

From Man to Witch
Gerald Gardner 1946-1949

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The Comment

This essay is an internet document, and, as such, it represents a notable draft of a work in progress. This gives you, the reader, a number of opportunities not commonly available from a paper-published essay. For instance, the on-line copy of this essay will always contain the most current information that I have, and you have the opportunity of helping contribute to this work by sending any comments, corrections, or new information to info@geraldgardner.com. Also, since this essay will always be changing (hopefully for the better), it is especially important that the copy available for download on the website *is the only copy available on the internet*. This means that, in addition to the normal copyright restrictions, this essay should not be mirrored or copied to any other website. However, linking to it is encouraged! The address where you can find it is: <http://www.geraldgardner.com/index/Gardner46-49.PDF>

I call this work a *draft* because I do not think it is entirely accurate, complete, or well written. I am not a professional historian, nor am I an apologist, nor am I anyone who claims the title of "expert" or "authority." I have tried to produce as well researched and well crafted an essay as possible, but, in the end, it will be up to you to decide how well my arguments and opinions hold up. To that end, I have quoted sources in full as often as possible and have attempted to make my arguments and opinions logical and transparent.

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Introduction

By the close of the Second World War, the word “Wicca” had not yet fallen upon the ears of the modern world. The new religious movement that would sweep the globe over the next half a century was the carefully guarded secret of a handful of people residing on the Hampshire coast, in the South of England. There are two dominant stories of the first steps of modern witchcraft¹ into the public sphere—one is a story of revitalization and rebirth, the other is a story of creation and beginning. Both tales begin with a tall, white-haired man, with tattooed arms and a piercing gaze, named Gerald Brosseau Gardner.

Gardner states that, in 1939, he was initiated into an ancient and secret tradition—the witch cult. This story—that of revitalization and rebirth—has been told on many occasions. Gardner found himself amidst a group of fascinating people within the larger social circle of the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona. He was led by these people to the large mill house of Dorothy Clutterbuck, a matron of the town of Christchurch, and initiated. He would practice, from then until he left the New Forest, with a coven of modern witches whom he called the Wica.² He would also come to be responsible for reforming this ancient religion and presenting it to the public.

The other version of this story—that of creation and beginning—is one told predominantly by historians and skeptics. Their accounts often open by identifying what

¹ I have chosen to use the capitalization present in Gardner's 1950's era public writings as a model for this essay. In that system, "witch," "witchcraft," "pagan," and "witch cult" are all left lowercase. "Wica"—and by extension the newer form of "Wicca"—are capitalized as well as phrases such as "Witch's Cottage" and "Witches' Mill." My choice represents a conscious attempt to avoid projecting any modern idiom onto Gardner. My only change is to use the phrase "modern witchcraft" in some situations discussing Wicca after Gardner's 1939 initiation.

² For a detailed account of Gerald Gardner's experiences in the New Forest area that supports this version of Gardner's life, see Philip Heselton's *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival* (United Kingdom: Capall Bann, 2000).

authors influenced Gardner, authors such as Margaret Murray, an anthropologist whose book on the subject helped coin the phrase “witch cult,”³ and Charles Godfrey Leland, a self-styled folklorist and adventurer who claimed to find traces of the religion of witchcraft in turn of the century Italy.⁴ In this version, Gardner created Wicca whole-cloth, drafting the religion’s rituals in a manuscript called *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical*⁵ and later publishing them in the guise of fiction with *High Magic’s Aid*.⁶ Gardner would go on to lay claim to the word “Wica” using a slightly altered version of the Anglo-Saxon word for "witch" that was later emended to its correct form of “Wicca.” This tale depicts the first Wiccan coven being formed in Bricket Wood, a small village between the London suburbs of St Albans and Watford.⁷

Despite the differences between these two stories, both accounts are largely the same after 1949 and the publication of *High Magic’s Aid*. From that point on, the history of Wicca’s public arrival is relatively well documented, allowing agreement between believers and skeptics. If one assumes that, by 1949 and with the publication of his novel, Gardner was committed firmly to publicizing Wicca, then the years just prior to that publication are of great importance. That time in Gardner’s life is glossed over,

³ Murray, Margaret Alice, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

⁴ Leland, Charles Godfrey, *Aradia or the Gospel of the Witches* (London: David McNutt, 1899).

⁵ *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical* is a notebook that Gardner kept that contains rituals copied from texts of ceremonial magic, passages from poets and from Aleister Crowley, drawings, as well as other rituals and material assumed to be authored by Gardner. It is now housed in the personal collection of Richard and Tamara James of the Wiccan Church of Canada. Some authors have speculated that it existed as a kind of "rough draft" of the Book of Shadows, others have asserted that it is merely a working notebook similar to the others that Gardner kept throughout his life.

⁶ Gardner, Gerald, *High Magic's Aid* (London: Michael Houghton, 1949).

⁷ For texts that support this version of Gardner's life, see Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Aidan Kelly's *Inventing Witchcraft: A Case Study of the Creation of a New Religion* (Seattle: Art Magickal Publications, 1998).

however, and sparsely documented in biographies and histories alike.⁸ Sometime in that quiet and difficult interim after World War II, Gardner began writing *High Magic's Aid*. This span, probably of just a few years or less, was a time in which Gerald Gardner's creativity and devotion to Wicca would change the religious landscape of the English speaking world for years to come, as this time was the stepping stone from which Gardner mustered his ambition and determined, decisively, that Wicca would flourish. What followed were the publication of two more books, the founding of a museum, the establishment of numerous covens and initiates, and fifteen more years of Gardner's life spent devoted to promoting modern witchcraft, but this crucial time of gestation is obscure. The period between 1946 and 1949 is one of the least known periods of Gerald Gardner's latter life, yet it is one of the most important for Wicca because the events of those three years, though not well recorded, committed Gardner to the role of Wicca's promoter and yielded, by his hand, early revisions of some of the religion's most enduring rites.

Conjecturing about the influences acting on the founder—or the popularizer—of a new religious movement when relatively little is known about the individual's life is fruitless. This essay is intended to serve as a source from which arguments regarding Gardner's effect on Wicca's development can be drawn. The events described here fill a gap left between the research of Philip Heselton, published in *Wiccan Roots: Gerald Gardner and the Modern Witchcraft Revival*, which covers Gardner's life up to the onset of World War II, and the books of Doreen Valiente (*The Rebirth of Witchcraft*), and Lois

⁸ Bracelin, Jack, *Gerald Gardner: Witch* (London: Octagon Press, 1960), 168-172, 174-175; Hutton, 213-214, 216-223, 226-233; Kelly, 35-36, (The entirety of chapter 3 of Kelly's work details what Gardner, allegedly, wrote in *Ye Bok* around 1949); Valiente, 15-16, 47, 49, 50, 56-59.

Bourne (*Dancing with Witches*), which describe from a first-hand perspective the events of Gardner's life from 1953 until his death in 1964.

In this essay, I will describe and analyze Gerald Gardner's actions, writings, and social circles during the years between 1946 and 1949, which has been described as crucial to the early development of the religion.⁹ I will draw on the sparse published information about this time span and combine it with other primary sources to craft a history of Gardner's life and immediate social context between 1946 and '49. With this narrative as a vantage point, it will be possible to distinguish some of the aspects of Gardner's religious, social, and intellectual life that entered and transformed Wicca during the religion's birth into the public world.

⁹ Hutton, 223.

1946: Old Catholics and Freemasons

Father John Sebastian Marlow Ward was the leader of a lay order called the Confraternity of Christ the King—a cadre of shoeless monks who made everything they needed, from food to clothing. He ran a historical park called the Abbey Folk Park in New Barnet, he was a Freemason, and he was Gerald Gardner's friend.¹⁰ Gardner and Ward had known each other for quite some time—at least since 1939.¹¹ Ward, like Gardner, began his professional life as a customs officer in the Far East, and he also purportedly studied Chinese secret societies. At some point, Ward began to have visions that led him to expect the immanent approach of the second coming of Christ. He formed his order in preparation for the messiah's arrival, and he made the center of his operations just north of London.

The usual story describing Ward's activities in the late '40s is that Ward's assumed authority led the Anglican vicar of the area to eventually excommunicate him. Ward, in response, turned to the Patriarch of Antioch and became ordained as a priest and bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church. The ensuing disturbance drove Ward to leave the country. In reality, Ward does not appear to have any link to the Greek Orthodox Church, and it is likely that the author of the account misunderstood the name of an Old Catholic sect based in the East and simply interpreted it as the Greek Orthodox Church. Also, Ward's flight from the country probably had more to do with a legal conflict surrounding an adolescent girl whom he had taken custody of rather than any conflict with the Church of England. Whatever the cause for his flight, Ward had wanted to go to Canada, but post-war traveling restrictions prevented him from it. Gardner graciously

¹⁰ Bracelin, 156-158; Miriam Gardner, telephone interview by author, 12 July 2001; Hutton, 214; Valiente, Doreen, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (Custer, Washington: Phoenix, 1989), 59-60.

¹¹ Gardner, Gerald, "Collectanea Witchcraft," *Folk-Lore*, (June, 1939); Hutton, 224.

offered to give Ward the property that he had purchased in Cyprus.¹² Outside of the implications of this oft-repeated story, Ward's identity and religious community were not so isolated and eccentric. He was part of a relatively sizable religious movement within England, and Gardner's periphery involvement with the movement points to some intriguing possibilities as to who Gardner's associates were at the time.

Ward was a part of the Old Catholic Movement's relatively limited presence in England. The Old Catholic Movement has its roots in Utrecht, Holland, where Jansenists had fled from France to escape Jesuit and Papal persecution in the early eighteenth century. However, the dissident church in Utrecht did not gain widespread influence until the First Vatican Council in 1870 declared Papal Infallibility and split the sentiments of Roman Catholicism. In response to this declaration, many Catholics sought in Utrecht for an alternative to the Vatican. Over time, the Old Catholic Church began to develop belief systems different from that of the Church in Rome. The Old Catholics began using the vernacular predominantly instead of Latin, they suppressed fasting and confession, and they reduced the number of compulsory feast days. Eventually, the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism were elevated above the others in much the same way as in some Protestant churches. The Old Catholic Movement's hold in Europe, though certainly minority, was relatively secure. With the Anglican Church, however, there was little need for a second large group of Protestant variants on Roman liturgy in England, so the Old Catholic Movement remained largely continental.¹³

Despite the overall lack of interest in England with the Utrecht Church, Old Catholics eventually appeared as English clergy sought alternatives to either Anglican or

¹² Bracelin, 156-158.

¹³ Melton, J. Gordon, ed., vol. 1 of *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, (New York: Triumph, 1991), 2-3.

Roman Catholic authority while still wanting to stay within the general bounds of the "high-church" experience. Because the sect was appealing in England only as a more drastic break from Catholicism or Anglicanism, the Old Catholic Movement on the island quickly became a refuge for relatively radical and anti-authoritarian church leaders. Bishops and priests were often self-appointed and led fairly small congregations. The individuality with which Old Catholic leaders approached their duties eventually resulted in the growth of doctrine and practices unique to each group. As concern for religious legitimacy increased among this minority in England, the leaders sought authority through appealing to various church leaders abroad, and they also sought to secure their apostolic succession by performing multiple consecrations upon one another.¹⁴ J. S. M. Ward entered into this milieu just before World War II.

On 15 September 1935, Ward was consecrated for the first time by Ebenezer Johnson Anderson, and I imagine that this consecration only legitimized what Ward felt was a calling already in place by the visions he described to Gardner. This highly individual approach was characteristic of the Old Catholics in England, and Ward seemed to fit in immediately. On 6 October of the same year, he would receive the consecration that would have the most lasting effect on him—that of John Churchill Sibley, into what Sibley called "The Orthodox Catholic Church in England." It was under this name that Ward opened the Abbey of Christ the King sometime between 1935 and 1938. Gardner first met Ward around this time as well, probably before Gardner moved away from London and into the Christchurch area.

Ward went on to receive another influential consecration on 25 August 1945, which was performed by Hugh George De Willmott Newman. Newman is perhaps most

¹⁴ Ibid.

noted for being one of three main apostolic lines, with Joseph Rene Vilatte and Arnold Harris Matthew, who brought the Old Catholic Movement to America. Newman was one of the more creatively syncretic bishops of the Old Catholic Movement, and he actively mixed Eastern and Western liturgies with the myriad lineages he gained from his multiple consecrations. His first consecration was performed by William Bernard Crow, whose background in Freemasonry, interest in the occult, and eventual activity with Aleister Crowley and the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.) places him in the same intellectual community with both Ward and Gardner.

W. B. Crow was a Theosophist and an occultist, and he nurtured an interest in many different facets of religions—especially Eastern spirituality. In 1939, Crow founded the Order of Holy Wisdom, which generally expressed the Theosophical notion that there is a hidden knowledge latent in the religious teachings of all nations and times. Crow's entrance into the Old Catholic Movement came in 1943 when he was consecrated by James Heard into the Syrian-Antiochene succession of *Episcopi Vagantes*.¹⁵ Heard had derived orders from Luis Mariano (*Mar Basilius*), who led a small Syro-Chaldean church represented mainly in the East.¹⁶ With this consecration, Crow gave himself the title *Mar Basilius Abdullah III*, and he began using his status to promote his esoteric brand of liberal Catholicism. At about the same time, in April of 1944, Crow consecrated Newman and also initiated a correspondence with Aleister Crowley that would eventually result in his involvement with the *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica* and the O.T.O.

J. S. M. Ward is, I think, the visible tip of a group that Gardner was at least aware of and probably was an active participant in. This group could contain Ward, Newman,

¹⁵ Sabazius X°, "The Manifesto of the Gnostic Catholic Church," <<http://www.hermetic.com/sabazius/mfstnotes.htm>> (December, 2001).

¹⁶ Melton, 4.

and Crow—three men linked closely by consecrations and common interests. When Gardner was granted his Charter to start an O.T.O. encampment, which I shall discuss later, he wrote what seems to have been an unsolicited letter to Crow to inform him of the new Camp.¹⁷ This possible group of acquaintances does not emerge in Gardner's biography or in any of the other writings that he left behind, just as Gardner's association with the O.T.O. goes unmentioned. Their absence could mean that he had no more than a passing and coincidental association with figures such as Newman and Crow, but the number of shared interests these men had and the relatively tight-knit group that the sparse occultists in England were a part of in the middle of the last century, makes arguments against their connection seem unlikely. It is known that Gardner received a consecration from Ward into the Orthodox Catholic Church in England,¹⁸ which raises questions about his level of involvement with the Old Catholics. However, Ward is the only figure with a distinct connection to Gardner in the corpus of documents left behind from this era in his life, and it is Ward's immediate influence that seems to have played a role in Gardner's ambitions for 1947.

¹⁷ Aleister Crowley, letter to W. B. Crow, 30 May 1947, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield). In this letter, Crowley mentions that he is returning a letter from Gardner that Crow had forwarded to Crowley—it is this letter that I am referring to.

¹⁸ The certificate for this consecration purportedly resides in Toronto, though I have not confirmed this. Kelly, 28.

1946-1947: Museums and Naturists

Miriam Gardner remembers that the winter of 1946 was a cold one in England, especially for a young woman who had grown up in Memphis, Tennessee. Miriam was sixteen years old and was visiting her uncle Gerald for a few weeks before attending a boarding school in London. During that stay, a few images stood out more than others. One was her only trip to Gerald's naturist club, where she saw a naked man seated on the radiator. She remembers being served tea by one of the few clothed inhabitants of the building, and she recalls trying to look at the ceiling and feeling a little uncomfortable being fully clad next to her uncle who, like her, wore many layers that night—the older man having grown up in a warm climate as well. But it wasn't without laughter that she related these memories and how she ran to Donna, Gerald's wife, that evening, who exclaimed in response to her modesty "I thought you were very liberal in America."¹⁹ It was a sort of kindness and industrious optimism that Miriam thinks was almost like a naïveté that characterized her uncle Gerald. Nevertheless, it was this industry that kept Gerald interested in his various ambitions and projects—one of which was starting his own museum.

Gardner had shown a passion for history, anthropology, and folklore all his life, and he only indulged these interests more when he retired to England in the late '30s. In 1939, Gardner joined the Folklore Society and made his first appearance by presenting a paper on a number of witchcraft relics that, he stated, had belonged to Matthew Hopkins.²⁰ In 1944, he succeeded in being elected co-president of the Bournemouth Historical Association, and he made a special effort to include Edith Woodford-Grimes,

¹⁹ Miriam Gardner Interview.

²⁰ Gardner, Gerald, "Collectanea Witchcraft," *Folk-Lore*, (June, 1939); Hutton, 224.

better known by her Craft name of Dafo, in the events that the association held.

Together, the two made an attempt to establish a museum of Christchurch's history and folklore, but to no avail. After his move back to London in 1946, Gardner redoubled his participation in the Folklore Society and became a member of its governing council.²¹ It seems as if Gardner, in 1946-47, was again trying to establish a museum of folklore and history, but this time he focused on London and the area surrounding the city.

By 1946, Gardner owned a few acres of land on Oakwood Road in Bricket Wood, near the Fiveacres Country Club.²² On this piece of densely wooded property, he transplanted an old cottage from the Abbey Folk Park, because the park had closed as Ward and a few of his followers prepared to leave. The building that Ward gave Gardner was a small, half-timber house that had been designed to resemble a sixteenth-century witch's cottage, complete with cabbalistic insignia decorating its inner walls.²³ Miriam recalls Gardner showing the cottage to her just after it had been erected on the wooded property near the Country Club. She says, "He had a little Witch's Cottage set up, as a matter of fact, with the Greek Orthodox reform group [this is how Miriam identified Ward's group]."²⁴ She goes on to mention that it was near the naturist club. It is possible that Gardner had larger plans for the both the Witch's Cottage and the adjacent clubhouse.

The naturist group that Gardner attended in the '40s was called The Fiveacres Country Club—founded around 1929.²⁵ It was probably affiliated with the New

²¹ Hutton, 213.

²² Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson, 27 February 1951, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG38); Lamond, Fredric, "Notes on Gardnerian Witchcraft in England," 1998, <<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/5756/bgrdtrad.html>> (16 September 2001); Smyth, Frank, *Modern Witchcraft* (U.S.: Castle Books, 1973), 29.

²³ Hutton, 214.

²⁴ Miriam Gardner Interview.

²⁵ NUFF, "Fiveacres Country Club," August 2001, <<http://www.armage.demon.co.uk/nuff/venues/area/hertfordshire/fiveacres.html>> (November 26, 2001).

Gymnosophist Society that had been founded three years earlier in the same area.²⁶ The club consisted of a prefabricated building that housed game rooms and a larger hall. Around the building was a muddy lot where caravans parked to house naturists who opted to stay for extended visits.²⁷

In early 1947, Gardner and Edith Woodford-Grimes started a company called Ancient Crafts Ltd. in order to raise money to purchase, it seems, the naturist club itself.²⁸ In my opinion, their purpose was to turn the club into a center for the study of folklore or into a museum—perhaps even to continue the service that Ward had provided with the Abbey Folk Park. That would explain the name of the company: "Ancient Crafts." However, they were not successful. A few years later, Gardner had to implore a friend of his, Cecil Williamson, to purchase the percentage of the club not owned by Woodford-Grimes and himself. Gardner's motive, other than his desire to own a museum, seems to have been to provide a larger social circle from which he could draft people into a tighter inner group—a coven. His museum and the attendant study group were supposed to form a kind of impromptu Outer Court. The name of the company may also have revealed this aspect of his ambition—after all, witchcraft was, to him, an "ancient craft." The text of Gardner's letter to Williamson four years later states:

²⁶ Farrar, Michael, "A Brief History of UK Naturism," 1999, <<http://www.british-naturism.org.uk/history.htm>> (November 26, 2001).

²⁷ Miriam Gardner Interview.

²⁸ Hutton states that Ancient Crafts Ltd. was started to buy land to put the Witch's Cottage on, but, according to Miriam Gardner, the cottage was already in place in 1946. Fred Lamond, cited by Roger Dearnaley, claims that Gardner bought land and started the nudist club in 1945, but Gardner states that he does not own the club in a letter to Cecil Williamson in April of 1951, and Doreen Valiente attests that the club's leaders did not approve of Gardner's witchcraft activities later in the decade. The club itself, which still exists, claims that it was founded in 1929. My conclusions have been formed to accommodate these conflicting sources as best I can. Dearnaley, Roger, "An Annotated Chronology and Bibliography of the Early Gardnerian Craft," 2000, <<http://www.cyprian.org/Articles/gardchron.htm>> (October 8, 2001); Hutton, 214. Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson, April 1952, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG73); Valiente, *Rebirth*, 57; Bourne, Lois, *Dancing With Witches* (London: Robert Hale, 1998), 25.

The position is that the blighter who is giving me so much trouble is trying to wreck the Club and get it all in his own hands, but I and a friend of mine [Edith Woodford-Grimes] hold half the debentures and she says OK. That means that what ever the price only half need be paid. [...]

If you run motor coaches from London, through the beautiful country past Elstree through Bricket Wood to Witch Hut and museum lunch there, then on to St. [blank] Cathedral, Museum Roman remains and back to London another way I think it would be popular; [...] then the [naturist] Club could use it on Saturdays and Sundays. [...]

I think the study group should be encouraged to join the folklore Society (they have cheap rates for students) refreshments only!! They have the use of their and University College Library. But likely Students should be told join the nudist club at the museum (at special rates!) Then on Saturdays and Sundays you can go down to the Museum. We can have the stuff out and study it, and try it, and try the old Witch dances, etc: the ones who take to it will be initiated and no one can say anything because they are all members of a Nudist Club. [...]

If it could be managed we could I think get a good and strong cult going. We could probably have a meeting place in London. The folklore Society can always borrow a Committee room from the London University and I think the folklore Study Group could also get it, if the secret was kept. But it must be kept. [...]²⁹

This letter was written in April of 1951, but I think Gardner's motivations behind the forming of Ancient Crafts Ltd. were much the same four years previous. The sole problem, as the letter suggests, is that he and Woodford-Grimes seem to have succeeded in purchasing only half of the clubhouse. M. D. Mackee, who Gardner insinuates was

²⁹ Gardner to Williamson, April 1951, (MOWG73). Line breaks have been preserved except where areas of text have been omitted.

vehemently against his witchcraft activities, owned the other half.³⁰ In the end, Williamson purchased property on the Isle of Man to house his own museum, but Gardner continued to insist on having a role in managing the museum until Williamson finally sold it to him.³¹ The Fiveacres Country Club also continued to be a hostile environment to the witches until the late '50s because of Mackee and others who supported his opinion.³²

There is no conclusive way to know whether or not Gardner was practicing with a coven during 1946-47 without further evidence, but there are some intriguing possibilities. Assuming that Gardner was involved with a coven in the Highcliffe area during World War II,³³ then it stands to reason that his contact with that group would slacken with his move to London after the threats of bombing were over. He could have been looking to start a coven in 1946, so he and Woodford-Grimes would seek to found their own group by mimicking the conditions that the New Forest witches had used to draft him from the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona—by creating a larger social circle to draft members from. Doreen Valiente was later recruited in just this way—she found out about the museum and wrote a letter to Williamson, which he then gave to Gardner.³⁴ This system of recruiting was something that Gardner was very firm to Williamson about from the beginning, and Williamson's keeping possible recruits back was part of the reason that their relationship eventually fell apart.³⁵ But no social circle of the sort

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ This tension between Gardner and Williamson is recorded in the letters Williamson received from Gardner from early 1953 onward. The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, see especially MOWG29, MOWG02, MOWG03, MOWG89, MOWG30, MOWG53, and MOWG27 (listed chronologically).

³² Valiente, *Rebirth*, 57.

³³ See Heselton.

³⁴ Valiente, *Rebirth*, 37.

³⁵ The text of the relevant letter states:

existed in the late 1940's except for the nudist club, which wasn't the friendliest place for those interested in witchcraft.

The earliest evidence of a coven in the London area comes in May of 1951. Gardner called it the "Northern Coven," as opposed to the "Southern Coven," which was the New Forest group.³⁶ The Northern Coven would eventually become the Bricket Wood Coven³⁷ when Gardner moved to the Isle of Man and started another group there. Gardner's fledgling Northern Coven numbered enough for a small rite on May Eve of 1951 at his London flat at 47 Ridgmount Gardens, just a few blocks from the British Museum,³⁸ and Doreen Valiente remembers a sensational newspaper article in the same year that connected a nudist camp with rumors of witchcraft.³⁹ But this Northern Coven apparently wasn't substantial enough for Gardner to claim it publicly, since he identified

Also we agreed to try & find a sort of meeting place where interested people could meet, & if people form a sort of fellowship among like minded people. It was agreed that I should investigate people who want in, because you could not leave the Museum. At first you kept the promise & told me of some of the people who want in, & I made long journey to investigate.

But from the last 18 months at least, I found you were also breaking this promise, keeping all the information to yourself, & not only preventing me from investigating people, but also, so many people were complaining that they had tried to get in touch with me through the museum, & were put off, prevented from meeting me.

Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson, late 1953, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG29).

³⁶ This assertion contradicts the work of Hutton and some other secondary sources, but Valiente clearly identifies the Southern Coven as practicing in the New Forest area, and Gardner identifies the Northern Coven as practicing in the London area. Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson, 5 January 1951, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG48); Hutton, 242-243; Valiente, *Rebirth*, 37.

³⁷ Bourne, 25.

³⁸ Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson 1 May 1951, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG48).

³⁹ Valiente, 49.

himself to a local paper only as a "member of the Southern Coven of British Witches."⁴⁰

By late 1953, the group would number between 8 and 10 when Valiente first met them all in Gardner's new accommodations in the city at 145 Holland Road, opposite the Victoria Hotel.⁴¹

It is also possible that Gardner was not actively involved with witchcraft at all in 1946-47, despite whatever connections he had in the New Forest. After all, he made no mention of being involved with a coven to his niece despite his lack of qualms about introducing her to nudism and Ward's eccentric group, and she distinctly remembers Gardner and the Witch's Cottage being associated with Ward and not with a practicing coven.⁴² Once Ward was gone, Gardner explored his interest in the O.T.O. He was also a member of the Circle of the Universal Bond, sometimes called the Ancient Druid Order, and he became a part of its governing council.⁴³ This period could have been one of spiritual seeking. When Gardner had passed this period, he immediately disowned his previous associations with the vigor for Wicca that he shows in all his writings after 1949. A mildly regretful vagueness about this time in his life would explain the reluctance to speak directly about his relationships with Ward and Crowley in the biography published in 1960, and it would also explain his reluctance to talk about these figures with Valiente, who had to use other sources of information to write about this period in Gardner's life.⁴⁴ The syncretic and fluid nature of *Ye Bok of Ye Arte Magical*, and Gardner's other notebooks like it, may be the result of a man searching for the proper

⁴⁰ Andrews, Allen, "Calling All Covens," *The Sunday Pictorial*, 29 July 1951.

⁴¹ Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson 4 April 1952, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG7); Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson, May 1952 (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG42); Valiente, *Rebirth*, 47.

⁴² Miriam Gardner Interview.

⁴³ Hutton, 224.

⁴⁴ Valiente, *Rebirth*, 56-59.

language and structure to express a changing spirituality. However, this is speculation; whatever Gardner's activities in the winter that spanned 1946 and '47, the only factual information available is that Miriam went off to school, Gardner continued to frequent the Fiveacres Country Club and his new Witch's Cottage, he continued to pursue his interest in history and folklore, and he kept up relationships with his eclectic friends. One of these friends would play a large role in the coming months, and that man was Arnold Crowther.

1947-1948: Aleister Crowley and the O.T.O.

Arnold Crowther was what Gardner described as a conjurer and showman who had also been made a witchdoctor in Africa.⁴⁵ Crowther was a stage magician and puppeteer who had entertained England's gentry since the late thirties when he was hired to amuse members of the royal family. Religiously, Crowther had been interested in Buddhism, African folk practices, and Freemasonry.⁴⁶ Crowther had met Gardner in 1939 at a lecture on folklore given by Christina Hole, who was a member of the Folklore Society.⁴⁷ In 1947, Crowther was thirty-eight and settling down after traveling with the Entertainers National Services Association (ENSA) throughout Europe during the war. Crowther's relationship with Gardner was a light friendship—the two men rarely saw each other, mostly due to the frequency with which they both traveled, but Arnold later remarked that Gardner's easy and talkative manner made it as if they had never parted.⁴⁸ Sometime during the war, when Crowther was in England and not abroad with ENSA, he was mistaken at a party for Aleister Crowley because of the similarity of their names and the fact that Arnold was a "magician." Intrigued by the coincidence, Crowther began to inquire after who Crowley was and eventually met him.⁴⁹ At the time, Crowley was living a solitary life in retirement at a boarding house in Hastings called *Netherwood*. The impression that Arnold received was of a somewhat sickly old man who welcomed

⁴⁵ Gerald Gardner, letter to Cecil Williamson, 17 April 1951, (The Museum of Witchcraft Archive collection, MOWG40).

⁴⁶ Patricia Dawson, the woman who would later marry Arnold, wasn't involved with him until 1956, despite some confusion to the contrary. Crowther, Patricia, *High Priestess: The Life and Times of Patricia Crowther*, (Blaine: Phoenix, 1998), 16.

⁴⁷ Crowther, 18.

⁴⁸ Guiley, Rosemary Ellen, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, (New York: Facts on File, 1989), 77.

⁴⁹ Valiente, *Rebirth*, 58.

company, but Crowley, who has been described as the "King of Depravity,"⁵⁰ was certainly not always so disarming.

Aleister Crowley was easily one of the more complex personalities from the Edwardian period up to his death just following World War II. With that in mind, I cannot do credit to his biography within the confines of this essay, but I will at least venture an outline for those who have not encountered him before. Edward Alexander Crowley, self-styled "Aleister," was born in 1875 to a family that had grown wealthy in the brewing industry and who were also characterized by their adherence to the puritanical Plymouth Brethren, which is possibly best known by its description in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*.⁵¹ Crowley's childhood was spent migrating from one boarding school to another where he alternately excelled and failed with equal expertise. As an adolescent, Crowley discovered a number of things that would prove to be motivating forces throughout his life. These were sex, magic, and an insatiable desire for knowledge and renown. As a young man, Crowley attended Cambridge briefly but left before taking a degree to follow his interest in the occult.

George Cecil Jones introduced him to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (H.O.G.D.) during that order's most formative period in the late 1890's. Crowley excelled in the lower degrees and quickly soaked up the work of such luminaries of the occult world as Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Arthur Edward Waite, both of whom he would come to despise. Crowley also nurtured a jealousy for William Butler Yeats, a fellow H.O.G.D. member, and repeatedly asserted that his poetry was far superior to that of Yeats. By 1904, Crowley had broken with the H.O.G.D. on fighting

⁵⁰ "The King of Depravity," *John Bull*, 10 March 1923.

⁵¹ Gosse, Edmund (originally published anonymously), *Father and Son*, (London: Heinemann, 1907).

terms and was in the process of starting a very similar order called the A . : . A . : .⁵² He operated with that group throughout the rest of his life.

The British popular press delighted in hating Crowley, and they did their best to cast him as a polar opposite to everything that could be considered Christian and virtuous. Crowley alternately courted this image and condemned it, but, despite his opinion of the articles that often verged on serious libel, the press had its effect. Crowley was expelled from both Italy and France, and he also lost at least one publishing deal due to his unsavory reputation as a debauchee and black magician.⁵³

In 1910, Crowley met a German journalist named Theodor Reuss who also was part of the leadership of an irregular, German, Masonic order called the *Ordo Templi Orientis* (O.T.O.). The O.T.O. combined a number of different Masonic rites with various other German orders based in the traditions of the Rosicrucians, the Templars, and the Illuminists. To this matrix of continental European ritual, the O.T.O.'s creator, Karl Kellner, also added a strain of Bengali Tantrism. Reuss initiated Crowley and supervised his succession into the first three degrees of the order. In 1912, Reuss issued Crowley a charter naming him National Grand Master General X° of O.T.O. for Great Britain and Ireland. Crowley began initiating individuals in the O.T.O. and often recruited members from the new British group, which was called the *Mysteria Mystica Maxima* (M . : . M . : . M . : .), to join his own A . : . A . : . In 1917, following Crowley's pro-German publications in New York, London police closed down the M . : . M . : . M . : .

⁵² The triangular formation of dots (∴), often referred to as "honor points," has been standard notation for abbreviating the name of a magical order since its innovation by the Freemasons.

⁵³ King, Francis, *Modern Ritual Magic*, (Lindfield: Unity, 1990), 53, 113-126; Hutchinson, Roger, *The Beast Demystified*, (London: Mainstream, 1998); Crowley, Aleister, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, (London: Penguin Arkana, 1989).

headquarters and seized all of the property and papers they found there. This raid marked an effective end to Crowley's O.T.O. group based in England.

In the early 1920's, Reuss suffered a stroke and showed signs of failing health. Crowley declared himself effective leader of the order and succeeded Reuss after his death in 1923. Crowley and Reuss had been integrating Crowley's unique religious and ritual material, commonly known as *Thelema*, into the O.T.O. for some time, and Crowley completed this process during the interim between the 1920's and 1940's. With World War II and the Nazi occupation of Germany came vast problems for all German occult orders. In 1939, the O.T.O. in Germany was effectively quashed and one of Crowley's primary associates there, Karl Germer, was placed in a concentration camp. Germer spent ten months in the camp and was released in 1941. Within the month, Germer immigrated to America and met with the only remaining O.T.O. group.⁵⁴ By 1947, Crowley was living out a quiet retirement, entertaining various occasional guests, and keeping up his contacts throughout the world by means of frequent letters.

On Thursday, the 1st of May, 1947,⁵⁵ Arnold Crowther brought Gerald Gardner to have tea with Aleister Crowley at Crowley's modest accommodations in Hastings. Gardner introduced himself as a Royal Arch Mason with a doctorate from the University of Singapore.⁵⁶ The two old occultists seemed to get along well, and Gardner visited

⁵⁴ Sabazius X° and AMT IX°, "History of Ordo Templi Orientis," 2001, <<http://www.otohq.org/oto/history.html> > (October 8, 2001).

⁵⁵ Arnold Crowther told more than one person that this event happened in 1946, but Crowley's diary maintains 1947—this discrepancy was pointed out by Dr. Ronald Hutton and Patricia Crowther has since stated that Arnold must have been mistaken. Crowther, Patricia, "Notes from Aleister Crowley's Diary," <<http://users.cwnet.com/~season/neighbor/crowlydi.htm>> (October, 2001).

⁵⁶ The full text of this diary entry is: "Thurs 1 Miss Eva Collins. Dr G.B. Gardner Ph. D Singapore. Arnold Crowther prof. G. a Magician to tea. Dr. G.R.Arch." (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection, MS23, page 3 of 3 in the center section of pages).

Crowley three more times on his own, on the 7th, the 14th, and the 27th of May.⁵⁷ Very little about what went on between Crowley and Gardner is known, though the intriguing subject of two such eccentric personalities has inspired at least two authors to write fictional accounts of their meeting.⁵⁸

The information that is available takes two forms. First, there are the sparse remains of the correspondences that Gardner and Crowley had with each other and with their associates at the time. Next, there is what Gardner, looking back on those get-togethers after Crowley's death, has told others. The former is useful for gleaning names and dates, while the latter reveals Gardner's changing priorities and opinion of Crowley.

In the letters and documents from the time that remain, a vague picture emerges of Gerald Gardner working with Aleister Crowley in an attempt to found a camp of the Ordo Templi Orientis in England. Both Gardner and Crowley seem enthusiastic—operating quickly over the space of only a few months. The documents start with a letter written by Aleister Crowley to Gerald Yorke on May 9th. It says:

This week I have had Dr. Gardner [...] here. I would be grateful if you would send to him one of the 4 copies of the Equinox of the Gods, which he has purchased.⁵⁹

Gardner also became a member of the O.T.O. in May—his membership is confirmed by two accounts of a copy of *The Book of the Law* being presented to Gardner from Crowley. The details of the accounts differ, but they agree that the book was presented to Gardner to mark the occasion of his initiation or affiliation with the Ordo Templi

⁵⁷ The full text of the relevant entries are: "Wed 7 Dr Gardner about 12. Tell him phone Wel 6709.", "Wed 14 G.B.G.", "Tues 27 Gardner here" (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection, MS23).

⁵⁸ Greenfield, Allan, "The Secret History of Modern Witchcraft," 1998, <<http://www.mindspring.com/~hellfire/wicca/>> (October 8, 2001); S.E., letter to the author, 18 July 2001.

⁵⁹ Aleister Crowley, letter to Gerald Yorke, 9 May 1947, (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection, OSD5, 33)

Orientis.⁶⁰ Karl Germer, who was the O.T.O. treasurer at that time, also made note that Gardner had paid the requisite dues and fees.⁶¹

After his formal entrance into the order, probably on May 14th, Gerald Gardner created a charter that would allow him to operate an O.T.O. encampment. Gardner, and possibly Crowley, seemed to want the document to appear impressive, but its ad-hoc creation is betrayed both by a few errors in spelling and also by the paper it is written on—the back of a land document and will from the county of Surrey, 1875.⁶² The only obvious reason for their paper choice is that the will provided a relatively large piece of vellum, which was not a particularly easy material to find on short notice. The words are written in Gardner's distinctive spidery calligraphy.

⁶⁰ An anonymous O.T.O. member, described only as "S.B.," reported this inscription: "To Fra. Scire P.I. from ... Baphomet X° O.T.O. on his affiliation." There is a copy of Liber AI with the inscription: "to Scire on the occasion of his Minerval" that is signed "Baphomet" in Toronto.

⁶¹ David R. Jones, letter to Amber and Jet List, 23 September 2001; David R. Jones, letter to author, 25 January 2002. Mention of Gardner's name occurs on two separate account records in Germer's hand that currently reside in the archives of the O.T.O. in America.

⁶² Smith, Geoff, *Knights of the Solar Cross*, a privately printed booklet that verifies the details of the will on the back of the charter.



Do what thou wilt shall be the law
 We **Baphomet X°** Degree **Ordo Templi Orientis**
 Sovereign Grand Master General of all English
 Speaking Countries of the Earth do hereby Authorise
 our beloved son **Scire**, (Dr. G.B. Gardner,) Prince
 of Jerusalem, to constitute a camp of the **Ordo**
Templi Orientis in the degree of **Minerval**
 Love is the law, Love under Will

Witness my hand and seal,
 Baphomet X° ⁶³

The charter bore Crowley's signature and a number of heavy wax seals bound to ribbons.

What it indicates is that Gardner is authorized to found an operating group of the O.T.O.

that is empowered to initiate members into the Minerval, or lowest, degree. It also

⁶³ Aleister Crowley, OTO Charter presented to Gerald Gardner, May 1947, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

indicates that Gardner, by that time, had been elevated as far as a side degree of O.T.O. IV°, or “Prince of Jerusalem.” This degree is also described as “Companion of the Holy Royal Arch of Enoch.” Since O.T.O. ritual parallels Free Masonry, it seems likely that Crowley admitted Gardner to the IV° under a process of affiliation, because Gardner had identified himself as a Royal Arch Mason.⁶⁴

Sometime between mid and late May, Gardner sent a letter to William Bernard Crow, probably informing Crow of the O.T.O. camp he intended to found, and Crow in turn forwarded that letter to Crowley. Crowley, on May 30, told Crow:

I suggest that you refer all your following in the London district to Dr. Gardner so that he may put them properly through the Minerval degree, and some of them at least might help him establish the camps for the higher degrees up to Perfect Initiate or Prince of Jerusalem.⁶⁵

In a handwritten note on the letter, Crow reports that the camp “will be ready in a few weeks.”⁶⁶ On June 14th, Gardner sent a letter to Crowley that indicates that Crowley wished for Gardner to contact a number of people regarding the encampment. Gardner went further to ask how much he should charge for initiation into the Minerval degree.⁶⁷ Gardner reveals that he has been initiated up to the VII° of the order.

Sometime during the latter half of the summer of 1947, Gardner traveled to America—the details of which I will go into later. In America, Gardner didn’t pursue his interest in the O.T.O. first because of illness, which is what initially compelled him to go overseas, and secondly because the people Crowley had instructed him to contact either

⁶⁴ Sabazius X° and AMT IX°, “History of Ordo Templi Orientis.”

⁶⁵ Aleister Crowley, letter to W. B. Crow, 30 May 1947, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gerald Gardner, letter to Aleister Crowley, 14 June 1947, (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection, E21, loose folio) cited in Hutton, 221-222.

had to serve abroad or were too far away for him to work with.⁶⁸ This is the text of the letter:

I tried to start an order, but I got ill, & had to leave the Country. After his [Crowley's] death word was sent to Germer that I was head of Order in Europe, & Germer acknowledged me as such, But owing to ill health I so far haven't been able to get anything going. I had some people but some of them were sent to Germany with the Army of Occupation. & other live far away. & so far nothing have happned.⁶⁹

It is also possible, though there is no evidence for it, that Gardner and Crowley quarreled during the autumn months. An argument of some sort would explain Gardner's later bitterness towards Crowley, which is not evidenced in any of their summer correspondence and doesn't show up until after Crowley's death. Whatever the cause of Gardner's failing interest in the O.T.O., his involvement with the order didn't resurface again until just after Crowley's death.

On December 1, 1947, Aleister Crowley died. Three months previous to his passing, Crowley's London doctor had refused to prescribe any more medical heroin, and, I assume, Crowley went through a painful period of withdrawal that may have hastened his decline.⁷⁰ Also in early October, Crowley's friend and associate Freida Harris forced Crowley to accept the assistance of a nurse.⁷¹ Immediately after his death, Crowley's associates were in contact with each other trying to clear up his lingering debts and to settle his estate. Within these letters there are clues that may shed some light on a persistent rumor concerning Gardner and Crowley's relationship.

⁶⁸ Gerald Gardner, letter to John Symonds, 7 December 1950, (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection, EE2, 340).

⁶⁹ Ibid. Spelling and grammar errors are Gardner's own, and I have not preserved the original line breaks due to the length of the lines. Hutton, 222.

⁷⁰ Hutchinson, 211-214.

⁷¹ Freida Harris, letter to Frederick Mellinger, 7 December 1947, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

Sometime after the 1950's, Gerald Yorke told Doreen Valiente, “Well, you know, Gerald Gardner paid old Crowley about £300 or so for that [Gardner's O.T.O. charter].”⁷² Valiente discounted this idea, preferring to believe Gardner's words in an entry he later published as part of a brochure for his Isle of Man museum, which claimed Crowley had given the charter to him out of friendship.⁷³ As of yet, no concrete evidence has been produced to discount this claim. However, in a letter to Karl Germer after Crowley's death, Frieda Harris told Germer that the only considerable sum of money Crowley had left was £400, which was a kind of trust fund collected from the California O.T.O.'s Agape Lodge and the Germers themselves.⁷⁴ Harris and Germer would have certainly known if there were an extra £300 floating about from Gardner's alleged purchase. It would have been an impressive feat for an ill old man to spend £300 in a matter of six months just before his death, but the money's absence is merely suggestive and not conclusive. More than just speculation over Crowley's literary estate passed between the late Crowley's associates, however. On December 7, 1947, Frieda Harris wrote to Frederic Mellinger and said in a postscript to that letter “Are you the head of the order here or was Gerald Gardner I can't find him, I fancy he died?”⁷⁵

Gardner was not dead, of course—only staying out the last few months of his trip to America. On hearing of Crowley's death, he immediately sent a hasty letter to Vernon Symonds stating: “Alister gave me a charter making me head of the O.T.O. in Europe.”⁷⁶

⁷² Doreen Valiente, letter to Allen Greenfield, 28 August 1986, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

⁷³ Gardner, Gerald, *The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic*, (Kent: Photocrom Ltd., c. 1954), 24.

⁷⁴ Frieda Harris, letter to Karl Germer, 2 January 1948, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

⁷⁵ Harris to Mellinger, 7 December 1947. The grammar mistakes in this quotation are Harris's own.

⁷⁶ Gerald Gardner, letter to Vernon Symonds, 24 December 1947, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield). In this quotation and the one from the same letter directly following, the grammar and spelling problems are Gardner's.

In that letter, Gardner asked about the addresses of Crowley's literary executors so that Gardner could contact them to buy any relics and typescript rituals relating to Crowley. He stated that he did not want them to "fall into other peoples hands."⁷⁷ Gardner did not, in fact, have a charter naming him as Crowley's successor in Europe. However, had Gardner been successful in founding a camp in England, he would have had the only practicing O.T.O. encampment outside of America, but he hadn't founded a camp by December. Nevertheless, the O.T.O was in disarray for a short time after its leader's death.

Frieda Harris wrote to Karl Germer and informed him that Gardner was the head of the O.T.O. in Europe, presumably passing on the claim that Gardner had started by writing to Symonds.⁷⁸ The somewhat garbled postscript of that letter reads: "G. B. Gardiner [...] is head of the OTO in Europe [...] also G. Waal Fitzgerald [this should be E. Noel Fitzgerald] [...] seems to have been asked to initiate Mr. Gardiner & may be a member [of the OTO]." Harris's comment regarding Gardner's initiation seems to be a piece of hearsay—an explanation that could explain her misspelling of Fitzgerald's name, or she could have been referring to a need to elevate Gardner to a higher degree, as would be befitting of a regional O.T.O. head—indeed, Gardner later identified himself as X^o.⁷⁹ However, after this letter, mention of Gardner seems to fall off for about a month. During that time, it seems that some matters regarding the O.T.O.'s leadership were sorted out.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Freida Harris, letter to Karl Germer, 2 January 1948, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

⁷⁹ Gardner to Symonds, 7 December 1950. Gardner signed this letter "G. B. Gardner X^o" and included a fourfold cross.

Crowley had, in fact, been grooming his successors since at least 1944. He favored Karl Germer overall, but he also was sensitive to Germer's advanced age and possible shortcomings. To that end, he also attempted to prepare Grady McMurty to be a kind of acting head of the order, over whom Germer could maintain veto power until his death. By July 15, 1947, Crowley had also considered the possibility of McMurty's death and had mentioned to Frederick Mellinger that he should hold himself ready for the possibility that he may have to succeed Germer. At the time that Gardner was writing a letter to Vernon Symonds in an attempt to secure Crowley's various papers relating to the O.T.O., those papers were being shipped to Germer as per Crowley's wishes. Germer successfully assumed the leadership of the O.T.O. and maintained it until his death in 1962. Germer did eventually authorize a camp of the O.T.O. in England under Kenneth Grant, but that camp was closed in 1955. The O.T.O. was on shaky ground for some time after Germer's death in the 1960's, and it later splintered over issues surrounding McMurty's claim to power. The O.T.O. eventually settled into two representative groups that have since maintained a relatively small but successful presence throughout the world.⁸⁰ However, in early 1948, Germer was just coming to terms with the role he would have to assume, and, it seems, Gerald Gardner was also thinking seriously about his role in the order.

In mid January, Gardner wrote to Karl Germer and asked to meet him on March 19 in New York, since he was departing to England from there.⁸¹ Germer, who had been having troubles with his visa, had not been able to travel to England to witness Crowley's

⁸⁰ Sabazius X° and AMT IX°, "History of Ordo Templi Orientis."

⁸¹ Hutton, 221.

funeral service and was stuck in New York. He mentions receiving this letter on January 19, and he says about it:

I received to-day a letter from Mr. Gerald Gardner, who says he is sailing from New York on March 19 and would stay in New York for a few days. I may either see him then, or, if I would have to go to the West Coast on a several months' trip, I might arrange to visit on my way there. Did you ever meet him?⁸²

Ten years later, Idres Shah, writing as Bracelin, related Gardner's experience with Germer in New York as follows: "When he went to America, Gardner found that many people regarded him as Crowley's successor: though he was nothing of the sort. In New York he met "Saturnus", the enormous, hearty yet somehow seemingly humourless German who was, if anyone, Crowley's successor." Shah goes on to mention that Germer and Gardner had contact later, after Germer had gone to California to Agape Lodge.⁸³ Shah's words display the tone of Gardner's later attempt to distance himself from Crowley, which I will discuss shortly. What actually happened between Gardner and Germer in New York is ultimately a mystery. After returning to England, Gardner wrote again to Symonds and informed him that Germer had recognized him as head of the O.T.O. in Europe—the letter's text is reproduced above,⁸⁴ but it is difficult to deduce Gardner's ambitions from what he wrote. Germer could have endorsed Gardner's claim and instructed him to continue his plans to start an encampment in England, but this encampment never materialized. After this meeting in March, the documents revealing Gardner's involvement with the O.T.O. largely run out.

⁸² Karl Germer, letter to Freida Harris, 19 January 1948, (courtesy of Rev. T. Allen Greenfield).

⁸³ Bracelin, 174, IHO 158; Hutton, 48.

⁸⁴ Gardner to Symonds, 7 December 1950; Hutton, 222.

The only mention of Gardner's involvement with the order after he leaves America occurs in his novel *High Magic's Aid* when he published it in 1949. On the title page, a copyist error states Gardner's O.T.O. degree as "4 = 7."⁸⁵ However, 4=7 is not an O.T.O. degree. The error has caused some misunderstanding among authors who have looked up that degree notation and assumed Gardner was a *Philosophus* in the O.T.O., but 4=7 is a Golden Dawn or A ∴ A ∴ degree. After 1949, Gardner mentions some of Crowley's associates and the O.T.O. in passing, but he is obviously no longer really involved in the order.

Though Gardner's active involvement with the O.T.O. fades during the later half of the '40s, he continued to look back upon his brief association with Crowley. These recollections form the second source of information regarding their relationship, and an element emerges that wasn't present in the correspondence that remains from 1947-48—the witch cult and Crowley's relation to it. Starting in 1950, Gerald Gardner started disassociating himself from Crowley in favor of Wicca—a process that culminated publicly with the 1960 publication of his biography. Existing documents from Gardner before Crowley's death do not include mention of the witch cult, but with the publication of *High Magic's Aid*, Gardner began to talk more about his involvement with the witches. In his 1950 letter to John Symonds, he wrote:

He [Crowley] was very interested in the witch cult & had some idea of combining it in with the Order, but nothing came of it, he was fascinated with some snaps of the Witches Cottage.
[...]

⁸⁵ Gardner, *High Magic's Aid*. Gardner's name is also misspelled as "Scire" instead of "Scire."

I enclose a Copy of my book, High Magics Aid, A.C. [Crowley] Read part of the M.S. & highly approved, he wanted me to put the Witch part in full.⁸⁶

Gardner later said that he had been working on the manuscript for High Magic's Aid since around 1946—a date that corresponds roughly to his move to London and the attendant surge in interest in local folklore and endeavors such as Ancient Crafts Ltd.

Also in 1950, Gardner wrote to his recent acquaintance, Cecil Williamson,

By the way Aleister Crowley was in the Cult, but left it in disgust. He could not stand a High Priestess having a superior position & having to kneel to Her & while he highly approved of the Great Rite, he was very shocked at the nudity. Queer man, he approved of being nude in a dirty way, but highly disapproved of it in a clean and healthful way. Also he disapproved of the use of the scourge to release power for the practiced reason if you teach a pupil the use of the scourge, he can get a mate & do it on his own. If you have a highly paying pupil, if you teach them the concentration & meditation method they go on paying you for years. But he didn't simply pinch lots of the witches ritual & incorporate it in his works. He claimed that he rewrote the Rituals for them but I doubt this. He did re write some Masonic rituals, and made an awfull hash of them.⁸⁷

This letter, to my knowledge, is the first instance that Gardner relates the story that Crowley had been in the witch cult and had left because of the superiority of the High Priestess. This story surfaced again in 1953 when Doreen Valiente, using her Craft name of 'Ameth,' told Gerald Yorke that Crowley disassociated himself from witchcraft because he "would not be ruled by women."⁸⁸ Since then, the story has been repeated on

⁸⁶ Gardner to Symonds, 7 December 1950. Portions of this letter are paraphrased on Hutton 219. Line breaks have not been preserved due to the length of the lines, and all grammar and spelling errors are Gardner's.

⁸⁷ Gardner to Williamson, 8 February 1950. Line breaks have not been preserved, and all errors are Gardner's own.

⁸⁸ Ameth to Gerald Yorke, (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection, Scrapbook EE2, 361) cited by Hutton 220.

a number of occasions and in a number of variations. Later, in 1954, Gardner elaborated somewhat in *Witchcraft Today*. He said,

The only man I can think of who could have invented the rites was the late Aleister Crowley. When I met him he was most interested to hear that I was a member, and said he had been inside when he was very young, but would not say whether he had rewritten anything or not. But the witch practices are entirely different in method from any kind of magic he wrote about, and he described very many kinds. There are indeed certain expressions and certain words used which smack of Crowley; possibly he borrowed things from the cult writings, or more likely someone may have borrowed expressions from him.⁸⁹

Gardner's statement seems a bit tongue-in-cheek, since he allegedly quoted copiously from Crowley's works when fleshing out rituals for the Northern Coven.⁹⁰ Doreen Valiente responded to the quoted Crowley material with strong opposition, and her influence—in addition to pressure from public opinion to make Wicca as respectable as possible—may have prompted Gardner to distance himself forcefully from the old occultist that had exerted such an influence on him.

Ten years later, in 1960, Gardner's biography *Gerald Gardner: Witch* revealed what Gardner had told Idres Shah about Crowley. The description itself lasts for a number of pages, and it moves between speaking in generalities about magicians whom Gardner considered charlatans to talking specifically about Crowley. Extracting Gardner's personal experiences from where Shah integrates background information about Crowley gleaned from the biographies available at the time is difficult, so I have cited only those instances where it is obvious that Shah is quoting or paraphrasing Gardner directly. The overall theme of the text seems to suggest that Gardner thought of

⁸⁹ Gardner, Gerald, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider, 1954), 47.

⁹⁰ Valiente, 47.

Crowley as a friend, though he looked down upon him—implying that Crowley was a jealous, mesmeric, money-grubbing fraud.⁹¹ The biography says, "On the whole, Gardner liked him, was sorry when he died. He regards him as a failure who might have made his mark, somewhere."⁹² The biography also gives a third account of Gardner and Crowley's meeting:

In 1946, Gardner went down to Hastings to see Crowley. Once handsome, he was now reduced to a little, frail, gentle and archdeaconish figure, very bent. [...] The fire was not quite all gone, however, even though he took heroin all the time.

At Oxford, Crowley said, he had been on the edge of witchcraft. Why had he not followed the way of the witches? Because he 'refused to be bossed around by any damned woman'. [...] He was still keen to revive the English O.T.O.⁹³

Of course, Crowley never attended Oxford, but Shah or Gardner easily could have confused Cambridge with one of England's other noteworthy schools.

Gardner's and Crowley's relationship ended on the sour note set in the biography, and Gardner never amended that account. Nevertheless, Crowley's influence on Gardner had been relatively strong, if only for a scant year or two. It was certainly long enough for Crowley to impress himself upon the witchcraft that Gardner popularized at the time.

⁹¹ Bracelin, IHO, 154-155.

⁹² Ibid, 158.

⁹³ Ibid.

1947-1948: America and Family

Aside from fostering many acquaintances and friendships over the span of the three years between 1946-1949, Gerald Gardner also nurtured close ties with his relatives and family. As the weather in England was beginning to grow cooler following the summer of 1947, Gardner fell ill and sought a warmer climate to revitalize his health—a practice begun with his early childhood that he kept up until his death. This time he traveled to America, seeking to recover from illness and to have an opportunity to visit his brother's family and his niece, Miriam, whom I've already mentioned.

Gerald Gardner was the third of four brothers. The two eldest, Harold and Robert, were already grown by 1884, when Gardner was born. Harold was in Oxford studying to take his degree and become a lawyer, and Robert, whom Gerald called Bob, was an older adolescent whom Gardner remembers fondly. In 1886, Gardner's younger brother, Francis Douglas Gardner, was born. Only two years apart, the two boys were close throughout their lives. As the family aged, Harold took on the responsibility of caring for Gardner's father, William. Harold also inherited the family's timber firm in England and grew increasingly aloof with his concern for social status, which Gardner seemed to understand but from which he felt alienated nonetheless.⁹⁴ Francis Douglas Gardner, whom Gerald simply called Douglas, also carried on the family's interest in the timber industry, but his job lay away from Britain and across the Atlantic—along the Mississippi in the United States.⁹⁵

In 1916, Francis Douglas Gardner moved to America as Secretary and Treasurer of the Anchor Sawmill Co., which had offices in New Orleans and Memphis. During the

⁹⁴ Miriam Gardner Interview

⁹⁵ Francis Douglas Gardner's obituary, *The Commercial Appeal*, 29 March 1959, Sec. 11 Page 3.

first portion of his life in America, Douglas lived in Louisiana. At some point, Douglas married Miriam Flemming and, around 1930, they had a daughter whom they named Miriam and called Mimi. In 1938, the family moved briefly to England and then returned to Memphis, Tennessee, where they took up permanent residence. In Memphis, Douglas led a quiet life, raising his family as Episcopalians. He enjoyed hobbies of semi-professional golf and tennis. Douglas also took pleasure in the arts, frequenting operas and painting prolifically, just as Gerald did.⁹⁶

Gardner and Donna arrived, in late 1947, to the small brick house his brother owned on 282 Strathmore Circle in midtown Memphis. The neighborhood was just off a main thoroughfare and, across the street, there stood a wood of old growth trees and a park. The street was filled with a number of small eccentric houses built in the '20s, and flowers and trees lined the road.⁹⁷ Such a setting was ideal for Gardner to convalesce in. Unfortunately, Douglas was not doing well. His health was failing and, by then, he was nearly blind. Miriam remembers that Gerald spent much of his time between the fall of 1947 and March of the following year helping his brother carry out daily tasks.⁹⁸ The family lived cozily in the winter months, and Gerald and his wife made frequent forays to different cities—visiting New Orleans and possibly California, where Gardner may have met with O.T.O. members at Agape Lodge.⁹⁹ Always curious about native religious practices, Gardner sought to study Voodoo in New Orleans. From what he learned, he

⁹⁶ Douglas Gardner Obituary; Miriam Gardner Interview.

⁹⁷ I visited the Strathmore Circle neighborhood in July of 2001 and talked with the current owners of the house on 282 Strathmore as well as some other residents of the street.

⁹⁸ Miriam Gardner Interview.

⁹⁹ Lamond, "Notes on Gardnerian Witchcraft in England." It is possible that Lamond is only reporting hearsay and not stating a fact. Lamond knew Gardner well and was an initiate of his since 1957, but his notes do occasionally have errors such as the publication date for *High Magic's Aid* listed as 1948 instead of '49 and the assertion that Gardner founded the Fiveacres Country Club in 1948 (the club was actually started in the 1920's, and Gardner tried to buy it in 1947). There are also rumors to the effect that Jack Parsons influenced Gardner from Agape Lodge, but I have found nothing to substantiate this.

eventually concluded that "Voodoo seemed to have been concocted from African Mythology and European Witchcraft."¹⁰⁰ Gardner felt somewhat rushed, however, because he had left England abruptly, leaving much unattended to, and Donna was never really comfortable away from her own sister and friends in Britain.¹⁰¹ In March, Gardner left Memphis and traveled to New York where he boarded ship for the trip home.¹⁰²

In 1953 Douglas died.¹⁰³ His wife lived another fourteen years, eventually leaving the house on Strathmore Circle to the care of her grandson, who rented it out until 1975, when it was sold to its current owners.¹⁰⁴ Miriam Flemming Gardner died in 1977. By that time, Miriam "Mimi" Gardner had moved to Soller, Spain with her son and had left her daughter to get married and raise a family of her own in Kansas. Francis Douglas Gardner's descendants continue to live in America and in Spain, where they nurture fond memories of their uncle Gerald, whom they remember as funny and eccentric—who introduced them to ghosts, witches, and the marvels of a life spent in the Far East.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Bracelin, IHO, 159.

¹⁰¹ Miriam Gardner Interview.

¹⁰² Germer to Harris, 19 January 1948.

¹⁰³ *Memphis / National Funeral Home Records 1935-1971 Index*, vol. 5, (processed by the History Dept., Memphis / Shelby County Public Library and Inform Center, 1999); Douglas Gardner Obituary.

¹⁰⁴ Miriam Gardner's obituary, *The Commercial Appeal*, 29 November 1977; personal communication with the Shelby County Assessor, July 2001.

¹⁰⁵ Miriam Gardner Interview; personal communication with Miriam's daughter, MS, July 2001, (Miriam Gardner has requested that her children's' identities remain secret).

1949: High Magic's Aid

Sometime in 1946, Gardner began work on the novel *High Magic's Aid*. His initial goal was, supposedly, to publish the rites of the witch cult, but, he states, some members of the Southern Coven—probably Edith Woodford-Grimes among them—were vehemently opposed to the idea. He reached a compromise by agreeing to hide the rituals in the form of a fictional story, and the witches retained veto power. In the end, Gardner was able to publish some material while much of the story had to be supplemented by adapting rites from ceremonial magic such as *The Greater Key of Solomon*. Gardner later wrote:

I enclose a Copy of my book, High Magics Aid, A.C. [Crowley] Read part of the M.S. & highly approved, he wanted me to put the Witch part in full. But I was only given permission to publish things as fiction & they [Southern Coven] could cut out what they liked, I wrote the third degree of the Witch Cult, but they went up in steam, & cut it out entirely, & of course things have been changed a little in the ritual, but I've got it nearyl asthay do it, to the great scare of the publishers, but no one has objected in the lsightest so far. The witchcraft parts are chap xIv Dearlep, & XVII the Witch Cult. You understand, its remnants of and Old Stone age religion, & entirely different to High Magic, which is really old Jewish Magic hashed up. But which needs a medium, to make it work, which is best obtained from Witches.¹⁰⁶

In another letter, Gardner discusses the book,

Actually, I wanted to write about a witch & what she'd told me, & she wouldn't let me tell anything about Witchcraft, but I said why not let me write ---- to --- ---- the Witch's point of view. You are always persecuted & abused & ---- -----.

So she said I might if I didn't give any Witch's magic, & it must only be as fiction. So, as I had to give some magic, I simply copied it from Jewish Ritual Magic, chiefly "The Key of Salomon the King".

¹⁰⁶ Gardner to Symonds, 7 December 1950. I have not preserved line breaks, and Gardner has made all spelling and grammar errors.

It was thought that King Salomon could command the spirits and make them work for him. & if you knew these words & sigils you could do the same. This Key is usuly in Latin or Hebrew, but there is an English translation by MacGregor Mathers. But personaly I don't believe that it works. It's all very dificult & complicated. & the Witch... [line missing]¹⁰⁷

There is also a note in Gerald Yorke's copy of *High Magic's Aid* which says:

He takes his magic from a MS Clavicula which I gave him and his witchcraft from a secret society dealing with witchcraft of which he is a member [...].¹⁰⁸

With the presence of such outside ritual material, it is difficult to separate what Gardner considered legitimate witch ritual and what was simply added as creative filler or an attempt to approximate the style of the liturgy using outside sources.

It is also possible that Gardner made these concessions only in hindsight, and that, at the time he wrote the book, the rituals of the witch cult were still being revised with *High Magic's Aid* representing a genuine early form of Wicca. This argument, proposed most notably by Aidan Kelly and Ronald Hutton, describes Wiccan ritual as evolving during the latter half of the 1940's in Gardner's notebook *Ye Bok of Ye Art Magical*. Indeed, the rituals in *High Magic's Aid* appear to be more polished versions of some of those that appear in the notebook, but the notebook's exact purpose remains unclear. The argument surrounding *Ye Bok* is difficult to assess, and either supporting or denying it is beyond the scope of this essay.

The plot of *High Magic's Aid* surrounds two young disenfranchised men, named Jan and Olaf, seeking to restore their family's fortune and name with the help of esoteric

¹⁰⁷ Transcription of a letter from Gardner to an unidentified recipient given in: Frew, Hudson "Morgann". "Crafting The Art of Magic: A Critical Review". (Unpublished essay). This letter is also paraphrased in Patricia Crowther's introduction to the Pentacle Enterprise's reprint of *High Magic's Aid*. Hutton identifies the letter as being in the Warburg, but I was not able to locate it in that collection. Hutton, 448.

¹⁰⁸ Gardner, *High Magic's Aid*, (Warburg Institute Library, Gerald Yorke Collection).

powers. These powers are introduced by the two predominate characters—an older, educated man, named Thur, who acts as a wise father-figure and is a ceremonial magician, and a younger witch named Morven. Together, this group of four evades the persecution of a grotesquely caricatured Catholic Church while fighting magical battles in an England of the middle ages. The book's magic comes from Thur and Morven, alternating between ritual magic derived from *The Key of Solomon* and descriptions of witch's rites that bear a large resemblance to the writings of Margaret Murray. For instance, the book is devoid of a goddess figure except where the moon is occasionally referred to in passing as female, and the god figure is described as having a human body, the head of a goat, and a lighted torch between his horns. Also like Murray's *God of the Witches*, this god is named Janicot.¹⁰⁹ In the end, Jan and Olaf become initiates of the witch religion, and their initiation rituals are what Gardner referred to in his letter to Symonds above. Other than that, it is hard to tell which parts of the novel are Gardner's filler and which he considered genuine witch beliefs and practices.

High Magic's Aid was published in the spring of 1949 by Michael Houghton, who owned the Atlantis Bookshop and was an acquaintance of Gardner's. Gardner largely funded the small press run himself, but Houghton and the circle of occultist surrounding the bookshop helped him. For instance, Dolores North, also known as Madeline Montalban, proofread and typed the final draft, as Gardner wrote:

It's very funny. Mrs North is "Delorres".
She used to work at the Atlantis
Book Shop & she typed & put the
spelling right in High Magic's Aid.
She makes a living at Astrology & Love

¹⁰⁹ Gardner, Gerald, *High Magic's Aid*, (London: IHO, 1999), 27-28; Murray, Margaret A., "The Initiation to Witchcraft," *The Necromancers*, Ed. Peter Haining, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), 96-104; Hutton, 224-226.

Philtres on the quiet. I know she claimed
to be a witch, but got everything wrong.
But she knows High Magics Aid & has a lively imagination.¹¹⁰

With the book's publication and Gardner's subsequent acquaintance with Cecil

Williamson, Wicca slowly began to emerge into the public sphere with Gardner working
hard as its ardent supporter.

¹¹⁰ Gardner to Williamson, May 1952. Line breaks have been preserved. Aidan Kelly conjectures that North may have been a member of the original Southern Coven, but I doubt this. If she was involved in anything, then it may have been the Northern Coven. Kelly, 28.

Conclusion: 1949 and Beyond

In the middle of 1949, this obscure but important portion of Gardner's life ends. The decisions he made throughout the previous three years had put him on a track that would lead him further and further into the role of Wicca's most influential spokesperson. By spring of 1951, Gardner would find the avenue to help create the museum he had desired since before he left the Hampshire coast, and his labor alongside Cecil Williamson would eventually help create the drafting system that provided him with coven members to work with. In 1954, Gardner published *Witchcraft Today* and announced his religion to the world. Wicca's history and Gardner's life and context are more fully recorded after 1949 because of the notoriety and growing circle of friends who shared his interest in witchcraft that Gardner found in that year, so the role of this essay ends.

The three years that I have attempted to illuminate outline Gardner's movement along a path that led him to become Wicca's popularizer. The narrative suggests a man searching for spirituality and purpose. Gardner, for his part, went about this search in a fashion that betrayed the lingering soul of the imperial Victorian—in life, Gardner traveled and collected from far off shores, and his spiritual and social identity reflected this. He gathered acquaintances, artifacts, degrees, consecrations, and titles. He traveled on a trajectory from Co-masonry to Rosicrucianism, to the more esoteric sides of Catholicism, Theosophy, and Freemasonry, to Druidism, to the Ordo Templi Orientis, and finally to a witchcraft that incorporated common elements of all of these with a core all its own. Between 1946 and 1949, he was drawn into a specifically counter-cultural

and esoteric element of society that led him eventually to adopt an interest in the occult that had only been latent previously.

In his promotion and living of the religion of modern witchcraft, Gardner built a belated identity for himself and found a way to leave an indelible mark upon the world, though I doubt his intentions were anything so grand as that. In his own words, Gardner was searching for "a desire for peace, a sense of wonder, and a sense of companionship and good fellowship."¹¹¹ To these feelings, I would add a sense of purpose and industry, a desire that I think Gardner felt acutely since the end of World War II and his return to London. For the most part, I think he began to find the fulfillment of these desires in 1949 as he crafted a new religious identity as witchcraft's spokesperson—his search was largely over, and it is his identity as a witch that has endured the past fifty years and will endure beyond. For Wicca, this essay conjectures at the forces that brought about the genesis of a religion. For Gerald Gardner, this essay describes the culmination of a lifetime spent afloat in the shifting waters of the twentieth century—from man to witch.

¹¹¹ Mercury Publishing CD, author's transcription.

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