1991), the phenomena of the techniques and practices of ceremonial magic influencing folk magic and traditions is widely recognized by anthropologists, and certainly does not indicate plagiarism. And of course there are many traditional Witchcraft aspects in Wicca.

### **Leaf and Flower and Fruit**

Having looked at the development of the magical orders which resulted from the British occult revival of the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we can see where this ties in with Wicca and Gardner’s claim of traditional initiation. We can now move on to consider the convoluted family trees of modern Witchcraft.

Turning first at possible roots of the Gardnerian tree, we encounter two candidates for the title of “hereditary” sources of Gardner’s formulation of Wicca: the New Forest Coven and the Cumbrian Group, into which Eleanor Bone (1911-2001) claimed to have been initiated before meeting Gardner. (Eleanor Bone was one of Gardner’s High



Priestesses, and her “line” has been immensely important to the modern Wicca. She was featured in the magazine series, *Man, Myth and Magic*, and in her heyday she ran two Covens: one in Cumbria, and one in South London.)

Sybil Leek (1923-1983) refers in her later books to the existence of the Horsa Coven in the New Forest area, and there is also sometimes mention of a St. Alban’s group that pre-dates Gardner, but as far as I know, this is mistaken. The St. Albans group was Gardner’s own group, which, as far as we have been able to ascertain to date, did not pre-date him.

While on the subject of pre-Gardnerian Witchcraft, I will mention George Pickingill – briefly, as I think it extremely dubious that he had any connection with Gardner, or any other modern Wiccan.

Pickingill died in 1909, whilst Gardner was still in Malaysia. Eric Maple is largely responsible for the beginnings of the Pickingill myth, which were expanded by Bill Liddell (Lugh) writing in two early and influential Craft magazines, *The Wiccan* and *The Cauldron*. The articles were initially published throughout the 1970s, but *The Cauldron* continued to publish Lugh’s material for quite some time. I met Bill Liddell and his wife in Brisbane in 2001, and found them to be a charming couple and very hospitable. We spoke a little about George Pickingill, and Bill is aware that I am extremely sceptical of any relationship between Pickingill and Gardner, or indeed with any modern Wiccan tradition.

In the book, *The Dark World of Witches*, published in 1962, Maple tells of a number of village wise women and cunning men, one of whom was George Pickingill. There is a photograph included of an old man with a stick, holding a hat, who Maple identifies as Pickingill. This photograph has subsequently been re-used many times in books about Witchcraft and Wicca.

Issue number 31 of *Insight* magazine, dated July 1984, contains a very interesting letter from John Pope: “The photograph purporting to be Old George Pickingill is in fact a photo of Alf Cavill, a station porter at Ellstree, taken in the early 1960s. Alf is now dead, but he was no witch, and laughed over the photograph when he saw it.” However, a very respected Craft authority has told me that he believes the photo, which is in his possession, to be of Pickingill, and I have no reason to disbelieve him.

Although most of the many claims made about Pickingill seem extremely far-fetched, some could, with a stretch of the imagination, be accepted. Still, notions like Pickingill, an illiterate farm laborer, co-ordinating and supervising nine Covens across the breadth of the UK are staggering. I lived in a small village in Cambridgeshire in the 1980s, and the locals considered a trip to London (maybe an hour or two away) to be the journey of a lifetime. Just going to Kings Lynn (less than 20 miles away) was considered to be a lengthy trip. The claim that Pickingill supervised Covens over several counties beggars belief, and to accept that he had the likes of Allan Bennett and Aleister Crowley as his pupils bends credulity even further.

When we return to the more credible side of the Wiccan family tree, we encounter numerous names that many readers will find familiar, such as Doreen Valiente, Jack Bracelin, Monique Wilson, Pat and Arnold Crowther, and Lois Bourne (Hemmings).

Jack Bracelin is best remembered as the author of Gardner's biography, *Gerald Gardner, Witch* (first published in 1960; republished in 2000 by IHO Books). There have been suggestions that this book was actually written by Idries Shah and simply published under Bracelin's name, but I doubt the truth of that will be known unless an authenticated manuscript is discovered.

I have a copy of Bracelin's *Book of Shadows*, which it is claimed dates from 1949, although in *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft*, Doreen Valiente states that Bracelin was a "relative newcomer" in the mid-1950s. I have also been told by two different sources that Bracelin helped Gardner write "The Laws" of *Witchcraft*. In *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft*, Valiente states that she did not see these Laws until the mid-1950s, when she and her partner, Ned Grove, accused Gardner of concocting them in order to re-assert control over the Coven. As Bracelin was in the Gardner camp during the break-up of the group, it seems reasonable that he did in fact help with their composition. Alex Sanders increased the number of The Laws much later – these appeared in June Johns's book, *The King of the Witches* (Davies, 1969).

Although Doreen claims that the reason for the Coven break-up was the fact that Gardner and Bracelin were publicity crazy, there was another reason, which was the instatement of a new lady into the Coven, effectively replacing Doreen as High Priestess. This is believed to be behind the creation of Gerald's Law which states that the High Priestess will "gracefully retire in favour of a younger woman, should the coven so decide in council." Needless to say, Doreen was not impressed, and she and Ned left the Coven under very acrimonious circumstances. It was quite some time before Doreen had contact with Gardner again, and they never quite regained the degree of friendship that had previously existed.

Monique and Campbell "Scotty" Wilson are infamous, rather than famous, as Gardner's heirs who sold off his magical equipment and possessions after his death to Ripley's in the USA. Monique was the last of his Priestesses, and many Wiccans have not forgiven her for selling off all Gardner's possessions. Pat Crowther has been scathing about her in an interview, and although Doreen tells of the sale of Gardner's magical possessions to Ripley's in *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft*, she doesn't ever mention the Wilsons by name. In effect, the Craft closed ranks against them. (Fortunately, Richard and Tamarra James (of the Wiccan Church of Canada) managed to buy the bulk of Gardner's collection from Ripley's in 1987, and it is now back within the Craft and is available for initiates to consult and view.)

Eventually the Wilsons sold the Museum in Castletown and moved to Torremolinos, Spain, where they bought a café. Monique died nine years after selling the Museum. In the late 1990's I spoke to someone who knows the whereabouts of

Campbell, and can confirm that he did move to the USA after Monique's death and that he still has connections to an operational Coven.

Monique Wilson was, of course, influential in a way that she could never have imagined, when in the early 1960s she initiated Raymond Buckland who, with his then wife Rosemary, was subsequently very influential in the development of the Wicca in the USA. (See Ray's chapter in this book for further details on his remarkable career.)

Another well-known and somewhat controversial individual in Craft history is Robert Cochrane. Cochrane's origins are obscure, but I have been told that he was initiated into the Gardnerian tradition by someone I must refer to as CS (CS and partner, D, are fated to remain completely anonymous, and if it were not for the Cochrane connection are unlikely to have been remembered beyond their immediate circle). Cochrane met Doreen Valiente through a mutual acquaintance in 1964, and represented himself to her as a hereditary Witch, from a different tradition to Gardner's. Valiente states that he was contemptuous of what he called "Gardnerian" Witches – indeed, she believes he coined the adjective "Gardnerian." She also reports that she was completely taken in by Cochrane and, for a while, worked with him and "The Clan of Tubal Cain" as he described his tradition, which was also known as "The Royal Windsor Coven" or "1734."

The figures "1734" have an interesting history. In a letter to Joe Wilson dated "Twelfth Night 1966" Cochrane says:

"... the order of 1734 is not a date of an event but a grouping of numerals that mean something to a witch. One that becomes seven states of wisdom – the Goddess of the Cauldron. Three that are the Queens of the Elements – fire belonging alone to Man, and the Blacksmith God. Four that are Queens of the Wind Gods. The Jewish orthodoxy believe that whomever knows the Holy and Unspeakable name of God has absolute power over the world of form. Very briefly, the name of God spoken as Tetragrammaton ... breaks down in Hebrew to the letters YHVH, or the Adam Kadmon (The Heavenly Man). Adam Kadmon is a composite of all Archangels – in other words a poetic statement of the names of the Elements. So what the Jew and the Witch believe alike is that the man who discovers the secret of the Elements controls the physical world. 1734 is the witch way of saying YHVH." (Cochrane, 1966.)

Justine Glass (in *Witchcraft, The Sixth Sense – and Us*, Neville Spearman, 1965) and Doreen Valiente (in *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*) both mention a copper platter that bear the numerals "1724," a photo of which appears in Glass's book. Cochrane told Glass that the platter had been in his family for "several hundred years," only to admit to Valiente when challenged that this was not the case and to claim that it was the fault of the publishers who had muddled the captions of two photos. In fact, Doreen Valiente had bought that platter from a Brighton antique shop at the request of Robert Cochrane, who had asked for her help in finding a platter suitable for the ritual meal of cakes and wine. I

have not seen any explanation of the discrepancy between the “1734” of Cochrane’s 1966 letter, and the “1724” that occurs in published sources.

Although Valiente says that Cochrane’s group was small, it still proved to be remarkably influential. As well as Cochrane, his wife (whom Doreen refers to as “Jean”) and Doreen herself, there were others who are well-known today, and a man called Ronald White, who very much wanted to bring about a new age in England and was absorbed with the legends of King Arthur, the Once and Future King.

In *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft*, Doreen elaborates upon the circumstances surrounding the death of Cochrane: the bald facts are that he died at the Summer Solstice of 1966 of an overdose of prescribed sleeping pills and narcotic herbs. Craft tradition believes that he became in fact, and of his own choice, the male ritual sacrifice which is sometimes symbolically enacted at the height of Summer.

The Royal Windsor Cuveen disbanded after Cochrane died, only to be reborn from the ashes at Samhain that year under a new name – The Regency. All of its early members were from the Royal Windsor Cuveen, and they were under the leadership of Ronald White. Meetings were held in North London, at a place called Queens Wood. As well as White and Valiente, the group included “John Math” (founder of the Witchcraft Research Association in 1964, and editor of *Pentagram* magazine) and the founder of the Pagan Movement, Tony Kelly.

At The Regency’s height, there were frequently more than 40 in attendance at rites, which tended to be of the dramatic, Pagan kind rather than the ceremonial associated with high ritual magic. The group operated fairly consistently for over twelve years, finally disbanding in 1978. It proved to be of great importance to the development of the Wicca, although its existence was kept a fairly close secret, and even today, there are relatively few people who have heard of it.

Returning to Eleanor Bone’s line, we encounter a number of influential people whose initiatory lineage can traced to her and her initiates, Madge and Arthur. (It should be remembered, incidentally, that although Bone was initiated by Gardner, she also claimed hereditary status in her own right.) Madge and Arthur’s initiates include John and Jean Score. John Score was the business partner of Michael Houghton and the founder of the Pagan Federation, which remains very active today.

Houghton died under curious circumstances, which are briefly mentioned in *The Sword of Wisdom* by Ithell Colquhoun (Neville Spearman, 1975). My Craft source told me that this was actually a ritual that went badly wrong, and Houghton ended up on the wrong end of some fairly potent energies. There is an interesting anecdote about Houghton in *The Rebirth Of Witchcraft*, which is taken from *Nightside of Eden* by Kenneth Grant (Frederick Muller, 1973; recently reprinted by Mandrake Press), and agrees in some respect to the similar story that I was told some years earlier.

Apparently one evening in 1949, Kenneth Grant and his wife, Gardner, Dolores North (Madeline Montalban), and an unnamed Witch (probably Olive Green) met to perform a ritual together, supposedly to contact an extraterrestrial being. The material basis for the rite was a drawing by AO Spare. Soon after the rite commenced, a nearby bookseller (presumably Michael Houghton) turned up and interrupted proceedings. On hearing that Kenneth Grant was within, he declined to enter and wandered off. The rite was disrupted, and everyone gave up and went home.

Grant claims that as a result of disturbing this working, Houghton's marriage broke up, and that Houghton subsequently died in mysterious circumstances. (The Houghton divorce was a *cause célèbre*, in fact, with his wife suing him for cruelty because he boasted of being a Sagittarian while sneering at her because she was only a dingy old Capricorn!)

The interrupted ritual could well have taken place. Madeline Montalban had a flat near to Houghton's Atlantis Bookshop and would certainly have known both Grant and Houghton. She was also acquainted with Gardner, although her opinion of both him and the Wicca was rather poor. One of Montalban's students told me that she thought Gardner rather a fraud and ritually inept. She also had a very low opinion of Wiccans and refused to allow her own students to participate in Wiccan rites. The reason for this may lie in an anecdote which Doreen Valiente doesn't relate: the story goes that Montalban agreed to participate in a rite with Gerald, which turned out to involve her being tied up and tickled with a feather duster! The great lady was not amused.

Two more individuals with an important position in the post-Gardnerian family tree are Pat and Arnold Crowther, as it is from their line that the infamous Alex Sanders derives. It is no secret anymore that Alex – far from being initiated by his grandmother when he was seven, as he liked to tell people – was in fact turned down for initiation by Pat Crowther in 1961.

There are numerous rumors about how Alex obtained access to a Book of Shadows, but I believe that Ronald Hutton has cleared away many of the smoke screens by revealing the existence of two letters, written nine days apart in August and September 1963, addressed to Gerald Gardner. The first letter was from Alex; the second from a lady known as Pat Kopanski, who was a member of Pat and Arnold Crowther's Coven. The letters both confirm that Alex was initiated to First Degree by a High Priestess called Medea in March 1963, and that Pat Kopanski was initiated to Second Degree on the following day. This allowed Sanders and Kopanski to set up a Coven together.

Pat Crowther continues to dispute the legitimacy of the initiations, pointing to the fact that there is no mention of a High Priest officiating at the rites. In my experience, it is not uncommon for initiations to refer to the High Priestess alone (I can't recall mention of Eleanor Bone's High Priest, and yet no one, as far as I am aware, has ever questioned the legitimacy of initiations performed by her), so I would not dispute the claim on those grounds.

In *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, Valiente also states that Sanders was initiated by an ex-member of Pat Crowther's Coven, but adds that he later visited Gardner and was allowed to copy from his Book of Shadows. Craft tradition has always said that the main differences between the Alexandrian and Gardnerian Books of Shadows occur where Alex misheard, or miscopied something!

Alex needed a High Priestess and chose Maxine Morris for the role. Maxine was, and remains, a striking Priestess, and made a very good visual focus for Sanders's Alexandrian line and the Wiccan movement in general, both of which grew in leaps and bounds. In the late 1960s, Alex and Maxine were prolific initiators, and a number of their initiates have become well known. Their most famous initiates are almost certainly Janet and Stewart Farrar, who left them in 1971 to form their own Coven, first in England, and subsequently in Ireland. Through their many books, they have had enormous influence over the direction that the modern Craft has taken. Certainly in Australia, the publication of *What Witches Do* in 1971 was an absolute watershed. Stewart died in 2000 but Janet, in collaboration with Gavin Bone, maintains a consistent output of literature that makes their progressive form of Wicca more likely to become the "standard" than any other type.

Another notable Alexandrian initiate is Seldiy Bate who was originally magically trained by Madeline Montalban, and later then took initiation from Maxine and Alex. Her husband, Nigel, was also initiated by Maxine and Alex, and they have been "public" Witches for a number of years now, often appearing on television and radio, and in the press. Their background in ritual magic is expressed in the type of Coven that they run – a combination of Wicca and Ceremonial Magic.

In 1971, Alex and Maxine went their separate ways. For a number of years Maxine practiced the Liberal Catholic faith with her working partner, David Goddard, a Liberal Catholic Priest. In 1984, Maxine gathered together a group again, and started practicing a combination of Wicca, Qabalah and Liberal Catholicism. She and David separated in 1987, and since then her Coven has been exclusively Wiccan. In 1989, she married one of her initiates, Vincent, and they now live in North Wales.

Alex's history after the split was a little more sordid, with one girl he married, Jill, filling the gutter press with stories about Alex being homosexual and defrauding her of all her money to spend on his boyfriends. Alex weathered those storms as he had all others, however, and when he died in 1987 his funeral drew a large number of Witches to pay their respects.

### **The Shadows of Books**

I'd now like to focus upon the last of the strands which I believe has been influential upon the birth and development of Wicca – that of the literary traditions and sources to which Gardner would have had access. To a certain extent these are contiguous with the magical traditions described earlier, as nowhere is it suggested that Gardner ever worked

in a magical Lodge, and so we must assume that his knowledge came from the written form of the rites, rather than the practice of them.

From reading Gardner's books, it is quite apparent that Margaret Murray had a tremendous impact upon him. Her book *The God of the Witches* was published in 1931, and ten years previously, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* had appeared. *The God of the Witches* has been extremely influential on a number of people, and certainly inspired Gardner. In fact, *Witchcraft Today*, first published in 1954, contained a foreword by Murray. At this time, Murray's academic work on Witchcraft was still taken seriously, and she remained the contributor on the subject of Witchcraft for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* for a number of years. Her work has subsequently been largely discredited, although she remains a source of inspiration, if not historical accuracy.

In Gardner's day, the idea of a continuing worship of the old Pagan gods must have been a staggering concept, and in the second article in my series about Murray (published in *The Cauldron*), I made the point that Murray may have had to pretend scientific veracity in order to get her work published in such times. Don't forget that Dion Fortune had to publish her work privately, as did Gardner with *High Magic's Aid*. Carlo Ginzburg's excellent book, *Ecstasies* (Pantheon, 1991), also supports Murray's basic premise, although he regrets her historical deceptions.

There were numerous sources other than Murray, however. In 1899, Charles Godfrey Leland's *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* was published. Most of Crowley's work was available in published form during the pre- and post-war years, as were the texts written and translated by MacGregor Mathers and Waite. Also readily available were works such as *The Magus* by Francis Barrett and, of course, the many classics from which Gardner drew much inspiration.

Of particular importance would have been *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, which is still a standard reference book on any British Wiccan's bookshelf. This was published in 1952, three years after *High Magic's Aid* appeared, and two years before Gardner's first non-fictional book about Witchcraft. I would like to observe at this point that Graves has taken some very unfair criticism in respect of this book. *The White Goddess* was written as a work of poetry, not history, and to criticize it for being historically inaccurate is to miss the point. Unfortunately, I agree that some writers have referred to it as an "authority," thereby leading their readers up the garden path. This is not Graves's fault, however, nor do I believe it was his intention.

Another book that has had a profound influence on many Wiccans, and would undoubtedly have been well known by Gardner is *The Golden Bough* by Sir JG Frazer. Although the entire book was written based upon purely secondary research, it is an extensive examination of many Pagan practices from the Ancient World, and the emphasis of the Sacrificed God could certainly have been taken from here equally as well as from Murray. It is likely that some the Gardnerian ritual practices were derived from *The Golden Bough*, or from Frazer's own sources listed in its bibliography.

In *Witchcraft Today* Gardner mentions a number of authors when speculating where the Wiccan rites came from. He says that, “The only man I can think of who could have invented the rites was the late Aleister Crowley.” He continues, “The only other man I can think of who could have done it is Kipling.” He also mentions that, “Hargrave Jennings might have had a hand in them ...” and then allows that “Barrat [*sic*] of *The Magus*, circa 1800, would have had the ability to invent or resurrect the cult.”

It’s possible that these references are something of a damage control operation by Gardner, who, according to Doreen Valiente, was not too impressed when she kept telling him that she recognized passages in the Witch rites! *Witchcraft Today* was published the year after Valiente’s initiation, and perhaps by seeming to be genuinely interested in where the Rites came from, Gardner felt he might give the appearance of innocence of their construction!

As mentioned previously, Gardner also had a large collection of unpublished esoteric manuscripts that he used extensively, and one has only to read his books to realize that he was a very well-read man with wide-ranging interests. Exactly the sort of man who would be able to draw together a set of rituals if required.

The extensive bibliography to *The Meaning of Witchcraft* published in 1959 demonstrates this rather well. Gardner includes: *Magick in Theory and Practice* and *The Equinox of the Gods* by Crowley; *The Mystical Qabalah* by Dion Fortune; *The Goetia*; *The White Goddess* (Graves); Lady Charlotte Guest’s translation of *The Mabinogion*; *English Folklore* by Christina Hole; *The Kabbalah Unveiled* and *The Abramelin* by Mathers; both Margaret Murray’s books on Witchcraft; and Godfrey Leland’s *Gypsy Sorcery* – as well as a myriad of classic texts, from Plato to Bede.

Although this bibliography postdates the creation of Gardnerian Wicca, it certainly suggests the sources of Gardner’s inspiration. There are also several books listed which are either directly or indirectly concerned with sex magic, Priapic Cults or Tantra. Hargrave Jennings wrote a book called *The Rosicrucians, Their Rites and Mysteries*, which Francis King describes as being “concerned almost exclusively with phallicism and phallic images – Jennings saw the penis everywhere.” As mentioned earlier, Hargrave Jennings, a member of the SRIA, also belonged to a group described as a Coven, which met in the Cambridge area in the 1870s, and performed rituals based upon the classical traditions – specifically, from *The Golden Ass*. There is, however, no evidence to support this, except that there are often found references to a “Cambridge Coven” linked to Jennings’s name.

Many of the rituals we are familiar with today were later additions by Doreen Valiente, and these have been well documented by both her and the Farrars. Doreen admits that she deliberately cut much of the poetry by Aleister Crowley because she felt it to be unsuitable, and substituted either her own work, or poems from other sources such as the *Carmina Gadelica*.



Of course we can never really know the truth about the origins of the Wicca. Gardner may have been an utter fraud; he may have actually received a “Traditional” initiation; or, as a number of people have suggested, he may have created the Wicca as a result of a genuine religious experience, drawing upon his extensive literary and magical knowledge to create, or help create, the rites and philosophy.

What I think we can be fairly certain about is that he was sincere in his belief. If there had been no more to the whole thing than an old man’s fantasy, then the Wicca would not have grown to be the force that it is today, and the talk on which this chapter is based would never have been given on a long-ago Saturday morning in Canberra!

## BIO

Julia Phillips is a Wiccan High Priestess whose experience includes running both Covens and magical lodges in London, Sydney, and Melbourne. Her formal study of the occult began in 1971, when she began to attend lectures at the Society of Psychical Research in London. In 1975 she obtained her first Tarot deck, and it was through the study of the Tarot that she met the High Priestess of the London Coven into which she was initiated.

She immigrated to Australia in 1988 and currently lives in Melbourne.

Julia edited and published *Children of Sekhmet* (1986-1990) and *Web of Wyr* (1990-1993), and in 1991 founded the Australian Pagan Alliance and its magazine, *Pagan Times*, which is now in its twelfth year of continuous publication.

She is the author of *The Witches of Oz* (Capall Bann, 1994), a guide to the practice of Wicca in the Southern Hemisphere. She also wrote the chapter “The Magical Universe” for *Practising the Witch’s Craft* (edited by Douglas Ezzy, Allen & Unwin, 2003), and was a contributor to *Bast and Sekhmet: Eyes of Ra* by Storm Constantine and Eloise Coquio (Hale, 1999); and *The Encyclopedia of Modern Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism* (edited by Shelley Rabinovitch and James Lewis, Citadel Press, 2002).

For more information on the Australian Pagan Alliance, contact:

Pagan Alliance Inc  
PO Box 26  
North Hobart TAS 7002  
[pagantimeseditor@neogenesis.com.au](mailto:pagantimeseditor@neogenesis.com.au)

The Alliance is Australia’s oldest and largest organization for Pagans. Each State has its own co-ordinator, newsletter and activities for members. Most States also run gatherings for members and other Pagans in the local community.